

COLOSSIANS

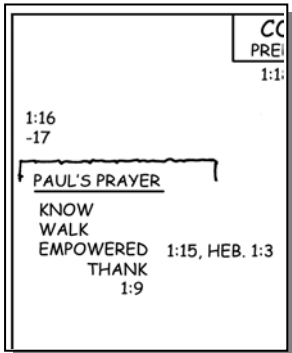
Preeminent Christ

Orientation: (Write: Title & subtitle in box provided on Student Sheet)

Colosse was one of three small cities grouped together in the Lycus Valley. Paul, the author of this book, had never visited the city, but it is likely the church was established (by his converts) during his three-year ministry in Asia. Epaphras had visited Paul in the Roman prison, apparently sharing the good, and the not-so-good, conditions in Colosse (1:7). He specifically asked for help in handling a heretical “infection” which was threatening the life of this church and the neighboring fellowships. The heresy, which was a mix of paganism (out of which many of the members had come), Judaism, and Christianity, brought question to the deity of Christ. Many feel this was an early sign of a movement of the “elite” called Gnosticism.

Paul’s answer, contained in this book, is relevant for contemporary studies because many forms of Gnosticism still exist. We need answers for those groups who deny the divinity of Jesus, and we must always see and worship the preeminent, all-sufficient Christ.

A. Paul’s Prayer. (Draw: edge of paper. Write: “Paul’s Prayer” & the following words shown in bold. Read: 1:9-12) Following his typical greeting in letters addressed to churches, Paul emphasizes the positive. They have faith in Jesus and love for all the saints. Paul not only assures them that he intercedes constantly for the church, he proceeds to speak a powerful prayer over them.



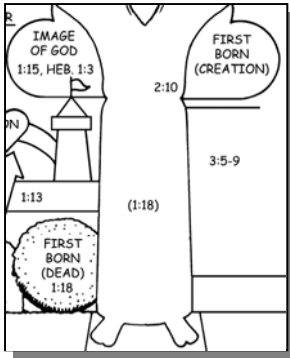
1. “**Know His Will.**” Faced with subtleties of the heresy as well as the challenges of their daily walk with God, they must be “filled with the knowledge of His will.” God has a plan for the universe and for each of our lives, but His plan is often difficult to discern. To know His will, we must pray, ponder and press on.

2. “**Walk Worthy.**” Moving with God on this earth is not mystical. He equips us to walk in a real world. As God’s people we must “walk our talk” and our actions must reflect a commitment to God. Our sole objective says Paul, must be to please Him in every part of life, “*being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.*”

3. “**Empowered.**” Fighting such as Christians must do every day can be tiring unless we recognize the Source of our strength. The strength to remain patient while combating false doctrine comes not from ourselves, but from God; His inherent “glorious dynamite power” within us.

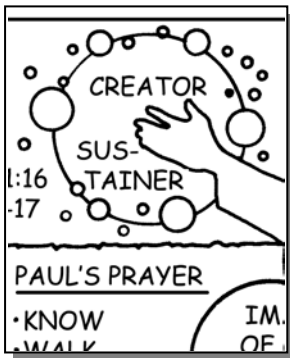
4. “**Thank God.**” Paul reminds them, and us, of our former condition, and the wonderful things God has accomplished on our behalf. In Psalms 104 King David cried out, “Oh that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness.” Thanks is an important part of equipping.

proclaimed by the sect called Gnostics) but that which is accessible to all believers who seriously seek Him.



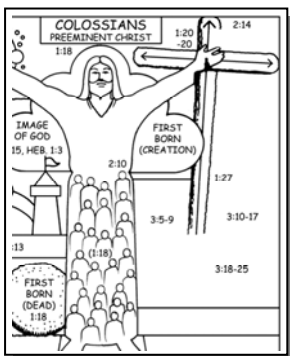
1. (**Write: “First Born—Creation”**) Jesus is “first born” not as a created being but in that He was before all things, before all creation (1:15). Created things are locked in the time dimension, but Jesus is above and beyond all creation. All things were created through Him and for Him, which means He is both the “agent” and the objective of creation.

2. (**Write: “First Born—Dead” on stone by cave**) Without missing a beat, Paul ties together the Son as Eternal God, His triumph over death (“first born from the dead”), His headship over the church and His preeminence in all things (1:18). Lazarus, and others raised from the dead, eventually died again. Jesus’ resurrection was not only the physical evidence of a cataclysmic event, He conquered the grave and death itself! He took the keys of Hades from Satan and thereby opened the door for all born-again believers to follow (1:13).



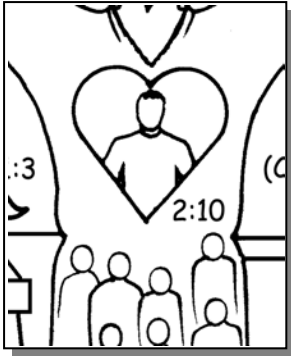
3. (**Draw: planets & stars. Write: “Creator, Sustainer”**) Jesus Christ was the Creator of ALL things, in heaven, on the earth, invisible, visible, thrones, dominions, principalities and powers. He created all of the angels (including Lucifer). And, He is also the One Who, by His power alone, holds them all together (1:6). Here we see the Christ as the creative Agent and the cohesive Power that holds all things together.

4. (**Draw: figures inside the shape of Christ**) Jesus Christ is the Head, the Lord of the church which is His Body. He is not only eternal God, He is the Lord of the now in “organic” relationship with His Body, the church. He is the “beginning,” the Source of life for the church and the One who gives birth, direction, power and purpose to all of us. We as members of His body, respond (or should respond) as our physical limbs respond to our head. Our life is in Him.



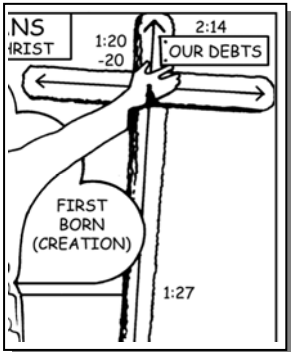
5. (**Draw: arrows on cross & nail with blood on Christ's hand. Read: 1:19-21**) In Ephesians we saw Christ as an “iconoclast.” removing a system that no longer worked. Here, by His own blood we see Him as the great “Reconciler!” He accepted our curse upon Himself and brought us into full relationship with our Father. However, Jesus also restored the entire order of creation, “things on earth and things in heaven,” which had been thrown out of alignment by Adam’s sin. He made peace through the blood of His cross (1:20).

D. The “Mystery” Revealed. “Mystery” is a word used primarily in the New Testament and usually refers to something that cannot be understood except by revelation from God. Paul uses the term in several of his letters concerning God’s overwhelming love and plan for us through Jesus Christ.



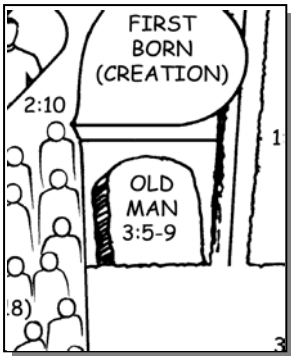
1. (**Draw:** heart shape with a figure of a man within the outline of Christ) “In Him” is also a favorite expression of Paul, used 172 times in his Epistles. “In Him” suggests that we, as believers, are in absolute, total union with Jesus Christ. We were “circumcised in Him” (2:11), in that we have made a total, lifetime commitment to Him and are “sealed” in covenant relationship with Him even as was Abraham (Gen. 17:11).

2. (**Read:** 2:12) “Buried with Him in Baptism” is the outward act or evidence, of our spiritual experience and suggests total identity with Jesus. By God’s design, we were “in Him” when He was baptized, buried and raised from the dead. (See also Rom. 6:3-11.)



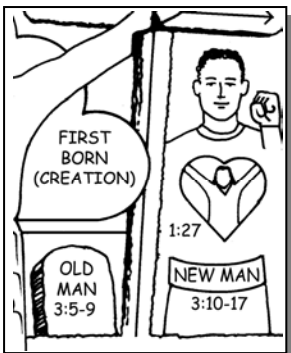
3. (**Draw:** sign on cross. **Write:** “Our Debts”) The Law, because it was impossible for us to keep, represented a damning indictment against us. We were hopelessly in debt. But, praise God, the blood atonement of Christ “wiped out,” erased the “requirements against us” and “nailed it to the cross” Jesus stood in our place and accepted full penalty due to us (2:14).

E. Old Man, New Man. (**Read:** 3:10-17) As he did in the book of Ephesians, Paul compares the characteristics of the Old Man and the New Man.

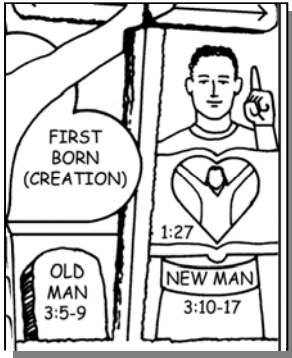


1. (**Draw:** tombstone. **Write:** “Old Man”. **Read:** 3:5-9) Our minds can either allow sin, and become polluted, or refuse temptation, and become clean temples for the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19). The sins which Paul describes are more than “unbecoming,” they incur the wrath of God and must be dealt with radically. Paul declares that this part of our nature must be put to death (3:5).

2. (**Draw:** man with heart shape & figure of Christ within. **Read:** 1:27) If our being “in Christ” has been difficult to comprehend, Paul embarks upon an even greater mystery- “Christ in us.” This gem of truth has been hidden to all previous generations, but God has chosen to reveal it now through Paul. To the Galatians, Paul went so far as to say, “I am dead. What you see now is Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Christ’s presence in us is our hope of someday sharing in His glory.



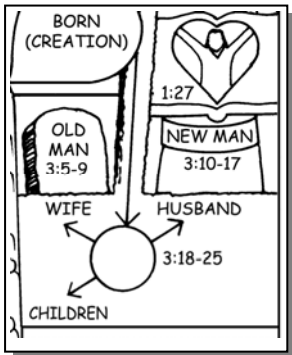
3. (**Write:** “New Man”. **Read:** 3:10-15) The new man in Christ re-programs his mind according to God’s image, not in comparison to other men. He sees no color or class distinction. Motivated by his calling and God’s love (3:12), he develops wholesome, tender relationships in the church. Love is not just another added virtue, it is the bond, the glue that holds everything together. The Christian must decide: does anger and anxiety rule, or does God rule in my life?



4. (**Draw: shape of open Bible**) Paul instructs, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom” (3:16). The “word” could be Christ’s literal words which they had from various sources or Old Testament Scriptures. His reference to “psalms” suggest David’s writings set to music, and their “hymns and spiritual songs” may have been similar to ours. It is interesting to note that in their singing to each other they will be taught and encouraged.

5. (**Draw: man’s forefinger pointing upward. Read:3:17**) It is only one sentence, but it contains compelling guidance: whatever we say or do is to be done in the powerful name of Jesus, never forgetting to give God thanks. Paul himself was a wonderful example of this command.

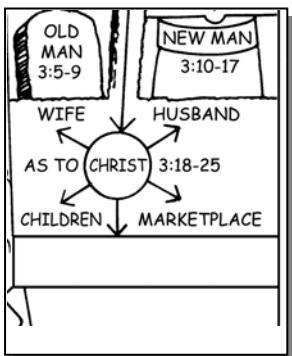
F. New-Man Relationships. Our faith is not lived in a vacuum—we relate to other people constantly. It is in our day-to-day interaction that our faith is often tried the most severely, especially in family relationships. Paul’s advice is succinct.



1. (**Draw: circle with arrows. Write: “Wife, Husband, Children”.** **Read: 3:18-25**) “Wives—submit to your husbands. Husbands, love your wives and don’t provoke your children. Children, obey your parents.”

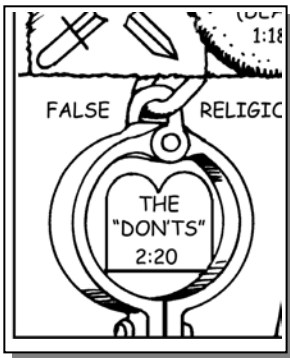
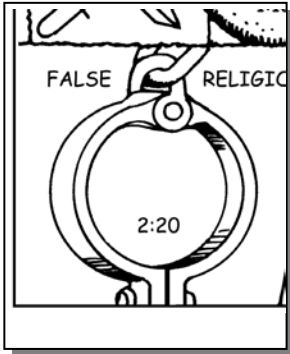
2. “Outsiders” (**Read: 4:5-6**) Jesus said, “Love your neighbors as yourself” (Mk. 12:31). Paul gives directions regarding our Christian witness (4:5-6). He covers three points: (a) Speak with grace. Speak lovingly, sensitively, softly. (b) Your conversation should be seasoned with salt. Salt changes bland food (and conversation) into something very appetizing. Don’t speak “Christianese,” talk in common vernacular. (c) “Answer each one.” Focus on the person in front of you, giving them full attention. Don’t be pushy. God will make a way for the “good news.”

3. (**Draw: arrows down. Write: “Marketplace”**) As mentioned previously, we do not have a counterpart in our contemporary society for the master-slave relationship. However, Paul’s words in this letter can be applied to today’s “marketplace.” Masters (and employers) must be sensitive to two primary things. The slave (employee) is a human being with feelings, not a “thing” to be mistreated. And, the boss must always remember that he too, has a “Boss,” a Judge to whom he will someday give an account (4:1). (*Note: The arrow on our drawing points to “Philemon”—Paul’s brief, but concise, book which deals with a runaway slave and his master. We will look at this illustration of the slave-master relationship in a moment.*)



4. (**Write: “Christ”**) In all of our relationships, at church, with our wives, husbands, children and employers, make sure Jesus

is at the center. “Whatever you do, do it heartily, as unto the Lord” (3:23). Human relationships can wear thin in times of stress. Only the indwelling Christ can keep our affection constant.



G. New Problem. (*Write: “False Religion”. Read: 2:8*) Because of Epaphras’ report, Paul is aware of a dangerous enslavement which is threatening their spiritual life. His voice must rise to a crescendo as he screams, “Beware, watch out! The purveyors of false doctrine are trying to cheat you out of your inheritance in Christ.”

1. (*Draw: leg iron*) As Paul unmasks the deception, his words are clear and powerful. He describes the “slavery” of this heresy in several places.

2. “**Tradition**” (*Draw: tablets. Read: 2:8*). The never-silent Judaizers kept trying to bind the Mosaic Law into the Christian doctrine of faith. Paul warns, “Don’t buy into this legalism. Those regulations are only ‘shadows.’ We have the real thing and His name is Jesus.”

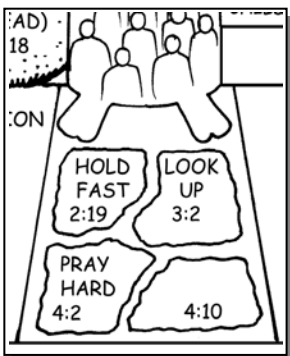
3. “**False Humility**” (*Write: “The Don’ts”. Read: 2:16*). Those who “take delight” in fake humility, expose their heart for what it is—deceitful. They create a man-made doctrine (sometimes referred to as “asceticism”) which is designed to impress. “But,” Paul says, “This is of no value in either making us more holy or curbing the desires of the flesh!”

4. “**Worship of angels**” (*Read: 2:18*). Gnosticism, which was a prevalent heresy in Paul’s time, had devised a row of angels between the material earth (to them—evil), and the untouchable, holy God. The most powerful angels, those closest to God, were to be sought and worshiped. This doctrine, of course, excluded the incarnation and the deity of Christ. The crucifixion, according to their doctrine, did not happen. Paul’s task was clear. He must present the pre-eminent, all sufficient Jesus Christ, Messiah, Son of God! Christ is either all or He is nothing!

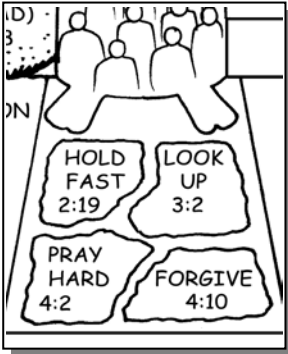
H. Final Exhortations. (*Draw: four stones. Write: following words in bold*) Scattered throughout the letter to the Colossians are solid words of encouragement—directions to this church and to us which will keep our walk with Christ alive. Step cautiously.

1. “**Hold Fast**” Hold fast to the Head, Jesus Christ. Therein is your nourishment, your source of life (2:19).

2. “**Look Up**” Set your eyes and your mind on things above, and let God’s priorities be your priorities. As you “see” Christ seated at the right hand of God, you will know...He is in control (3:1).



3. **“Pray Hard”** Pray earnestly. God has designed prayer as His way for us to cooperate with Him and to accomplish miraculous things. “With thanksgiving” is an encouragement for faith. Thank God before you see any change. That is faith (4:2).



4. **“Forgive”** Although “forgiveness” as a command is not emphasized by the apostle, we cannot help but see strong evidence in Paul’s personal life. Mark, cousin of Barnabus and “defector” from Paul’s earlier perspective (Acts 15:38), has not only been forgiven, he is now to be a “welcomed” brother (4:10). To Timothy he will later say, “(Mark) is useful to me—please bring him to me” (II Tim.4:11).

I. Conclusion. Paul’s fellow workers and prisoners send their greetings. Paul wisely suggests that the churches exchange his letters. He cannot close without extending God’s grace upon them (4:18).

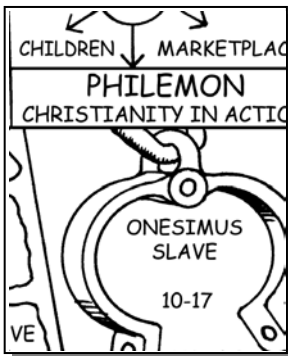
PHILEMON

Christianity in Action

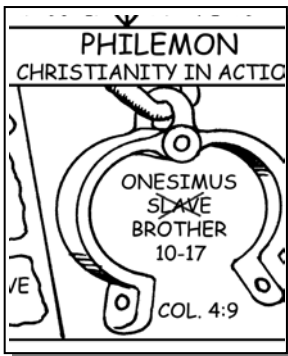
Orientation: (Write: “Philemon, Christianity in Action” in title box)

Because slavery was a significant part of the Roman culture, Paul addresses the relationship between slave and master. Very wisely, he does not attack the practice of slavery, but rather builds a platform beyond emancipation— true brotherhood in Jesus Christ.

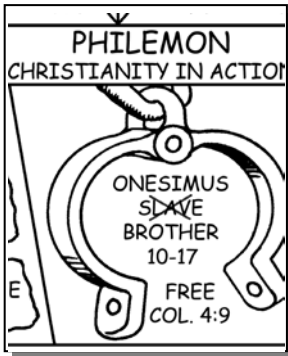
The letter is written to Philemon, a man whom Paul has led to Christ and who is now a prominent member of the church in Colosse. Philemon owned a slave, Onesimus, who had stolen from his master and run away. As God would have it, Onesimus ran to Rome and wound up in prison with Paul. Paul is now sending Onesimus back to Philemon with this letter. He does not want his friend to face his master alone. Imagine Onesimus as he knocks on the door, hands his master this letter and waits nervously for the response. (This letter has been associated with Colossians because it illustrates Paul’s point concerning our Christian behavior in the marketplace).



A. Words of Praise. (Read: 1:4) Paul, the master letter-writer, begins with his genuine affection and respect for Philemon. Paul tells him that he is a good leader and that he has heard of Philemon’s love and faith, as well as his ability to “refresh” the saints (1:4, 7).



B. Paul’s Appeal. (Draw: leg iron. Write: “Onesimus” & “Slave”) Paul does not deny the wrong-doing of Onesimus, Philemon’s runaway slave. Under Roman law, the punishment could be severe. Paul’s appeal is not from his position as an apostle, but as a “prisoner” himself. He admits that Onesimus was a “good-for-nothing,” but he now lives up to his name, “Profitable.” Onesimus is a different man than when he left Philemon (1:10-11).



C. The Ultimate Purpose. (Cross off “Slave”. Write: “Brother”) Paul now bares his heart. “I gave ‘birth’ to this man while we were in prison; I led him to the Lord” (10). “His running away was for a purpose,” continues Paul, “that he could meet Jesus, then return to you, forever your companion (15). Receive him back, please, not as a slave but as a beloved brother (16). Here is my signature, and I pledge to personally repay his debt.” Then, adding a probing punch to his appeal, Paul reminds Philemon, “I will not mention, my friend, that you owe me your very life” (19).

D. Paul’s Conclusion. (Write: “Free”) (21) Paul concludes by saying, “I know you will do more than I ask. I know your character and your heart of love” (21). Paul may be saying, “I believe you will set Onesimus free because he is now your brother in Christ.”

E. An Added Incentive. To further Philemon’s reception, Paul says, “Prepare my room; I will be there shortly, and I know you will welcome me, even as you have Onesimus.” Signed - Paul, your Pastor, Epaphrus, Mark, Aristarchus,

Demas and Dr. Luke. Paul ends his appeal by saying, “Grace from our Lord Jesus Christ.” We know from Col. 4:7-9 that Philemon did indeed set his brother free. This (now slave of Christ) accompanied Tychicus in delivering the letter to Colosse.

Applications for life:

1. Discuss what it means to “walk worthy of the Lord” (Col. 1:10).
2. Discuss the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” which are “hidden” in Christ (Col. 2:3).
3. What are some of the current “regulations” which have the look of holiness, but are really of no value? (Col. 2:20)
4. Exchange ideas on what “things which are above” means (Col. 3:1, 2).
5. How can we put Christ in the middle of all of our relationships?
6. Discuss some of the subtleties of prejudice even among Christians.
7. Find the expressions of love (described in I Cor. 13:4-6) which Paul practiced in the book of Philemon.

❖ **IMPLANT THE WORD:** Draw a picture and memorize Col. 3:1-3.