

EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS (Lesson 07) - Pastor Joh. W. Matutis www.nnk-berlin.de E-Mail: pastor@matutis.de

Concerning the studying

I **recommend** you to read through the respective book in the bible at first. Our manual is the bible. And then to go through one or two pages of the material every day, which implies to also look up and read the given bible scriptures to become thoroughly acquainted with the subject. Another suggestion would be to use this material as one's regular devotion.

If you would like to **obtain a degree (certificate) at the end of the seminary**, you need to answer the **test questions** at the end of each lesson and send or email it to us with your full name and address. And now I wish you lots of joy and spiritual profit during your bible study.

Pastor Joh. W. Matutis

MISCELLANEOUS

Colosse was one of the most important cities of Phrygia. It was located about 150 km away from Ephesus in Asia Minor, the fruitful valley of Lycus, a river flowing from Maeander not far from Laodicea and Hierapolis flowing into the Aegean Sea. Because of the fruitful area and the main street leading through it as well Colosse was an important and rich city. 66 AD it was destroyed by an earthquake along with Laodicea and even after its restoration it never came back to its former position Those cities formed a small unity of cities that are only ruins nowadays.

The Phrygian city Colosse was not yet important in the era of Paul. It was located together with bigger cities (Hierapolis and Laodicea). In those three cities there seemed to be more Christian churches that were supposed to read this letter (Col. 4,13+15ff) the **name Colosse** probably originated from Colossus, a big statue which was perhaps named after the unusual big stones it consisted of, that could only be found in this area. In addition Colosse possessed the main street of the area.

It has to be said that the three cities Hierapolis, Laodicea and Colosse were rather populated by Jewish people. Alexander the Great once (183 b.C.) led 2000 Jewish families from Babylon and Mesopotamia to Lydia and Phrygia. These Jews had settled down there and reached a certain level of prosperity. As a consequence more kinsman moved there to take part in the prosperous life.

Finally so many **Jews came to Phrygia** that the religious among the Palastine Jews already complained that a large number of Jews only left the country of their fathers because of the Phrygian wine and the nice landscape. How great the number of Jews was who lived there can be found in a historical event. Laodicea was the governing center of the area. In the year 62 b.C. Flaccus was the Roman governor. He tried to stop the Jewish tradition to send money from the province of Phrygia to Jerusalem to pay the temple taxes. He therefore prohibited that money would leave the province. Once he discovered 20 pounds of gold that were supposed to be sent to Jerusalem. This amount applies to the temple taxes of about 11 000. Since women and children did not have to pay taxes and many Jews were successful to smuggle the money out of the country we can assume that they provided for about 50 000 people of the Jewish population.

Christianity had not reached the area through Paul, even though he traveled through Phrygia two times (Act.16,6/ 18,23). It was preached to them by **Epaphras**. He surely became an important man to Paul during his time spent at Ephesus. Epaphras started to minister at Colosse about 58 AD. He also established small churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis. **Epaphras** also took care of them (Col. 1,7/ 4,12f) and had spread the gospel in a way that pleased Paul (Col. 1,5ff./ 2,6ff.).

The church of Colosse must have consisted of a majority of Gentile Christians (Col. 2,13 / 1,21+27).

The terminology: „alienated and enemies in your mind“ (Col. 1,21) belonged to the vocabulary that Paul usually used to describe people who used to be strangers to the covenant of promise. In Colossians 1,27 Paul says that he wanted to proclaim the secret of Christ among the heathens and in this case it definitely refers to the Colossians.

In Colossians 3,5-7 **he names sins they were** guilty of before they came to Christ. These are **typical Gentile sins**. This leads us to the conclusion that the church of Colosse was mainly consisting of former Gentiles.

After about 4 years of ministry **Epaphras** visited Paul in Rome to tell him about the false teachings which were about to destroy the healthy growth of the church. Not like in Galatia where they were threatened by a falling away from faith. But they had to deal with Jewish Christian suggestions of circumcision (Col. 2,11), laws concerning food and adherence to holy feasts (Col. 2,16) which was connected to a passion for nature and philosophy. They meditated about the origin of evil and found it in material, they meditated about the supernatural, spiritual world and tried to kill their flesh by religious choice of food and other means to be as angels. Paul's assignment now was to emphasize Christ as the head, and to explain that he is more than just a higher spirit, but the Alpha and Omega to reveal all hidden treasures of wisdom. The letter reminds us of the letter to Ephesus in many ways: The issues of Colossians 1 can be found in Ephesians 1-3. Then Colossians 2 dealing with false teachings is a topic that cannot be found in Ephesians, while in the second part we can find similarities again. Only that the Epistle to the Ephesians is rather highlighting the unity of the church, whereas in Colossians the **heavenlies** are a main topic.

This explains the way Paul is fighting the upcoming false teachings. The Colossian false teachings were dealing with a first stage of „**Gnosticism**“:

- The origin was Jewish and it emphasized the request to keep the OT laws and ceremonies.
- It was philosophical and suggested a special / deeper insight (gnosis).
- It included the worship of angels as messengers of God (Col. 2,18).
- It was strictly exclusive and put emphasis on the special privilege and the perfection of the few chosen ones belonging to this philosophical elite.
- In addition it was „Christological“. But the gnostic roots denied the Godhead of Christ but in the end they caused one of the greatest confessions of Christ of the whole bible (Col.1,15-16/ 2,9).

The **Gnostics themselves praised their knowledge - Gnosis**. They claimed to have information that surpassed the teachings of the apostles and tried to suggest to others that no one could truly be glad unless they would be told the deepest secrets of their community.

The gnostics

- taught (among other things) that Christ left Jesus before his death.
- taught that between God and material there are several levels of spiritual beings.
- believed that the body was sinful and practised asceticism. This meant that they forced a system of self-denial up to self-chastisement to obtain a higher spiritual level.
- Believed that the body is nothing and has no influence / effect in the life of the believer. Thus they lived devoted to their sinful desires.

Paul, however, speaks of the glorious person and the works of the Lord Jesus by severely judging those evil teachers and their false teachings. Both threats are exposed: on one hand the „**asceticism**“, and on the other hand their **excessive lifestyle** and how a Christian nowadays is able and should live in submission to the head in all things.

Paul seemed to follow three main concerns, when he wrote the letter to the Colossians.

- On one side he tried to defend the Godhead and privileged position of Christ against the heresy at Colosse (Col. 1,18/ 2,9).
- On the other side he tried to lead the believers of the local church to greater spiritual maturity (Col. 1,28/ 2,6-7).
- And finally he wanted to inform them about his own situation and ask them for intercession (Col. 4,2-8).

It is strange that in spite of the apostle's warning, the prayer to angels, especially to archangel Michael was still practised till 364 AD until it was strictly prohibited in a church meeting at Laodicea. We do not have any further information about the Colossians but about the Laodiceans (Rev. 3,14-22).

The Epistle to the Colossians holds a unique position in the bible.

Even though Paul wrote many letters, they were usually addressed to churches he wanted to visit or he had already visited – **he did not visit the city of Colosse** (Col. 2,1). Furthermore most of his letters were addressed to big or important cities. Colosse on the opposite was a city that was not in its best condition – if this letter would not be contained in the bible only historians would know about it. The church did not grow famous in early church history. This letter is still very important because just like John 1 and Hebrews 1 it includes the most exiting description of the **perfect Godhead** of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because this foundation is a foundation for all Christian dogmas, the value of chapter 1 cannot be overrated. The letter offers plenty of teachings concerning the topics relationships, sects and Christian life.

AUTHOR

The content of the letter reveals the apostle Paul as the author. He calls himself **„Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ“** (Col. 1,1), „I, Paul“ (Col. 1,23), „this salutation by my own hand – Paul“ (Col. 4,18). He was in prison at that time (Col. 4,18b). The different co-workers mentioned are all known as companions of Paul (Col. 4, 7-14). The thoughts and the theology cannot originate from anybody but Paul. According to Colossians 4,18 the letter was probably dictated by Paul to one of his co-workers followed by a greeting from his own hand. The biblical and historical testimonies confirm that Paul is the author of this letter.

MESSENGERS

The messengers according to Colossians 4,7 is **Tychicus** and the former slave **Onesimus** whom Paul sent back to the church at that time (Philem. 12). They were also supposed to report about Paul's conditions and the events that happened.

RECEIPIENTS

The author calls them **«the saints of Colosse and the faithful brothers in Christ»** (Col. 1,2). There is no doubt about the addressed readers. Ch 4, 13 + 15-16 seems to reveal to us the „faithful brothers in Christ“. This was speaking to the churches Laodicea and Hierapolis, which mainly consisted of Gentile Christians (Col. 1,21+27/ 2,13), but there was also a minority of Jews (Col. 2,14+16). The apostle Paul did not seem to be the founder of the church at Colosse, since he does not know the readers of the letter personally (Col. 1,4). He must have passed through Asia Minor two times (Acts 16,6/ 18,23), but according to Colossians 2,1 he probably never visited Colosse.

COMPOSITION

Paul wrote this letter when he was in prison, which can be seen in Col 4,3+10+18. Where exactly he was, in Rome or Caesarea cannot be concluded with the information of Colossians. We have to consider other letters and the Book of Acts. Significant about his captivity in Rome was that he was still able to preach and proclaim the gospel (Eph. 6,19-20). In Acts 28,30 where he is in Rome we even find out that he had **a private apartment** and was allowed to receive visitors. The visitation of a simple slave like Onesimus (Col. 4,9/ Phlm. 8-18) would rather fit in this situation than the situation in Caesarea where Paul was strictly locked away.

Terms like **„my chains“**, **„being bound“**, **„messenger in chains“** (Col. 4,18/ Eph. 6,19-20) can be traced back to the fact that he must have been in Rome, chained to soldiers who had to guard him.

Another reason for a later date than the captivity of Caesarea was the condition of the Colossian church. We find a certain form of Gentile Christianity which was very different from the Pharisee's lawfulness that Paul was fighting until he was imprisoned in Caesarea. If the letter would have been written there the sudden change of the Judaistic opponents could not be understood.

A fourth, even more convincing fact pointing to Rome is that Paul asked the Christians in Colosse to prepare him a dwelling place just like in his letter to **Philemon** (22) which was written at the same time as to **Ephesus** and to **Colosse**,

It is hard to imagine that Paul would ask such a favor during his captivity in Caesarea, and he is also referring to the Emperor (Act. 25,11/ 26,32). Those arguments are confirmed by ancient church traditions which do not doubt Rome to be the place of composition of those jail letters.

Two facts let us assume that the apostle wrote the letter shortly after his arrival in Rome:

- Firstly he says nothing about the trial, whereas he expresses his hope of a happy ending of the trial in the letter to the **Philippians** (Phil. 1,23-25).
- Secondly **Luke and Aristarchus**, the two friends who went with him from Palastine to Rome (Act. 27,1-2), were still with him (Col. 4,10+14). Later when he wrote to the Philippians they did not seem to be with him anymore, otherwise their greetings would not be missing. .

The **date of composition** of the letter must have been written during the first time of his captivity in Rome, at the end of 62 AD or in the beginning of 63 AD. Paul was also imprisoned in Ephesus, Caesarea or Rome (Col. 4,3+10+18). We know from Acts 23,33-26,32/ 28,14-31 that he was a captive in Caesarea and in Rome. The greeting list include **Luke and Mark**. But Luke was definitely not with Paul in Ephesus because the „we“ Acts was supposed to point out that he was there at the reported events and we know that **Mark** was not travelling with him on the so-called 2nd Mission journey (Acts 15,37-39).

It can be seen in Acts 20,4/ 24,23 that **Aristarch** was imprisoned with Paul (Col. 4,10). Also **Tychicus** who also traveled with Paul according to Acts 20,4 could have continued with Paul to Caesarea. Besides, **Mark** and **Luke** fit in well with the imprisonment of Paul in Caesarea and also in Rome. The captivity in Rome was not so strict (Act. 28,16+30f.) and offered Paul the opportunity to preach freely and also to work with a big circle of co-workers.

AUTHENTICITY

The peculiarities of vocabulary that we can find in Colossians support the assumption that this is a work of Paul. It is typical for Paul to oppose and fight the false teachings with their own words. **The teaching of Christ** for example totally corresponds to the way Paul speaks and writes about Christ. In Colossians he describes the crucified Christ as the one who rose from the death. Risen, seated in heavenly places to the right hand of god and as the head of the church. It is comprehensible that he mainly puts emphasis on the **Godhead Jesus**, the eternal sonship, and his relationship to the angelic world. Remember that this letter was opposing a certain false teaching (purpose and goal). Indeed there is an apparent relation not only between the letter to the Colossians and the Ephesians, but also between the one to Colosse, Galatia and Corinth. Therefore it is not unusual that it bears the same testimony of Jesus Christ, his sovereignty, the fullness of his salvation, his triumph on the cross and the power of his redemption.

Thus the text includes for example three personal indicators of Paul in the 1st person singular (Col.1,1/ 1,23 / 4,18) and numerous allusions to the co-workers of Paul. Even the **style and content** of Colossians is similar to the one of Ephesians which was written about the same time. This can be seen in the comments about the letter to Laodicea (Col. 4,16). **Thirty-four** terms that were used in Colossians were never used in any other letter of Paul, but still they are terms that still refer to the content of the letter and agree with Paul's thoughts and opinions. This includes words like the visible (Col. 1,16), the first (Col. 1,18), philosophy (Col. 2,8) and Godhead (Col. 2,9). The end of the letter to Ephesus reveals that **Tychicus** must have been the messenger who also delivered the letter to Colosse (Eph. 6,21 / Col. 4,7).

It is interesting to watch that Paul reveals in his letter to Colosse **who Christ is for the church**, and in the letter to Ephesus, **what the church means to Christ**. In Ephesians Paul depicts the church of the Lord, in Colossians the Lord of the church.

One of the strongest evidences that Colossians was written in the first decade by Paul is the proximity to the letter of **Philemon** whose authenticity is practically doubtless:

- In both letters the introduction mentions the name Timothy and Paul together (Col. 1,1/ Phlm. 1).
- Both letters contain greetings by Aristarch, Mark, Epaphras, Luke and Demas (Col. 4,10-14/ Phlm. 23-24).
- Both letters mention the service of **Archippus** (Col. 4,17/ Phlm. 2).
- Both letters mention the slave **Onesimus** (Col. 4,9/ Phlm. 10).

PURPOSE AND GOAL

The letter was written out of a very peculiar situation. The Christians of Colosse were agitated by certain false teachings. This is what Paul heard through Epaphras or other messengers. He used the journey of Tychicus (Col. 4,7-8) to warn and enlighten the church of Colosse. At the same time he is seeking to lead the young church to further knowledge of Christ and to open for them the door to the fullness of blessings.

The church of Colosse mainly consisted of **Christians with a Gentile background** (Col. 1,13+25-27/ 3,6-7). The way of instructions that they received applied to the teachings of Paul (Col.1,6-7/ 2,5-7). The spiritual condition was such that the apostle was able to rejoice over it (Col. 1,3-6/ 2,5). Therefore Paul does not exhort them to change their thoughts or way of life, but encourages them to continue in their way and progress as before.

Several interpreters believe that the false teachers who threatened the church of Colosse were philosophers with a Jewish background who tried to press them into their own tradition of the **Tora** and the **Talmud**. They requested **circumcision**, the **keeping of the sabbath** and the **feasts** etc. (Col. 2,8+11+14+16). They brought **the spirit of the law and the Pharisees** which the apostle opposes in the letter to **Galatia**. The false teachers of Colosse do not suggest **the law** as means to justification but **for ascetic reasons**. It is like an additional form of religion based on a **mystic and ascetic system** crowned with the name philosophy (Col. 2,8). (some kind of first level of **Kabbala**, New Age, etc.).

The believer is supposed to connect with a higher spiritual world by acknowledgment of angelic powers as mediators besides the Lord Jesus Christ. For this reason the body had to be chastised to lose the bonds of the material world in order to receive heavenly revelation. It therefore deals with things beyond the redemption of Christ, rather a self-redemption: a training to become spiritual. Some of those statutes let us assume some influence of the **Judaeo-Esseners**, who were seeking to live away from regular life and who decided to live in **abstinence, wash many times a day and share all of their goods with the rest of the community**. According to them the soul is superior to the body. But all attraction to the lustful comes through the body which is as a prison to them. Material things were the root of all evil to them.

However controversial the questions might have been. One thing is for certain: Paul is attacking the core of this spiritualism and especially the spreading of a theological system based on such a foundation that brings only death. He does that by utilising the message of the person and the work of the triumphant Jesus Christ. He alone is sovereign and in him is all the fullness of the Godhead.

CONTENT AND THEMES

This letter forms a unity and it is hard to divide it into single parts. The following is a suggestion:

<u>Introduction</u>	Ch. 1,1-12
Greeting and blessing	Ch. 1, 1-2
Thanksgiving	Ch. 1, 3-8
Intercession	Ch. 1, 9-12
1. <u>teaching part: Christ the Lord</u>	Ch. 1, 13-29
The sovereignty of the person Christ.	Ch. 1, 13-20
The sovereignty of the work of Christ.	Ch. 1, 21-23
The sovereignty of the ministry of Christ	Ch. 1, 24-29
2. <u>Exhorting part: The church</u>	Ch. 2, 1-23
Warning to the church.	Ch. 2, 1-8
Position and prosperity of the church	Ch. 2, 9-15
Dangers for the church.	Ch. 2, 16-23
3. <u>Practical part: The Christian</u>	Ch. 3, 1-4, 6
The real life of a Christian.	Ch. 3, 1-4
The sanctification of a Christian.	Ch. 3, 5-17
The duties of a Christian.	Ch. 3, 18-4, 1
Prayer and a wise attitude towards the world.	Ch. 4, 2-6
End: <u>Personal messages</u>	Ch. 4, 7-18
The sending of Tychicus and Onesimus.	Ch. 4, 7-9
Greetings and recommendations.	Ch. 4, 10-18

Key word: **perfection**

Key verse: „***For in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily***“ (Col. 2,9).

MISCELLANEOUS

Fullness(or other similar terms)

The fullness of knowledge.	Ch. 1, 9
The fullness of Christ.	Ch. 1, 19
The fullness of wisdom.	Ch. 2, 2
The fullness of the Godhead.	Ch. 2, 9
Our fullness in Christ.	Ch. 2, 10

With Christ

Dead.	Ch. 2, 20
Buried.	Ch. 2, 12
Resurrected.	Ch. 2, 13
Risen.	Ch. 3, 1
Hidden.	Ch. 3, 3
Revealed.	Ch. 3, 4

Pleas of Paul

For knowledge of the will of God.	Ch. 1, 9
For spiritual wisdom and understanding.	Ch. 1,9
For a worthy change.	Ch. 1, 10
For fruitfulness in all good works.	Ch. 1, 10
For growth in the knowledge of God.	Ch. 1, 11
For God's strength in all situations.	Ch. 1, 11

CONTENT OF COLOSSIANS

Col. 1,1-12 - Introduction

In all of his letter, apart from the two earliest (1. and 2. Thessalonians) and in his very personal letter to the Philippians, Paul introduces himself as an apostel of Christ.

Paul, who has never been to Colosse, needs to explain why he is claiming the right to write them a letter. He does so with just one explanation: He is an apostel, which means that God called him as a messenger. His right to write to him was based on the fact that God sent him as His messenger to reach the Gentiles. Paul adds another thing: He is an apostel by the will of God. He has not earned or deserved this office and no man gave it to him because he did something to get it. It was rather granted to him by God.

The beginning of the letter already contains the teaching of grace. Man is therefore not what he made himself but what God made him. There are only those who were positioned by God and those who oppose his will to let God work in them. Even though Paul did not belong to the twelve (Act. 1,21-26), who had been with Jesus from the beginning of his work on earth (Luk. 1,2/ Joh. 15,27/ Act.1,22), but he had an encounter with the resurrected Christ (1.Cor. 9,1/ 15,8-9), and he also walked in the power of working miracles that were only granted to true apostels (2.Cor. 12,12/ Hebr. 2,3-4). Besides himself Paul mentions **Timothy** in the same sentence, calling him a wonderful name. **He calls him brother**. The same name he gives to **Quartus** (Rom.16,23), **Sosthenes** (1.Cor. 1,1) und **Apollos** (1.Cor. 16,12).

The important requirement of Christian service in any christian office is the brotherhood. Paul calls **Timothy** neither a preacher or a teacher or a theologian, but his brother. Whoever is trying to refrain from others cannot become a true servant of Christ. **Timothy** appears, as in many other scriptures, as a brother, companion and co-worker of Paul (2.Cor.1,1/ Phil.1,1/ 2.Thess.1,1). He might have had a Gentile father (Act. 16,1), but his mother and grandmother were Jews who converted to Christianity (2.Tim.1,5), who introduced to him the scriptures of the Old Testament when he was still young (2.Tim. 1,5). Paul met Timothy, who was a man of good reputation among the brothers, on his second mission journey to Lystra (Act. 16,2). The apostel took a lot of time to instruct the young man and he wrote two letters to him personally.

His greeting words bring some more light into the situation. They are adressed to the **saints in Colosse**, to people who were set apart for God and to the faithful brothers in Christ. Paul's letters introduce us to different forms of adressing people. The first letters are always dedicated to the church. The first and second letter to the Thessalonians, the first and second letter to the Corinthians and Galatians are dedicated to the churches of the named area. From the letter to the **Romans** on, Paul's letters are adressing in one or another way the **beloved or saints of God**. This applies to Romans, Colossians, Philippians and Ephesians.

The older Paul grew, the more he understood how important every single member was. In the end a church is formed by every single one. The church is the people. Therefore he eventually closes his letters not greeting a group called church but single men and women that were part of the church at that time. Paul addresses the Colossian Christians as the **to the saints in Colosse** the faithful brethren in Christ. They are marked as holy ones, chosen and set apart for God. Almost the same introduction can be found in the Epistle to the Ephesians which is addressed to the saints in Ephesus, the believers of Christ Jesus (Eph. 1,1). Paul determines his greeting by combining two important things.

He writes to the Christians who are in Colosse and in Christ at the same time. A real Christian is always moving in two levels. In the city, the place and the community that the Lord has placed us in, and in Christ at the same time. As Christians we are supposed to live in two dimensions.

- **In the world** where we have to do our duties with excellence, but beyond that a true Christian lives in Christ. In the world he might move from place to place.
- **But wherever he may be, he is always in Christ**. Therefore the true Christian does not care a lot about the circumstances and conditions he lives in. His luck, peace and joy are not depending on him.
- All of these things are **subject to change** and only the fact that he is in Christ never changes.
- The real Christian will therefore do any work, any assignment whole-heartedly, no matter how low or uncomfortable or exhausting it may be. Even if no one would praise him, the Christian will be diligent to do it.
- **He is in Christ and does everything as unto the Lord**. We all live in the place that God has purposed for us and Christ determines our life and our lifestyle.

Col. 1,3-4: The essence of Christian life is explained: Paul is very grateful to God, that the Colossians have developed two excellent attitudes. They prove with their lives **their faith in Christ** and **their love for their neighbours**.

Those are indeed the two significant aspects of Christian life, which should put emphasis to faithfulness to Christ and love for other people.

- We Christians should believe and trust God, and of course we should know what we believe in.
- We should love others by acting upon the things we believe. Because faith alone is not sufficient enough. Some people believe, but they have no love and no commitment to Christian brotherhood, this is work without love.
- But also the pure love alone is not sufficient enough, because without a faith foundation this love is based on emotions.

As Christians we should be faithful to Christ and faithful to people. Christians have a **double duty** towards Christ and towards the people around them. Christian faith does not come from a certain spiritual point of view, but it is rather flowing out of the heart.

Der christliche Glaube besteht nicht nur im richtigen Denken, sondern auch im liebevollen Verhalten gegenüber seinen Mitmenschen. Der Glaube an Christus und die Liebe zu den Menschen, das sind die beiden Doppelpfeiler des christlichen Lebens.

Col.1, 3-8 - Thanksgiving

Paul continues to write how he always gives thanks to God for the saints in his prayers (Rom. 1,8/ 1.Cor. 1,4/ Eph. 1,16 etc.). Only in **Galatians** and **2. Corinthians** he does not do so. To him God is the source of all positive developments within the Christians he called. The reason for this thanksgiving is based on the growing faith in Christ and the love **Epaphras** praised them for in vers 7. **Prayer** is a deeper way of worship that also includes giving thanks and intercession (Mt. 6,7/ Act. 16, 25).

Col. 1,5 – Paul gives thanks to God for the hope, the faith and the love that the Colossians were claimed to have. Those are regular Christian virtues that all Christians should practice (1.Cor. 13,13/ 1.Thess. 1,3/ 1.Petr. 1,3/ 5,22).

Col. 1,4-8: This is a short summary of what the gospel is and the effects it has.

- The gospel is a **good news** of God himself, that he himself communicates that he is a friend to us all and that he loves us. The result is that men can have a real relationship with God. Page 07

- The gospel is **the truth**. All religions that existed before could be called assumptions about God. But the gospel of Christ does not only bring assumptions, but assurance about God.
- The gospel is **universal**. It is there for the whole world. It is not limited to a people or a race. It is not addressing a certain level of society and is not bound to certain conditions. There are only very few things in this world that are open to all. The message of the gospel, the joy and the peace of the gospel are for all human beings without exception.
- The gospel is fruitful. It bears many fruits and grows. It is a simple, historical fact and experience that the gospel has the power to change the life of a single person completely, but also the society that he lives in. Through the power of the gospel a sinner can become a saint, and through the power of the gospel selfishness and cruelty can totally vanish in the human society.

Paul is grateful for the spreading of the gospel. This alone is reason enough for gratefulness. Therewith he consciously takes part in the „triumph of faith“. That there are many false teachings (as in Colosse) troubles him and he takes action and writes and argues against them. The apostle knows that false teachings as such are always limited to space and time, and can only cause damage in places where it is accepted in silence. In places where nobody has any arguments against it or deals with it. Where people do not really know where they stand and therefore do not support their opinion. Light, love, goodness and the truth of God are strong enough, they are universal, they are unshakeable, eternal and sooner or later will win, just like i.e. the grace of God (Rom.11,6/ Eph. 2,8-9/ Tit. 3,5–7).

Col. 1,7: „This is what you learned from Epaphras our dear co-worker, who is a faithful servant of Christ for you.“

The Colossians received the gospel from Epaphras, who obviously was the founder of the Church at Colosse. Paul calls him his **beloved co-worker**, a term of humility of the great apostle and a faithful servant of Christ, without a doubt – compared to the unfaithful servants of God that were confusing the church of God here and there in different places (2.Cor. 11,15/ 2.Petr. 2,1-3+12-19). Paul later also calls **Tychicus** a faithful servant and co-worker of the Lord (Col. 4,7). Epaphras was probably in Rome with Paul, because he mentions him in the letter of Philemon in vers 23 as one of the prisoners. Epaphras is the short form of Epaphroditus, a name that appears in Phil 2,25 and in Ch. 4,18. This might talk about one and the same person, but it could also be referring to two different men since this is a common name. Epaphras is assumed to be Paul's representative at Colosse. This tells us indirectly that Paul did not visit Colosse himself (Col. 2,1).

Epaphras reports to the apostle Paul, who was still in prison, about the love in the spirit which the Colossians had for Christ. How they are full of the holy spirit and what kind of love they have for all the saints. In one point Paul urgently reminds the believers to bear not only the fruit of spiritual love (Rom. 15,30) but also the fruits of spiritual fruits (Gal. 5,22).

There is no other letter of Paul where Christ is exalted to the same extent, in no other letter the perfect uniqueness of Christ is highlighted like in Colossians. Jesus Christ is the **image** of the invisible God.

- In Him dwells all the fullness (Col. 1,15+19)
- In Him are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2,3).
- In Him dwells the fullness of the incarnated Godhead (Col. 2,9).

Never was any greater thing said about Christ, and there could not be a higher claim than this. Furthermore we recognize that Paul leaves his usual style and emphasizes the importance of Jesus Christ concerning all of creation. In this letter he exalts the creative works of the Son:

- In Him everything was created (Col. 1,16);
- In Him everything is (Col. 1,17);
- In the creation the Son was the tool of the Father.
-

And at the same time Paul refers to the true human nature of Jesus, the fact that he was a man of flesh and blood. With the flesh of his body he reconciled all man (Col. 1, 22). The fullness of God truly dwells in Him (Col. 2,9). In all of his divinity Jesus Christ was really a man of flesh and blood at the same time.

Col. 1, 9-12 - Intercession

The apostle starts the prayer **with the request**, to know the will of God more and more. He wants to listen to God more while he prays, to find out what He wants instead of trying to talk God into something. Paul has heard so many good things of Epaphras about the Colossians, therefore he always prays for them. The most urgent request of the apostle for the church of Colosse is to be filled with the knowledge of His will. It is a big concern of him, that they would be filled with the knowledge of his will, and then receive a deeper understanding thereof.

Such a **deep knowledge of God** does not result out of a worldly spirit, a spirit that boasts (1.Cor. 8,1), but by the holy spirit that enlightens the believer from within (1.Cor. 2,5 – 6,13), and from the word of God. The will of God which is revealed in the bible by the instructions of the holy spirit.

Paul adds: **In all spiritual wisdom** (sophia). This term is mentioned six times in Colossians. It means: a practical knowledge given from God (Jam. 1,5; 3,15), and the wisdom, which means a serious application of this knowledge to all kinds of problems. The false teachers on the opposite, only offer a shadow of wisdom, which is holding their thinking and their way of life under the law.

However, the spiritual wisdom is establishing and delivering at the same time (Eph. 4,14). Knowledge or understanding or revelation or wisdom are usually connected with each other in the scripture (Ex 31,3; Deut 4,6; Is. 11,2/ 1.Cor. 1,19). The origin of both is the fruit of the spirit (Pro. 1,7/ 9,10).

The request of the apostle (in Col. 1,10) aims a very practical thing: **to live worthy of God's calling.**

The **true knowledge of Chris is revealed in a changed personality** (Eph. 4,1/ 1.Thess. 2,12), that becomes more and more Christ-like. The term „worthy“ means as much as equal. The believers are supposed to strive for the statutes of the Lord, to become holy as He is holy (1.Pet. 1,15 / Eph. 5,10). To seek to please people does not go along with the life as a servant of Christ (Gal. 1,10; Eph. 6,6; Col 3,22; 1.Thess. 2,4). Paul rather made it his highest goal to pleas God (2.Cor. 5,9).

An important part of a life pleasing unto God is:

- bearing fruit and growth (Col. 1,10),
- Strength (v. 11) and Thanksgiving (v. 12).

The two first go together: **That you bear fruit and grow in the knowledge of the Lord.** Exactly the same words Paul uses in vers 6. Bearing fruit always requires growth.

Col.1.11 ...and be strengthened with all strength through his glorious power to all patience and longsuffering.

A third factor that is connected to the knowledge of God's divine will and the longing to please God, is the spiritual power resulting thereof. raus resultiert.

In the terminology: **“strengthened with all strength through his glorious power”** the Greek word for strenght is used three times. The term strength, which means to be strengthened with all strength, is spiritual strength and power, an overwhelming power – a term that is only used for God in the new testament.

This **strength given by God** empowers the believers to all patience and longsuffering.

The best example for this patience (Jam. 1,3) was Job (Jam. 5,11).

To patience Paul adds longsuffering, a word that is usually connected with gentleness and kindness as in 1. Cor. 13,4.

Patience and longsuffering is often mentioned together (2.Cor. 6,4+6/ 2.Tim. 3,10 / Jam. 5,10 - 11). Patience or „remaining under“, does not mean to be defeated by the circumstance.

To show longsuffering means to practice self-control that will not be tempted to quick revenge. A lack of patience often leads to discouragement, a lack of longsufferin often leads to anger or revenge (Pro. 15,18; 16,32). This applies to God's glorious power or the power of his glory.

In the glory of God is most inner being is manifested. And in Eph.1,19 - 20 Paul also speaks of the overflowing great power of God and the work of the power of his strenght, that raised Christ form the dead.

The strenght for such a patience (Col. 1,12-13) should be accompanied by real and not forced thanksgiving to the Father, from whom all good and perfect things are flowing (Jam. 1,17).

Gratefulness is the fourth thing, that results from following the divine will and striving for a life pleasing unto God. It is very important for our spiritual life.

Gratefulness and joy are important topics for Paul (1.Thess. 5,18/ Phil. 4,6). This are dealt with four times in particular (Col. 3,15 - 17/ 4,2). Whoever has the forgiveness of sins is grateful and happy, because they know the price they were bought with (Eph.1,7 /Rom. 3,24-26).

Col.1, 13-29 Teaching Part: Christ is the Lord

From his request for the enlightenment of the Christians at Colosse through God's delivering work in their life Paul know gets to the main concern of his letter. This is the exaltation and the position of Christ.

In the following passage; in the verses 15 to 20; Paul speaks of **seven unique characteristics of Jesus Christ**, which rightfully makes Him the highest. Christ is:

1. the image of God,
2. the firstborn of creation,
3. the creator of the universe,

4. the head of the church,
5. the firstborn of the dead,
6. the fullness of God and
7. the reconciler of all things.

Nowhere else in the New Testament is a comparable list of so many attributes of Christ and His Godhead. Christ is the great sovereign one, exalted above every other thing of the universe.

Col.1,15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn before all of creation.

First of all: **Christ is the image of the invisible God.**

He is the manifestation of the invisible God Himself. Because in the direct meaning of likeness (2. Cor. 4, 4), the term „image“ also holds the thought of representative and manifestation. Like the head of a ruler on a coin, Jesus is the image of God, the Father (Hebr. 1,3). Where Jesus Christ is, the invisible, eternal God is present. Nobody has ever seen God. Therefore Jesus Christ came, so that we could get to know the invisible God and his character through him. Jesus said: Who saw me has seen the father (Joh. 14, 9).

Through HIM we know how God feels about us, how He thinks and acts. Now we know that He is not a monster seeking to kill us, like we might assume looking at all the catastrophes happening in this world. Now we know that He is seeking us with His endless love and that He really wants to be our Father. Who sees Christ, the visible manifestation of the invisible God, has seen God Himself. Paul continuously speaks of the invisible God (1.Tim. 1,17), but Christ is the perfect, visible incarnation of this God. Even if the **word „image“** (eikon) does not always speak of perfect likeness, 1.Cor. 11,7 definitely requires such a perfection. Like the word „form“ (morphi) in Phil. 2, 6 - 7, eikon also refers to the most inner being, the core of a matter or a person. This portrays the superior position of Christ, at first with reference to his relationship with the Father. **He is the perfect image of God.** Jesus as a person is the manifestation of the invisible God. He was not only when he was here physically, among us on earth. He will remain the same in all of eternity. Since He is the living God, the spirit is also like God. He is never far from us. He is in the midst of his church. He is with us all the days of life.

With Jesus Christ God gave a perfect and unique gift to us. He is not a philosopher. He is not a prophet. He is not starting a new religion. **He is the manifestation of God himself**, in whom all of the love and life of God comes to us – back then, today and until eternity.

Secondly the position of Christ is revealed in His relationship with creation.

He is the firstborn before all of creation. With this information about Christ we reach the limit of our thinking and imagination and we must not cross this line. Jesus Christ is the first of creation. He is the center of this world, the center of God's plans, the one through whom God acts. He is the firstborn of the whole creation and far superior to all other things. Therefore **„all was made through Him“**; (Kol. 1,16) and **„all is in Him“** (Col. 1,17)

- **The firstborn is NOT part of creation.** even though He created everything. You cannot create yourself after you have been created.
- The firstborn was worshiped by all the angels (Hebr. 1, 6), but something that was created must not be worshiped in such a way (Ex 20,4 - 5).
-

The term **firstborn stands for two attributes of Christ:**

He went before all of creation and is Lord over creation. In the Old Testament a firstborn had all the privileges, the honor and sovereignty of the firstborn (Ex 13,2-15/ Deut 21,17).

When Jesus calls Himself the first (Rev. 1,17) he uses the word that means „the very first“. It means the same as total sovereignty.

Even though the firstborn is not a usual title for Messiah in the OT **“And I will make him the firstborn son, the highest among the kings of earth!”** (Ps. 89,28), this hymn which is referring to David is already bringing up the thought of a coming messiah. Rev. 1, 5 is where Christ is where He is called the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of all kings of the earth. The **title firstborn** indicates Jesus positioning before creation with reference to time, and his sovereignty above all of creation as a matter of fact (Col. 1,16-17).

The **third attribute** of Christ is **that all was created in Him**, which means that He is the creator and maintainer. Not only the one through whom all things became, but also the one who keeps them alive.

Further scriptures of the NT describe Him in a very similar way:

- All things were made through the same (Joh. 1,3)
- Christ the Son is the one through whom the Father created the world (Hebr. 1,2)

- The father is the origin of creation and the son is the tool through whom the world was created.
- The son was the forerunner of creation, the beginning of God's creation (Rev. 3,14). In this creation of the son everything is included, everything in heaven and earth, the visible and the invisible. Therefore the whole universe, the material and non-material works.

Because of that the fear of the Christians in Colosse of demonic powers, called authorities and power is totally irrational. Perhaps they tried to protect themselves through special pious behaviour. The fellowship with Christ did not seem to be sufficient for them.

Jesus Christ is the one through whom all of the world received life and its existence. Therefore all things are subject to and depending on him. This is why we are always in his hands and safe from all evil powers and spirits. There is no natural or supernatural power that is more powerful than his. They are all depending on him.

In Christ all men are safe from all the dark, invisible powers that could threaten our life. In the opposite a man without Christ is without protection, even if he does not know.

Fourth, Christ is the head of the body: which is the church (Col. 1,18). This is the amazing part, that the one who was the first of all creation, who is above all powers and authorities of the world is also the head of the church. A church that is not impressive, consisting of sinners, people with so much lack because they are so weak. All of this is incomprehensible for usual measures and imaginations. Every world ruler is seeking the best, the most able and the strongest to accomplish something with them. Christ does exactly the opposite: he is seeking the ones who are nothing and broken and have failed many times.

All of humanity is an exceptionally poor and imperfect society.

But usually one would still look for the good and strong. Every company and every state and also all of us do so. It is amazing that Christ dares to choose another way and consciously chooses the weak, the poor and the disabled to add to his church. He does not only bear them with patience but also seeks them with his great love. If this was not the case, no man would be sufficient for this church.

Jesus, he is not only the Lord of the universe but also the head of the church, (Eph. 1,22 - 23/ 5,23). This must refer to the invisible or universal church into which all believers are baptised the moment they start to believe through the holy spirit. This work of the spirit started with Pentecost (Act. 1,5; 2,1-2/ 11,15-16). The invisible church forms a very special body in which there is neither Jew nor Greek (Gal. 3, 28) but instead there is a new creation of God (Eph. 2,15). The church is a mystery which was not announced to mankind before (Eph. 3,3-5/ Rom. 16,25 - 26/ Col 1,26).

Fifth, Christ is the beginning, the firstborn of the dead (Rev. 1, 5). Christ is the first who was raised with his eternal body (1. Cor. 15,20), and as such he walks before all of creation as the ruler. His resurrection was the evidence of his victory over death (Hebr. 2,14/ 1. Joh. 3,8). He was the first of man (1. Cor. 15,20) who was raised to eternal life. He was seated as the son of God with power through the resurrection of the dead (Rom. 1, 4) and lives according to the power of indestructible life (Hebr. 7, 16), because when God exalted Christ on the day of Ascension and placed him at his right to make him Lord of all – he gave him all the fullness of life. Therefore all things he needs to act with authority as the head of his church and their saviour, is already provided for. This fullness was entrusted to Christ through the spirit.

Christ is the number one in all creation. The same eternal logos (Joh. 1,1), who became flesh (Joh. 1,14) and humbled himself (Phil. 2,8), and was then exalted by God the father and obtained a name “.. that is above all names!” (Phil. 2,9). This is how through Christ the church was founded in the beginning, when he was placed into the new and higher life on Easter morning by God. The first Christians called Jesus Christ the **„prince of life”** to express what a royal authority he has over the church since Easter, the Ascension and Pentecost. In all things he has the highest position. Thus there must be no one in the church who would be called equal to him or obtained the rights of lordship. Because nobody is able to provide to have the same function like Christ. The life of God is only embodied in Christ. He is the only source of life for his church. This is his sovereignty, the work and the ministry of Christ (Col. 1,13-29).

Paul's emphasis in Colossians, that Christ himself, in his personality has the last word in all things. He also quenches every doubt, that through Christ there is no longer religion. The search for God has found an end through Christ. The foundation of faith in God is now laid for all men, all time and the whole world.

This was **the sixth attribute** of the exalted Christ: all the fullness of God dwells in him (Col. 2,9). The message of Colossians 1,19 is one of the **most impressive statements referring to the Godhead Christ in the New Testament** (Hebr. 1,8). And it is also the key of the revelation of Jesus (Eph. 3,19/ Gal. 4,4/Joh. 1,16). Especially strong are the terms **„in Him“** and **„through Him“**.

The Colossians were supposed to have this faith foundation and receive assurance that only through him (Jesus) alone there is salvation – for the whole visible and invisible world. And he wants to prevent that the church would replace the Lord by another religious system. They were supposed to realize that Christ and only Christ is the foundation and reason for the church of God, which is now the temple of the perfect Godhead.

The special relationship of Jesus Christ is explained in the verses through

- His relationship to the father – in vers 15
- His relationship to the creation in verses 16 and 17
- His relationship to the church in verses 18 and 19
- His relation to the cross in vers 20.

The seventh attribute of Christ is his role as the mediator. Through Him God wants to reconcile all unto him. The term **„all“** is referring to the good angels and the redeemed, because only things on earth or under the heavens are mentioned (Col. 1,20/ Rev. 5,3+13). **For Satan and his helpers who are under the earth there is no redemption.** they remain powers opposing God (Numb. 16,33).

In Phil. 2,10 all **three levels of the cosmos** (universe) are mentioned, also the ones under the earth will **bow their knees and confess Jesus as their Lord.** This means that also Satan has to confess the Lord of the universe. He already did that in part through the demons during the time of Jesus' lifetime (Mat. 8,29). **When Jesus returns to this earth** he will freely flee from the face of God for eternity and also leave the church (Ps.1,4/Job 21,18/ Rev. 20,11). Satan will bow to him but he would never submit. He would rather flee.

There is nothing in God that is not also in Christ. In Him God stepped out of the secret place. All character and lifelines of God are incarnated in Christ. Not only in part but in its fullness like the first Christians testified in Joh. 1,14 -16. The life of Christ indeed carries everything in itself that we could ever need for any kind of relationship. In Jesus God gave all he had, and whoever receives Christ has all that God ever had.

Col. 1,21-23 deals with the topic of reconciliation. As the seventh attribute of Christ reconciliation is necessary, because men are alienated from God and the divine life (Eph. 2, 12; 4, 18). Before the conversion also the saints in Colosse were enemies of God in words and deeds. The sin is rooted in the heart of man (Mat. 5,27-28) and revealed in his deeds, evil works (Gal. 5,19). **Men are not enemies of God because of their sinful behaviour.** They sin **because they are in enmity with God on the inside.**

Reconciliation of a sinner with God takes place through the death of Christ, the death of his mortal body. The **gnostic touch** of the false teaching at Colosse with its orientation to Plato denied that Christ was **really a man**, and also that **he was really God.**

Like John explains in his first letter, the Christians have to confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh (1.Joh. 4,2), because spiritual beings cannot die and without bloodshed there is no forgiveness of sins (Hebr. 9,22). To redeem mankind Jesus had to become a man (1.Tim. 2,5/ Hebr. 2,17). Therefore it is important for the salvation of mankind that his body was truly physical and he died a physical death (Rom. 7,4/ Hebr. 10,10).

But the result of Christ's death is redemption. „to present you holy before him!“. This statement is referring to the justification of the believers and their spiritual perfection. Because God himself wants both for the believer and the death of Christ is the adequate **foundation** which is the key to justification (Rom. 3,21- 26), to continuous healing (Rom. 6-7) and for the future glorification of the saints (Rom. 8). Paul writes to the Ephesians:

“Because in Him he chose us, before the foundation of the world was laid to make us holy and acceptable for Him” (Eph. 1, 4). The Christians are to be **without blemish** (Eph. 5,27/ Phil. 2,15/ Jud. 24) and **perfect in Christ.** The second term appears five times in the New Testament and is finally used by the apostle Paul (1.Cor. 1,8; in 1.Tim. 3,10 and Tit.1,6-7). Satan is the **accuser** of our brethren (Rev. 12,10), but Christ is **our advocate** (1. Joh 2,1) before the father. Therefore we can stand before him blameless due to Christ (Rom. 8,33).

In Christ the accused are the **righteous** and the judged are **released.**

This reconciliation in Christ is possible by **steadfast faith:** *“if you remain in me“*. The Colossians are firm in their faith like a house built on solid ground (1.Cor. 7,37; 15,58), so that Paul would not doubt their steadfastness. He speaks much more of the hope, which is expecting that the gospel of reconciliation would not only be preached to them but to all creatures underneath the heavens.

This is obviously a term to express **that the gospel and his proclamations are universal** and that every man on earth was supposed to hear this message preached. In Acts 2, 5 he is referring to all people of all geographical origins (Gen 41,57/ 1.Kin.10,24/ Rom. 1,8).

In v. 21-23 the goal and the commitment of the reconciliation is expressly named.

- **The aim of the reconciliation is holiness.** Christ brought the sacrifice of his act of reconciliation to present us holy and righteous and without blemishes before God.

As a matter of fact, God loves us without limits, and out of this love he would do anything for us. But this is not a permission for us to continue like we used to live. It is rather a duty to prove worthy of God's love. The love of God makes it easy to love God without fear since we are no longer breaking the law and we are no longer condemned. **We are reconciled with God.** The act of reconciliation now requests total faithfulness to him. He urges us never to lose our trust in God and his love all the days of our life.

- In Col.1,24 Paul speaks of a **“suffering in his flesh“** when he mentions the reconciliation between the Jews and the Gentiles. He wants to be a mediator and therefore willingly goes to Jerusalem and faces the Jews. This was surely hard for him. Remember how he used to destroy the church and scatter the disciples. Now he tried to restore the damage and bring some back. For this reason he also diligently collected for the „poor in Judea“. He was part of the reason for this misfortune (Act. 9,1-2/ 11,29-30) and now felt guilty of the way he persecuted them in the past. .
- **Christ did all to redeem us.** When he speaks of „suffering“ he refers to his suffering because of the spreading of the gospel which he freely bears. He is trying to explain that the sufferings for God brings Christians and the churches closer to perfection.
- This term of representative repentance is known in the Old Testament where the innocent takes on the anger of God deserved by the guilty one. And brings the guilty person back to favor with God. Moses offered himself as a sacrifice for the people who had sinned (Ex 32,32). Job offers a burnt sacrifice to make up for the sins of his children (Job 1,5). Isaiah prophesied the representative suffering of vengeance of the Messiah (Is. 53). The New Testament interprets the suffering and death of Christ as a sacrifice for the sin of mankind. Nothing can be added to it apart from bearing one another's burdens and to practise love (Gal. 6,2).

Some thoughts concerning “suffering”:

- Trouble and opposition is the lot of all men (Gal. 3,16-19/ Job 14,1).
- Not all sufferings are punishment or signs from God, also the believer is has to suffer pain (Ecc. 7,15/ 8,14).
- God sometimes allows the believer to suffer to test them. He also helps and saves them (Deut.13,4/ 1.Petr. 3,17/ Is. 55,6/ Rev. 3,19).
- All prophets that have prophesied the „incarnated Jesus“ also suffered (Mat. 23,35).
- from the crucifixion of Jesus until his return all who confessed Jesus publically suffered and had to participate in his shame. Now it is a privilege of the believers also to suffer for Christ (2.Tim. 3,11; 1.Petr. 3,13-14; 5,9; Hebr. 10,32).
- The word perils (affliction) is not the same term used for the death of Jesus. It stands for sorrow, pressure, worries, etc. And Paul had more than enough of those (2.Cor. 11,23-28). It is rather referring to tests and trials of life and not to agony of death.
Es bezieht sich also auf schwere Prüfungen im Leben, nicht aber auf die Todesqualen.
- One more thing: Christ also suffers when the believers suffer. This can be seen in his question to Saul who turned into apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. Jesus said: Saul, Saul why do you persecute me? (Act. 9,4). Because the church is the body of Christ Jesus feels everything that the saints feel. And therefore Paul is glad to suffer on the behalf of Jesus (Phil. 1,29). Jesus died to redeem the church, but the church needs to be exhorted and grow. It must be strong and pure and faithful. Thus every member serving the church, increasing its capacity, strengthening the faith and keeping them from wrong is doing the work of Christ. And if this ministry is suffering, effort and sacrifice all of this suffering is added to Christ and therefore completes it. To suffer in the service of Christ is not a punishment but a privilege and an honor, because it means to participate in his ministry.

Col. 1,25-26: Paul is assured and knows that a **called servant** is a precious truth of the divine word.

The heretics of Colosse boasted in their knowledge which was supposedly revealed to them through spiritualism. Paul argues that **the secret can only be found in Christ.**

Secret is referring to something **that was hidden before** but now is exposed and revealed. But this opposed the imagination of the false teachers who said that the secrets can only be known by secret teachings. Only few could receive that knowledge which was not supposed to be for everybody.

The people of the Old Testament **did not know much about the church** because it was hidden for long times and generations. Also now this secret is only revealed to the believers. But since the **church is the body of Christ** and resulted from his death it could not have existed in the OT. It was only Jesus who announced the future church (Mt. 16,16-18). The church remains in unity as the body through the holy spirit (1.Cor. 12,13). **The church was only born at Pentecost** (Act. 1,5; 2), and Paul soon had to find that this mysterious body of Christ, the church that he persecuted truly existed (Act. 9,4/ Gal. 1,13).

That the **Church was a secret** does not mean that the redemption and the blessing of the Gentiles was unimaginable before the era of Christ (Lk. 2,29-32; Am. 9,11-12). The mysterious was not so much that the Gentiles were saved, but rather that they could become co-workers (Eph. 3, 6), **equal to the Jews** without a fence between the two groups (Eph. 2,12-14). In the OT the Gentiles who converted to the Jewish faith were not equal with the Jews. The special unity where it does not matter whether Greek or Jew only began after Jesus' death and the outpouring of his spirit that baptized all believers into new life. To proclaim the message of this good news is an important ministry of Paul with regards to the Christian faith. It is about the truth that also needs to be brought to the Gentiles. Paul therewith destroyed the imagination that the love and mercies of God were only for one people.

He confronted people with the message that Christ is for the Gentiles just as he is for the Jews. There is therefore no **Extra-redemption** for the Jews. Jesus is the only way to the father. Out of themselves the Jews would never have agreed that God was there for all people. They strictly denied that God could be the God of the Gentiles also. It seemed impossible, yes even like blasphemy, to think that God has a desire for all men and that all men were to belong to God.

Without Paul Christianity **might** be nothing more than **another Jewish religion** and all others would never have received the salvation of the Lord. But Paul wanted to reach **all** men and preach the gospel **to all** men, so that all could become perfect in Christ.

Paul proclaims this new discovery and knowledge everywhere as his assignment from God. It is the divine secret, the new thing which was hidden from mankind for decades and now becomes known through the holy spirit. It was revealed to Paul that the salvation of God, the calling, the blessings etc, are not for Jews exclusively, but are valid for all of mankind.

The gnostics would never have agreed with Paul's revelation. They also did not believe that all men are chosen by God, that he cares for them, enlightens them and instructs them through the work of Christ and the holy spirit. They all thought that the redemption required such a high measure of knowledge, that only a spiritual elite, which means only few chosen ones could participate in it. They thought that divine wisdom was not accessible for most of the people. They often confessed that the perfect life is spared for very few. .

Therefore many people agreed that wisdom is not for everybody. They knew that not all people could be philosophers, not all could become priests, not all people receive the same gifts of the spirit, etc. Not all people are good at the same thing. Not all can become an author, a student, a singer or speaker. In addition there are many gifts that are only for few, or privileges or accomplishments that many will never obtain. **According to Paul there is now one thing for everybody: that is Jesus Christ.** The good news of the gospel is open to all men. That means the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord, his changing power that makes our life unique, precious and holy. This is the universal treasure of God that he proclaims (Col. 1,27-29).

Col. 1,27-29 For Paul the gospel of Jesus contains everything. He speaks of the author of salvation, the secret of God. He talks about extraordinary riches and a special glory dwellin on the inside of this secret. He continues to emphasize that it is not a **special mystery** that will only be revealed to a small religious group, like some **exclusive brothers of Colosse** thought. His message is so unique and so universal that it belongs to all people.

Paul makes it clear that God wanted to share his secret of the new testament with all believers. In all of his grace God was ready to reveal his eternal plan with all his riches and all of his glory.

The surprising thing was that it was also supposed to be revealed to the Gentiles. Up to then the special revelations of God were for the Jews only (Rom. 2,17/ 3,1-2/ 9,4).

“But now all were drawn near through the blood of Christ, also the ones who were far away!” (Eph. 2,13). Or: **“those who were without hope and without God”** (Eph. 2,12) now had a glorious hope! These amazing riches or word by word: the **“riches of his glory”** are for all who believe in Christ who is the hope of this glory. Because they are now **“in Christ”** and **“Christ is in them.”**

The very thing that some brothers in Colosse would consider foolishness or little knowledge, is actually **the greatest of all** you could ever receive. He is the fullness of the gospel! Jesus himself and he alone is the Christ, **the perfect salvation of the world.**

All **attempts to add** through other messages or other ways to follow Christ or to live a godly life **have nothing to do with the fullness of the gospel** but they are **rather short-cutting** or **hiding** the great fact that through Christ we were given the whole foundation of faith and the total gift of God (grace). He is the Christ who lived among them. He is not far from this world or holding a majestic distance so that we could only draw close to him through mysterious, cultic acts.

He is in the midst of the believers, in the midst of his church. He is close to all, and with them all of the days. He is the friend in the life of a believer, which means that he is not only standing next to us, but he is also dwelling in us with his spirit and unites every member of his church into a deep communion. There is nothing comparable on earth.

He is **the** hope of glory. He is the only hope, and there is no hope beside him. Whoever has him, will enter the fullness of God's glory. This is not in a teaching building or during divine acts or based on cultic tradition. Our hope is grounded in the glory and eternal life of God. Our eternity is based on Christ alone and nothing else. He is the one, the absolute, the undeniable hope of our salvation.

Paul explains to the believers of Colosse, that they are not supposed to hope for anything but set all of their hope **completely in Him.** Christ is the hope of glory for his church and it cannot be replaced and nothing must be added. This is the **“fullness of the gospel”**. Wherever other things and other truths necessary for salvation are proclaimed the gospel is reduced and its fullness destroyed (Col. 1,28-29).

Paul tells his readers **that Jesus also lives in the believers who used to be Gentiles** and each of them is a new creation through the resurrected Lord and the holy spirit living inside of the believer. **Paul obviously tries to avoid** that the Colossian Christians would be more influenced by the heretics. His motivation is always to lead every Christian to **“perfection in Christ,”** which means to spiritual maturity (Jam. 1,4). It is Paul's desire that those who once converted would always **grow in the spirit** (1.Cor. 3,1-2). They were supposed to **mature** (Hebr. 5,11-14). There is a point where he prays for **“complete sanctification”** of the believers (1.Thess. 5,23).

He always proclaims all of the riches of the gospel so that the believers would also know all of the riches of the life that Jesus promised to us (Joh. 10,10). This is what God uses all of his power of God. He is all about helping the believers to move forwards with their life of faith even if it is a lot of effort for Paul (1.Cor. 15,10+58; Gal. 4,11; 1.Thess. 1,3). Even if it meant to fight (Col. 2,1; 4,12) or bring up as much strength as for an athlete to run a race (1.Cor. 9,25; 1.Tim. 6,12). But all of this strength is flowing from Christ (Phil. 4,13).

Since Christ is the **“fullness of the message”** Paul is concentrating his message on only **HIM** – Christ. **He is the center,** he is the one and the whole content of his proclamation. If there is emphasis on other truths one is leaving behind the gospel, the revelation of God in Jesus and the way of salvation. Because the only thing **necessary for salvation is Jesus Christ alone!** He alone died for us and he alone is our mediator to the right hand of God. This is the message Paul is pressing and proclaiming. And all of this must never be hidden or reduced.

Col. 2, 1-23 Exhorting part: To the church

Col. 2,1-8 are **warnings to the church**.

Col. 2,1-3 The battle of the apostel. He is fighting on behalf of believers that he himself does not know, has never met and yet loves dearly. He is thinking of the three cities in the valley of Lycos, Laodicea, Hierapolis and Colosse which are located in close proximity.

The reference to Laodicea (Col. 4,16) shows that the false teachings obviously were spread thus far. But the center of their origin was probably in Colosse. This was primarily **spiritual warfare**. He would have loved to travel to Colosse to oppose those teachers personally and dealing with their arguments if they strayed away from the gospel.

Let us not forget where Paul was when he wrote this letter: he was a prisoner in Rome and waiting for his trial in court which was supposed to end with the death sentence. There was nothing left for him to do but to pray. What he himself could not do God would have to do. Therefore Paul fought the battle with prayer for people he was never allowed to meet in his lifetime. If time, distance of circumstances separate us from people we still have one way to help them: We can fight for them in prayer.

It is also possible that Paul fought another fight in his spirit. **Paul was also just a man** with all the problems of human nature. As a prisoner he was waiting for his trial before the Emperor Nero. And he had to expect to be sentenced to death. It would have been much easier for him if he would have denied the truth on behalf of his own security. This would have been so easy for him, to let Jesus Christ down in order to avoid the court. But Paul knew that such a failure towards Christ would have had worse consequences. If Paul would have given up and had denied Christ it would have been a great loss for all other churches.

For many this would have been the end of their Christian faith. Paul did not only fight on his own behalf he fought for all others whose eyes were on him. They regarded him as a leader and father of faith. It is good if we always remember that there are people watching us. Our behaviour will either build up their faith or destroy it. **Therefore we never fight just for ourselves** but the honor of Christ is always the most important. The faith of others has also been entrusted with us.

In Colossians we realize from the prayer of the apostel, the **main characteristics** of a living and faithful church.

- **A church is supposed to have a courageous heart.** Paul is asking the Lord to strengthen their hearts and fill them with courage. They are supposed to receive the power to face difficult situations and deal with them as heroes.
- Paul is asking the Lord **for more love in the church**. Every church member was supposed to be connected through bonds of love. The way of church government and the order of the service are not so important. They might change from time to time and from place to place. But a true church can be recognized in the love among the brethren. If the love dies, the church dies. But where love rules, the church is strong. Because only where the love is, there is Jesus Christ – the presence of the love of the Lord.
- **The church is supposed to be filled with all wisdom.**

Paul is using three different terms for wisdom: understanding, ability to judge or insight and the ability to discern the matter of a situation.

The term: **„ability“** stands for assurance of discernment in every situation. To be able to call to mind the results and consequences in order to be able how to act whenever the believer or the church is called to act.

In addition Paul says **in Jesus are hidden all treasures of wisdom and knowledge**, in Greek **„sophia“** and **„gnosis“**. Those words are not only a repetition of the same statement, because there is an important difference between the two.

„Gnosis“ means that someone is able to understand the truth by intuition and instinct. It is the ability to divide right from wrong in the instant of the moment when we hear or see something.

„Sophia“ is the ability to promote the truth by intelligent arguments and explanations. To support and to promote once we have understood.

Gnosis means to understand the truth and **sophia** enables a person to share the hope that lies within him/her.

The true church has such wisdom that enables her to do the right thing in every situation, a clear prophetic wisdom that is neither filled with prejudice or ignorance.

A real spirit-filled church has the wisdom to know the truth instantly and the wisdom to communicate it to every thinking spirit. All of these treasures of wisdom Paul claims to be **hidden in Christ**.

Paul uses the word „**hidden**“. This word alone is an attack against the gnostics. The word „apokryphos“ (hidden) means hidden from the eyes of the mediocre, it is a secret thing.

The gnostics believed that the redemption required special intellect. Their knowledge was written down in books called „apokryphoi“ because they contained secret knowledge that was hidden and denied from the simple people. When Paul uses this particular word he is therefore saying: you gnostics have hidden your wisdom from others and call it „apokryphoi“. We also have some knowledge. But it is not hidden in books that are hard to understand but rather hidden in Christ. Therefore this knowledge is open for all mankind.

The truth of Christian faith is not secret knowledge but a secret revealed. There cannot be riches in understanding and knowledge without devotion to God. This understanding is according to its substance **centered around Christ**.

Only the knowledge of the way of God enables a Christian to get to know Christ. Christ, the true secret of God is revealed to all who are “in HIM” (Joh. 1,18/ Hebr. 1,2-3), because in Him are hidden all treasures of wisdom and understanding. Right understanding means the knowledge of the truth and right wisdom means the application of this knowledge to the practical, every day life. This means understanding is the wise judgment and wisdom is intelligent action – all of this can only be found in Christ.

- For Paul true Christianity can be concluded in one sentence: „**to be in Christ**“. This is what is seeking and also wants to show the Colossians the right direction – which is to regard it as the lifestyle of Christian life. Because only then they would be safe from temptation and deception (Col. 2,4-7).

If the believer is in Christ, he has the power to „**resist enticing teachings**“ no matter how well the teacher's ability to speak.

The terminology: „**Enticing speech**“ was originated from the legal language. It was referring to the convincing power of an advocate who was able to turn wrong into right so that the accused could escape the righteous punishment. This term describes the ability of the speaker that could enthrall the audience. Some misused this ability. But the true church was supposed to hold on to the truth so that those deceptive and enticing statements would not move them.

- **A healthy spiritual church is ruled by „chastisement and order“**. Paul rejoiced when he heard of the order and the steadfast faith of the Colossians. The words Paul uses at this point communicate a clear image, because both originated from the language of the army.
Firstly: The church was supposed to be **as a troop in order**, a unity where every member is in place, ready to hear the command and follow immediately.
Secondly the church was supposed to be like **a strong fortress**: unshakeable, no matter how hard the enemy might attack them. The soldiers are not supposed to move and flee. **In the churches the same discipline was supposed to rule and the same steadfastness as disciplined army troops**.
- **True churches live in Christ alone**. The members of the church are supposed to walk in Christ. All the days of their life they should be aware of the presence of Christ. Their life should be rooted in him. Paul used two images to describe it: **The image of a tree** whose roots reach deep into the ground and **the image of a house** with a firm foundation. **Like a big tree is rooted** deep in the ground where it is nourished so shall a Christian be rooted in Christ in order to be the source of his life and strength. **Like a house** stands firm on solid ground a Christian life should be protected against every storm, because it is not grounded on human power but on the power of Christ.
- **The faithful church holds on to the faith they received**, always remembering what Christ taught and the faith they were instructed in. This is not simply a stiff theology where every change and every new thought is considered blasphemy. Let us only think of Paul's thoughts of Jesus Christ to prove that this was not his motivation.

It was rather his goal to state that there are certain foundations of faith that must never be changed. Even if Paul followed after new thoughts they were always based on the unchangeable truth that Jesus Christ is Lord.

- **The true church can be recognized in a certain gratitude.** Gratitude is an unchangeable and characteristic attribute of Christian life. Gratitude is the climax of human behavior, no matter if we express it with words or deeds. We should praise God at all times, the one from whom all the blessings flow.

Col. 2,8 Be careful so that no one will cheat you... After explaining the fullness of God in Christ he now judged **heresy**, which is responsible for the Colossian's fall from Christ.

There are several allusions to the false teachings such as „philosophy“ und „empty lies“. This is not against philosophy itself but against false philosophical assumptions just like the bible is also turning against false religion (Jam. 1,26). The philosophy taught in Colosse was vain and deceptive. It was based on the teachings of men and not of Christ. Real Christian philosophy brings into captivity every thought that rises above obedience to Christ (2.Kor. 10,5). Philosophy is love of wisdom but if someone loves wisdom that does not line up with the total Christ's wisdom is worshiping an idol. Such a person is always looking for new teachings and will never get to know the truth (2.Tim. 3,7). False philosophy is based on the powers of this world (Gal. 4,3+9). This might refer to evil spirits who inspired those teachings. Christ already defeated those spirits (2.Cor. 4,3-4; Eph. 6,11-12). This philosophy is demonic and worldly, not pleasing unto God or Christian.

A philosophy based on empty human logic cannot offer any fullness, since all the fullness of God is only found in Jesus Christ (Col.2,9).

The early gnostic heresy questioned **the Godhead** and humanity of Christ. It claimed Christ to be **an angel** and his body was not a real body. Paul opposes this opinion by proclaiming Christ as a real God and a real man (1.Joh. 4,1-6).

The **fullness is not only in Christ** but also **in the believers** who are participating in the fullness through (Col. 2,10). The riches of life they possess flow from the fullness of Christ. Through him they can take part in the divine creation (2.Petr. 1,4), because from his fullness we all took grace for grace (Joh. 1,16). Of course this does not mean that the believer is now God himself. They can only participate in the fullness of God, which means that they have the goodness of the one who is the fullness.

They are sharing the body of the one who is the Lord of all power and authority. Those authorities are also the ones who tried to teach the Colossians the way of life according to the statutes of the world and not of Christ.

From **theological misconceptions** of the false teachers and their gnosticism Paul now turns to their **practical mistakes**: their legalism. The Gentile Christians **did not need to adhere** to the Jewish laws and regulations like circumcision or other things. Because from the spiritual point of view they are already circumcised in Christ (Col. 2,11-12). This spiritual circumcision was not effected by humans but by Christ. It meant a crucifixion or the laying down of the old body, a circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2,29; Eph. 2,11). The fleshly being or the fleshly body, the fleshly desires (in vers 18) was taken away through the death and resurrection of Christ.

What they once **were in Adam**, which was sinful, fallen and filthy, **was now erased by Jesus Christ**. But now the believer is a new creature in Christ (2. Cor. 5, 17). In his new head he has a new measure for life. An this is no longer the **Mosaic law** but the faithful following after Christ. „Laying down“ or „laid down“ means **a total break**. The laying down of the old existence happens in redemption, when the believer is buried with Christ and resurrected to new life by the baptism of the holy spirit (1.Cor. 12,13). The burial and resurrection of the Christian is portrayed metaphorically through baptism. (Rom. 6,4/ Col. 2,13-14).

Death means separation but not deletion. Because even the ones who have not been redeemed yet still carry the image of God in them but they are separated from God (Gen 9,6; Jam. 3,9). They might be separated from the spiritual life but they still have their physical life. But now God brought us life through Christ (Eph. 2,1-6). The same power that raised Christ from the death wakes up the believing sinner to a new spiritual life. This new life was granted to us when God forgave us all sins, because they were redeemed. The law of God judged mankind (Rom. 3,19) because all of the requirements were opposing their nature. But in Christ the law is fulfilled (Rom. 8,2 / Gal. 3,25; Hebr. 7,12). Therefore it is wrong to cling to the law, because the believer in Christ are dead to the law.

Christ fulfilled all requirements of the law in his life and through his death and the Christians are in Him. Since mankind is not able to fulfill the law out of their own strength they are guilty. Since they are not able to pay the price of their sin they are breakers of the law. Jesus erased this claim through his death. It is as if he crucified all of this to the cross where he was, showing that he had paid the full price. Through HIM, through Christ the sin account of a man is deleted.

When Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the law (Col. 2,15-17) He exposed all demonic powers and authorities and took away their power. He publically defeated them with triumph (2.Cor. 2,14). Therewith the believers are free from the power that wants to dictate regulations for food or feasts.

“Do not feel guilty because of food or drinks!”

Christians are free from the commandments of the laws like Lev 11 and 17; Deut 14, because God is not judging those who eat all things (Rom. 14,1-4). In the opposite he even states that all food is good for nourishment for **he created it**. They should receive it with thanksgiving, especially those who have known the truth (1.Tim. 4,3).

Paul says a **teaching that claims the opposite** is demonic (1.Tim. 4,1) and originates from those powers that Christ has already overcome (Col. 2,15). The redemption of the believers also applies to feasts like the new moon or the sabbath (Gal. 4, 10). Those who want to bring the Christians under the lordship of the law make artificial differences between ceremonial and moral laws and therefore the **sabbath** is still important. But that this is wrong can be explained based on several scriptural evidences:

1. **The sabbath law** is the only of the 10 commandments that is not mentioned in the new testament.
2. The first Christians gathered on Sunday (Act. 20,7; 1. Cor. 16,2), because Christ rose and appeared that day (Mark. 16,1; Joh. 20,1).
3. The bible makes no difference between the so-called moral and ceremonial commandments. Such a separation was introduced in the 13th century AD.
4. This passage of Colossians expressly judges the ones who require adherence to the sabbath.
5. According to Paul's point of view the OT laws including the sabbath commandment was only a shadow of the future (Hebr. 8,5; 10,1). The things that were revealed like shadows now became reality in Christ (Mt. 5,17; Rom. 8,3-4). A shadow is (skia) only a shape of an object.

Whoever found Christ does not need to chase after shadows any longer.

Col. 2,18 Let no one steal the price from you ... Everyone who tries to lead people astray from Christ and back to the law are taking their price of victory, which means they are stealing the heavenly reward from the believers. Like athletes running a race in a wrong direction would be disqualified by the referee, Christians will not receive their reward if they turn away from Christ instead of following him (1.Cor. 3,10-15).

Some heretics who tried to lead faithful ministers away from their service often **perform with false humility** that carries a pretense of holiness, but who denies the power of Christ (2.Tim. 3,5). This hypocritical piety of the legalists was connected with **the worship of angels** which is not allowed according to scripture (Ex 20,3-4; Rev. 22,8-9). The legalistic teaching is a theology that originated from fallen angels (1.Tim. 4,1) and that wanted to bring people who have the power of this earth (Gal. 4,3) under their lordship with the help of mystic meditation. The legalistic philosophers emphasised that they received their knowledge in dreams and visions – which are empty, foolish and not very special (Gal. 3,4) and only serve to boast in their own strength. Instead of humbling themselves, like a true minister of God, those people boasted with their visionary experiences and boasted in their flesh. The apostle Paul warns the church and the believers of such people.

Paul continues to explain in his letter what **“once used to be”** and what **“had happened now”**.

Once there used to be a high priest who sacrificed for the people every year, but the reality was that he could not pay the ransom of the sin. One high priest followed the other but not one was really able to help. They all set their hope in the true high priest who was to come and erase the sin of mankind completely. This high priest was and is Jesus.

Once there was a temple of stone where you could go to worship and which was a place of revelation. And still no building of stone could ever really be a dwelling place for God, because God wanted to dwell in the living temple of our bodies. Now the new temple has come and is the church of God.

This church of God that Jesus established and is building is the place of the presence of the Lord. This is now the place of His revelation and in it the living God is truly dwelling.

Once they brought numerous sacrifices but still could not obtain peace with God. They were only prophecies of the great sacrifice at Golgotha, which brought true peace between God and man.

All **forms of service** of the old covenant have determined terms such as high priest, temple, sacrifice and many others more. But Jesus Christ brought it all into reality. **The season of shadows is over** for Christ himself is the end of all religions. He himself is the new service. And his church is not based on shadows but based on HIM, Christ.

Paul is worried that the Colossians could be cheated of their reward through those teachings of Judaism and Mysticism (Col.2.18-19), and thereby would be separated from Christ. Paul says that all spirituality does not grow out of adherence to laws that are only a shadow, but out of a relationship to life itself – to Christ who is the truth. Because without a living connection to its head the body of Christ cannot live (Joh.15,5)

Col. 2,20-23 True believers are free from all powers of this world.

Another side effect of legalism and mysticism is a tendency to asceticism.

It is a **pseudo-spiritual attitude** that is boasting in all kinds of physical self-denial like for example “You shall not touch, you shall not taste, you shall not do.” The prohibition applies to behavior in certain situations up to prohibition to touch certain things.

Legalism (which means a strict holding on to laws and paragraphs) is speaking in the same exaggeration applied to the divine commandment of God in Gen 3,3 and said: **“Do not touch it lest you die!”** Whereas Gen 2,16 and 17 say: *“And the Lord God commanded and spoke: You may eat of all the trees in the garden, but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat for the day you will taste it you must die”*

The **asceticism** is known to grow out of a feeling of guilt. But Jesus paid the price for all sins with his death. And since the Christians have died to the powers of this world in Christ they are no longer subject to them who are trying to pull us after our lustful desires. Only the ones who live for their sin (Rom. 6,1-7) have to submit to their lordship. Worldliness means a life according to the laws of the world, also according to those that would pretend false humility and worship angelic beings. Spirituality is a life in the power of the spirit in unity with Christ through which the believer has died to sin. We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would be destroyed. (Rom. 6,6).

Asceticism is a human **system of rules** often used out of the context of divine law and based on commandments and teachings of man (Col. 2,22-23).

The best thing about the new testament is the continuous example of lawfulness is the OT commandment of circumcision that God gave the Jews as a sign of their faith. The legalists try to make it a requirement for grace (Gal. 2,21). A life according to such rules and a self-made religion might have the semblance of wisdom but in the end of those rules are worth nothing and only fulfill the desires of the flesh.

Asceticism contains a number of rules about drinks and food. With other words it means a return to the Jewish rules about food and long lists of clean and unclean things.

- Gnostics consider every material thing evil.
- If the essence of material is evil in itself than the body is also evil.

If according to that the body is evil one can draw two conclusions:

- **If the body is evil anyways** it does not matter what we do with it. Then it does not matter if we satisfy all of his desires or if we neglect and despise it. Since it is evil in itself it can be used or misused however we want to.
- **If the body is evil it has to be chastised**. It has to be tormented and all of its needs (hunger) must be neglected, its functions oppressed. This means that gnostics practised total immorality as well as strict asceticism. For this reason the apostle Paul deals with asceticism in detail and says: stay away from those whose religion are rules concerning food and drinks (Matth. 15,10-20/ Mark. 7,14-23). Also Peter had to learn not to speak about clean and unclean food (Acts 10).

Col. 3,1-4,6 describes the „true Christian life“.

Paul encourages the Colossians not to allow empty philosophical speculations to lead them astray. The believers have become like Christ and no longer have to live under the Jewish law which would steal their reward. They have died with Christ and therefore do not need to submit to any rules or laws. Furthermore they rose with Christ and should set our minds on heavenly things (Col. 3,1-4), give up our sinful and worldly ways of life (Col.3,5 - 11) and be clothed in the virtues of Christ (Col. 3,12-17). Turning to Jesus changes a person completely (Rom. 6,8-10). Now his life is ruled and determined by heaven (Rev. 9,6; 1.Cor. 7,27). Therefore a Christian should care about the things above (Col. 3,2), and the eternal, not so much about the mortal, visible things (2.Cor. 4,18). Paul tries to explain to the believer that life in this world could be better if it was saturated with a power that goes beyond this world, the power of the resurrected, exalted and glorified Christ. What we should avoid here on earth (Col. 3,5) – is rather **of moral** and **not physical nature**: immorality, filthiness and desires. Paul is not speaking of the gnostic despise of the material. All that God created, also the body and sexuality **are good** (Gen. 1,27-28+31/ 1.Tim. 4,14).

Col. 3,4: Paul describes the „Lord“ and what He means to him. He calls him „**Christ, our life**“. To the Philippians he wrote „**Christ is my life**“ (Phil. 1,21). To the Galatians he said : ***I live, not me but Christ in me*** (Gal. 2,20). According to Paul Christ is the most important thing for a Christian, even more Christ is the life himself.

For the true Christian Christ is his life. Jesus Christ rules all of his thinking and fills his whole life. And this brings us to the core of the chapter. This is the reason why a true Christian puts all of his mind and desires on the things above and not the things of this world. He judges all things of this world in the light of the cross and eternity.

The true Christian is independent of all earthly things and he is able to turn all of his love and heart to the things above. Because in the moment of redemption a Christian dies to his flesh and its sinful nature (Rom. 6,3-8). His life is hidden with Christ in God. „**Hidden**“ means covered as well as safe. It pictures both: the invisibility and safety.

The Christian is not yet glorified but he is already safe and secure in Christ!

Because Christ is already his life (Joh. 14,19) even if he is physically still separated from Him. In his second coming we will also be united with him in the physical (1.Thess. 4,16-18). All of this is only a matter of time (1.Joh. 3,2/ 1.Cor. 13,12; Col. 1,27). Paul is placing something new in the center of attention of the believer. They are supposed to look up, look at the heavenly Lord Jesus Christ and to the future where we expect his return. And not to **look back** at the old Jewish traditions (the rules about food with long lists of cleanness and uncleanness) or to hold on to the present world (where the gnostics considered all material things evil).

After the theological discussion now the **moral requirements are laid out (Col. 3,5-10)**

Paul is trying to work out the standard of Christian life and draw practical conclusions from it.

Vivid and metaphorical he says: ***Kill the members that are still on earth*** and wants to say: kill everything inside of you that is against God, and everything that is hindering you to fulfill the will of God (Rom 8,13/ Mat. 5,29+30). In other words: we Christians should kill all of our selfishness and egoism. We should regard all of our personal desires as nothing and our personal ambitions as dead. Our will has to change radically and so does the center of our life. All that is hindering us to obey God completely must die. This process is described as a changing of clothes. It is a call to determined action (Röm. 6,5-14).

They should not continue to live like they were still alive to sin, if they are actually not. The members who are on earth are a contrast to the things above. The carnal being is the „old me“ or the „sinful nature“ the old man (Eph. 4,22; Col. 3,9). The believers should not continue to live as before because they are a new creature in Christ (2. Cor. 5,17). **In the life of a believer there is a „once“ and a „now“** (Col. 3,7-8).

The Christian should take off the old man. Paul is using the ancient Christian ritual of baptism where you took off the clothes before you went into the water, after that he received a clean, new, white garment. He took off his old life and received a new one.

What does Paul suggest to take off the old man?

- **We Christians should take off all anger and rage.** Especially **hot-headedness**, the sudden burn, the anger that leaves as fast as it came. The Greek compared it to a straw fire that enflames quickly and

burns down and goes out just as fast. But he is also referring to the deep rooted anger that is long lasting, cannot be comforted and is continuously nourished in order to keep it alive.

- **There is wickedness.** it refers to the wickedness of mind, which is the source of all vice.
- We as Christians **should lay down every blasphemy and disgraceful word**, and should not lie to each other. Like grieving and slander. Disgraceful applies to every filthy and obscene word.

The last three commandments are all about speech. If we change those negative commandments into positive commandments, we will attain those following three commandments of christian manner of speech.

1. As Christians we should always have a kind speech.

2. The christian manner of speech should be pure. We as Christians should be aware that we have to give account about every unusefull word that comes out of our mouth.
3. Christians should not lie. Our speech should be the truth.

Every evil behavior like anger, wrathfulness, wickedness, blasphemy, disgraceful words etc. don't befit a Christian. They don't fit him anymore (Eph. 4,17+31). He should **take them off**, like a dirty shirt (Rom. 13,12/ Eph. 4,22+25/ Jam. 1,21/ 1.Petr. 2,1/ Hebr. 12,1). You can see in the bible that **our behavior** is often **compared with a garment** (z. B. Job 29,14/ Ps. 35,26/ Is. 11,5/ Rom. 13,12/ 1.Thess. 5,8).

He doesn't lay down his bad habits only, but **his old religion, his race, affiliations** etc.. It belongs to the critical impact of Christian faith, that he tears every separating barrier down.

For him there are neither Jews nor Greek, circumcised nor uncircumcised, neither barbarians, scythians, slaves nor those who are free.

- **The old world was full of barriers.** The Greeks despised the non-Greeks, strangers or barbarians. To them everyone who didn't, speak Greek was a barbarian.
- The Greeks had been the aristocrats of the ancient world, and they were surely aware to fit.
- **The Jews looked down at all other tribes. Only the Jews were God's chosen people. In the eyes of Jews all other tribes were predestined for hell.**
- The scythians stood at the lowest level of all non-Greeks.

The Jewish annalist Josephus, who lived from 37 until nearly 100 AD, says that they have been a little more than wild animals. The scythians had been the wild ones. They terrified the civil world through their brutal atrocities. According to the law in the ancient times slaves weren't even considered human beings. They were merely living, human tools without any rights.

The christian faith tears every human barriers down:

- Christian faith tears down all **the barriers of origin and nationality**. People who despised and hated each other were included into one great family of the Christian church. People who wanted to wipe out each other in battle, sat down peacefully next to one another at the table of the Lord. The christian faith pulls down all ceremonial and ritual barriers too. Circumcised and uncircumcised belong to one community. As long as Jews stayed Jews, all other people from other tribes were unclean in their view. When they became Christians, all people of different tribes became brothers to them.
- **The christian faith pulls down the barriers between the civil and non-civil people.** In ancient times the Scythians were as worthy as the ignorant barbarians. But the Greeks were praised as spiritual heroes. But then in the Christian church the non-civil were brought into contact with the civil ones. The most eminent Scholar could sit next to most simple primitive people in the church of Jesus Christ.
- The Christian faith **pulls down all barriers between the different social classes**.
- In those days, both slaves and those who were free, belonged to the church, and much more. It was possible in the early church, that a slave, the preacher and the head and his Lord could be a simple Member of the church. In the eyes of God we are all the same.
- **In Christ all groups are abolished no matter what kind.**

The believers were, **„called out“** of this world. Here all usual human differences were dissolved and were transformed through the unity in Christ. Now they are the **„chosen ones of God“** (Col.3.12), the saints and the beloved of God.

All of those three descriptions were usually reserved for the Jews. But the **terms are now transferred to the gentiles by the apostle Paul.** He points out that the love and mercy of God is going to last until the end of the world. And the limitation of „**the first loved tribe**“ in the plan of God doesn't exist anymore.

But we need to recognize, that all virtues that Paul is talking about, are referred to the personal relation among the people. Neither competence nor smartness nor diligence nor eagerness are mentioned. It doesn't mean that those properties are non-essential or not important. But the vital Christian virtues are others. Here it is about the virtues of interpersonal relations. **Christian faith means community.**

The fulfillment of the spiritual life in Christ doesn't only concern our **personal** and **prayer life**, but also our **social relationships.**

To lead the dimension of living in Christ to perfection, Paul advises the believers to be wise. (Col.4.5-6)

This wisdom (sophia), that is of God and not of people, should become acknowledgeable especially for those who are out there, those who don't belong to the family of believers. (1. Cor. 5,12/ 1.Thess. 4,12/ 1.Tim. 3,7). But the **Colossians should also seize the time.** They should be ready to declare Christ in season and out of season. Their speech, word or conversation should always be friendly, literally in gracefully and pleasant, but spiced with salt (clean/pure) and conclusive. Hereby they can answer everyone who is asking for the hope that is inside of them. (1.Petr. 3,15).

Now this stage contains three important rules in life as a christian.

1. Christians should always behave smart and tactfull in front of those who dont belong to the Church or the congregation of Jesus. Of course christians should be missionaries, but we need to know, when we are allowed to talk with others about spiritual questions and when not. We never must give the impression of pride or i-know-it-all. We should always be aware that we can't convince people to come to christian faith.And we should always consider the we represent the christian faith in the eyes of others . Accordingly, we are a good or a bad embodiment for Christ. Christians can't win others for Christ with words but more with their lives. But it is also possible to disgust them. Therefore through our life we - as christians - are responsible to keep our faith (and consequently Christ himself), with steadfastness before others.
2. Christians should **always look out for the right opportunity.** We should percieve every opportunity, to appear in Christ and to serve the people as good as we can. In our everyday life and daily work there are many opportunities again and again to give testimony for Christ. Christians should not miss any opportunity, Not for our own advantage but alone for the will of Jesus.
3. **The speech of christians should ever be lovely and still spiced with salt.** They should always be ready to give the right answer. At this point Paul is expressing something very interesting to the Collosians. As Christians we should declare our message withe the same grace and the same flavor like Jesus did.

Col. 4,7-10 Paul shows how the mature and interpersonal relationships should look like.

He is mentioning his friends, his fellows and colleagues and expresses his real care for them.

Tychicus was a leading member in the church und deliverer of the epistle to the Colossians. He is the dear brother, faithful servant and fellow servant in the Lord (Eph. 6,21). He originated from the province Asia Minor (Acts. 20,4) And he is mentioned by Paul in 2.Tim. 4,12 und in Titus 3,12 too. Paul sent him to Collsse not only to inform the local church about his personal situation, but to encourage them too.

Onesimus (Col. 4,9) was an escaped **slave of Phlm.**, who converted to christian faith. He is also called a faithful and dear brother by the apostles in the Phlm.letter (Verse 10 und 16). Because he too was a Collosian, Paul writes: "The one who is yours".

There was **Aristarchus**, (Col. 4,10) who was a descendant from Thessalonicha in Macedonia (Acts. 20,4). Aristarcus is just briefly mentioned, but there is one thing noticed: Obviously Aristarcus was a very beneficial man, as soon as you had problem he was there. When a tumult dispatched in the Tempel of Diana in Ephesus, he stood in the front lines so that he was caught by the rabble (Acts. 19,29). He was with Paul when he sailed away to Rome as a slave (Acts. 27,2). It is indeed possible that he masqueraded himself as a slave of Paul, just to travel together with him. And than in Rome he was a fellow prisoner of Paul.It seems like Aristarchus belonged to the type of men who are always on scene, if there are problems. **When Paul went trough difficulties, Aristarchus was there.** Out of this short remarks, weak outlines imply a picture of a man, who was a faithful mate.

And there is Mark. Mark probably had the most astonishing career of all characters in the early church. He was close to Peter, so that he called him his son. (1.Petr. 5,13).

And we know that Mark held on to the gospel that Peter preached. On their first mission journey Paul and Baranbas took him along (Act. 12,25). On the way Mark parted from them went home (Acts 13,13). Paul found it hard to forgive him for a long time.

When they wanted to go on the second mission journey Barnabas wanted to take Mark along again. But Paul did not agree. This resulted in an argument that caused Paul and Barnabas to go separate ways. They never ministered together again (Act. 15,36-40). It is sure that a Mark was with Paul in the time of his last captivity and that Paul considered this Mark a very useful man (Philem. 24/ 2.Tim. 4,11).

In this short remark about him we find the echo of the old unfortunate event. Paul instructed the church in Colosse to receive Mark and welcome him in case he would show up. **Why is Paul doing that?** Without a doubt all the churches that Paul founded were full of mistrust towards the man who Paul once neglected as unuseable for ministry. But at this point Paul with his love and anticipation is making sure that his past is not influencing his future and confirms that he is counting them among his trustworthy friends. And the end of Mark's life is honoring Mark as well as Paul.

Jesus (with the surname Justus) was a common Jewish name (Col. 4,11). The surname of this companion of the apostle was Justus, which means „the righteous“ (Acts 1,23; 18,7). Those three: **Aristarch, Mark and Justus were Jews**, which means they were circumcised either after birth or after conversion as Proselytes. All those three co-workers of the kingdom of God comforted the apostle in prison with their faithfulness and encouragement.

These names in the end of this chapter are a **list of heroes of faith** that served Paul and therefore also Christianity.

Epaphras, and Onesimus were both Colossians and also part of the list (Col. 4,12-13).

Also **Luke** the physician, the beloved, a good friend of Paul (Col. 4,14) did not only support him during this time in prison but also during his time in prison when **Demas** (who is still with Paul at that time) left him alone (2.Tim. 4,10). Since Paul only calls Aristarch, Mark and Jesus (Justus) **as circumcised**, we can assume that Luke was a Gentile.

Col. 4,15 -16 Greet the brethren in Laodicea and Nympha and the church that is in his house.

If we want to understand the early church we must know that church buildings did not exist before the third century AD. Until that time the Christian churches met in the houses of their leaders. The churches of Rome and Ephesus gathered in the houses of Aquilla and Priscilla (Rom. 16,3; 1.Cor. 16,19). There was the church that gathered in the house of **Philemon** (Philem. 2). In the time of the early church, the church and a house were one and the same. Even today every house should be a church of Jesus Christ.

The apostle is urging them to exchange the letters among the churches.

As soon as the Colossians had read his letter to the church they were supposed to send it to Laodicea and were supposed to receive theirs in return. This verse is containing one of the secrets about Paul's letters. The letter to the Colossians was supposed to be forwarded to Laodicea and Paul said that **a letter was supposed to be sent to them from there**. What about the letter to Laodicea? There are several possibilities:

1. It could have been a letter that was addressed to the church of Laodicea. If this is true the letter must have been lost, even though we will find out that the letter still exists. One thing is for sure: Paul wrote more letters than we have today. We have **thirteen letters of Paul** that were written within about 15 years. Paul surely wrote more than 13 letters in 15 years. Many letters must have been lost. Maybe also the letter to Laodicea.
2. The letter could also be the one we officially **know as the letter to the Ephesians**. When we take a close look at Ephesians we find that this letter is not precisely addressed to the church in Ephesus, but that it was rather **a shepherd letter of Paul**, a letter that was supposed to be read to all churches in Asia Minor. Maybe this letter had reached Laodicea and was on its way to Colosse.
3. **The letter Paul is referring to could also be the letter to Philemon**. This is possible. But we will go deeper into the matter in the study material of Philemon.

The letter is closing **with Paul's urgent request to Archippus** (Col. 4,17) to faithfully fulfill his duties. Archippus could have been the son of Philemon serving in the church of Colosse. Perhaps he was the representative of Epaphras.

Paul suggests to the readers to communicate the message to Archippus: "Be careful of the office that you received from the Lord, that you may fulfill your assignment!" Whatever kind of problem he had we do not know. It is obvious that he did not fulfill his duty to the full. But probably there we can bring some more light into the situation when we look at Philemon. At the moment we will leave it with that. But the exhortation reveals how much it mattered to Paul that the Colossians would be perfect in Christ.

There is another thing that we find out. **Paul did not write the letters himself but dictated them** (Col. 4,18). We know for example that the author of Romans was called Tertius (Rom. 16,22). But he had the habit to sign them himself and to add a blessing with his own handwriting. **„Remember my chains!“** is what he says. He brings up the chains continuously (Eph. 3,1/ 4,1/ 6,20/ Philem. 9). Not because he pities himself or because he wants to be pitied. The letter of Paul to the Galatians closes: I bear in my body the marks of Jesus Christ (Gal. 6,17).

A commentary on this verse reads: ***„If we read about his chains, we must not forget that the hands were still moving over paper when he signed those letter. His hand was chained to the hand of a guard. Nevertheless Paul does not mention his sufferings to ask for pity. He only wants to let us know what the source of his authority is. The chains allow him to speak as he does. It is like he was trying to say: This letter was not written by someone who does not know what it means to serve Christ. With this letter he is not asking anybody to do something that he would not do. It is rather a letter of a man who suffers for Christ himself and who is offering his life for Him and the gospel. Because I also carry the cross of Christ I also have the right to speak to you. And this is how he closes this letters. All of his letter finish with a plea for grace which he considers to be the highest of all.***

Test

1. How often did Paul visit the city Colosse?
2. What are the divine attributes of Jesus mentioned in Colossians?
3. What did the first Christians say / testify of Jesus?
4. What are the accused in Christ?
5. What would Christianity be without the apostel Paul?
6. What does Paul explain to the believers in Colosse?
7. What does Paul warn them of?

Please send the answers to pastor@matutis.de

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