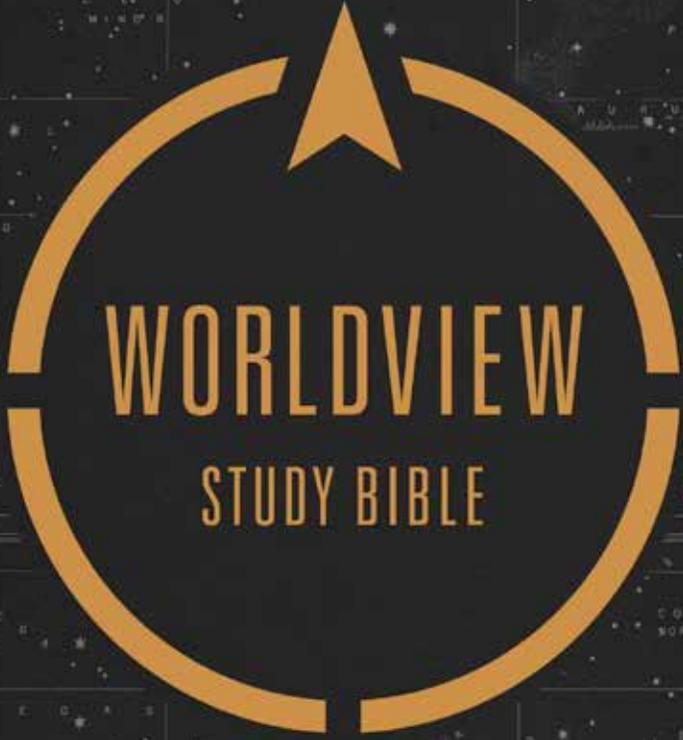


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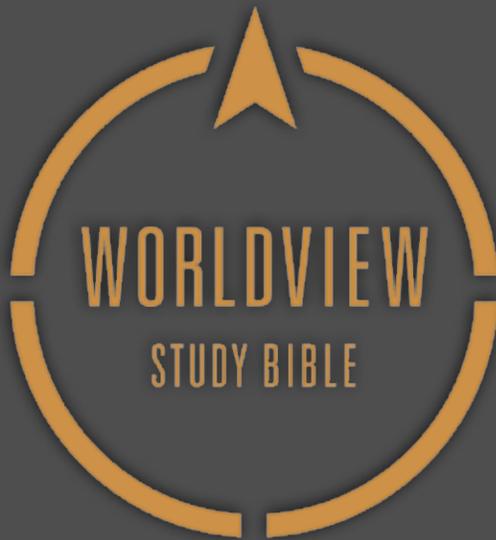
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  9. Available Covers and Details
  10. Sample of Colossians

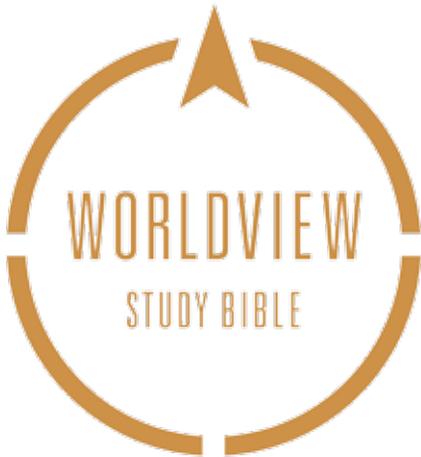


The **CSB WORLDVIEW STUDY BIBLE** features extensive worldview study notes and articles by notable Christian scholars. These study tools and resources will help Christians better understand the grand narrative and flow of Scripture within the biblical framework from which we are called to view reality and make sense of life and the world. This Bible is an invaluable resource that will help you to discuss, defend, and clearly share with others the truth, hope, and practical compatibility of Christianity in everyday life.

**FEATURES INCLUDE:** Extensive worldview study notes, over 150 articles by notable Christian scholars, center-column references, Smyth-sewn binding, presentation page, two ribbon markers, and two-piece gift box.

**CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE:** David S. Dockery, Trevin K. Wax, Gregory A. Thornbury, John Stonestreet, Ted Cabal, Darrell L. Bock, Mary J. Sharp, Carl R. Trueman, Bruce Riley Ashford, R. Albert Mohler Jr., William A. Dembski, Preben Vang, David K. Naugle, Jennifer A. Marshall, Aida Besancon Spencer, Paul Copan, Robert Smith Jr., Douglas Groothuis, Russell D. Moore, Mark A. Noll, Timothy George, Carla D. Sanderson, Kevin Smith, Gregory B. Forster, Choon Sam Fong, and more.

The *CSB Worldview Study Bible* features the highly readable, highly reliable text of the Christian Standard Bible (CSB). The CSB stays as literal as possible to the Bible's original meaning without sacrificing clarity, making it easier to engage with Scripture's life-transforming message and to share it with others.



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## Christian Worldview Elements feature in every introduction.

### COLOSSIANS

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Paul wrote Colossians during his first Roman imprisonment (4:3,10,18; cp. Ac 28:30-31; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 2.22.1) in the early AD 60s. Together with Philemon, Philippians, and Ephesians, Colossians is commonly classified as a "prison letter." All four letters share several personal links that warrant this conclusion (Col 1:7; 4:7-8,17; Eph 6:21-22; Phm 2,12,23).

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1469 INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS

for believers' salvation (2:10,13,20; 3:1,11-12,17) and conduct (3:5-4:6). Colossians contributes to Scripture a high Christology and a presentation of its implications for the believer's conduct.

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Colossians may be divided into two main parts. The first (1:1-3-2:3) is a polemic against false teachings. The second (3:1-4:17) is made up of exhortations to proper Christian living. This is typical of Paul's approach, presenting a theology position first, a position on which the practical exhortations are built. The introduction (1:1-2) is in the form of a Hellenistic, personal letter. Notable in the final section are the mention of Onesimus (4:9), which links this letter with Philemon; the mention of a letter at Laodicea (4:16) that may have been Ephesians; and Paul's concluding signature which indicates that the letter was prepared by an amanuensis (secretary; see 4:18).

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God is the Father of Jesus, and his fullness is in his Son (1:19; 2:9). Jesus is especially the "firstborn" (1:15,18). Colossians 1:15-18 is the most elevated passage in Paul's letters presenting the identity of Christ. When Jesus returns, his people will appear with him in glory (3:4). The Spirit is mentioned only once (1:8), as the source of love.

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Because Colossians was first written to stop false teachings, it shows just how easy it is for people to be led astray from truth, particularly in matters of eternal destiny. In every age, powerful enemies of truth oppose genuine understanding of God and the human condition. Apart from Christ, all are "dead in trespasses" (2:13). Christ brings new life and transformation of relationships, particularly within the home (3:18-4:1).

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Any understanding of salvation that is "Jesus plus . . ." is defective. Good works, keeping Jewish law, accepting certain philosophical principles, and other positive human accomplishments cannot add anything to what Jesus has already achieved. Therefore salvation is a matter of being rightly related to him by faith and refusing to trust anything else, no matter how valuable. Christ allows nothing to rival him in redeeming sinners.

---

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Herodotus describes Colossae as "a great city of Phrygia" strategically located on the main road from Ephesus and Sardis eastward to the Euphrates. **430** Xenophon describes Colossae as a "populous" city, wealthy and large. **400** Cyrus and his army spend seven days in Colossae as he moves from Sardis east to take the throne of Persia. **400** Laodicea founded by Antiochus II who named it for his wife, Laodice. **242-244** The regions of Colossae, Hieropolis, and Laodicea become subject to the Pergamenes after the battle of Magnesia. **190**

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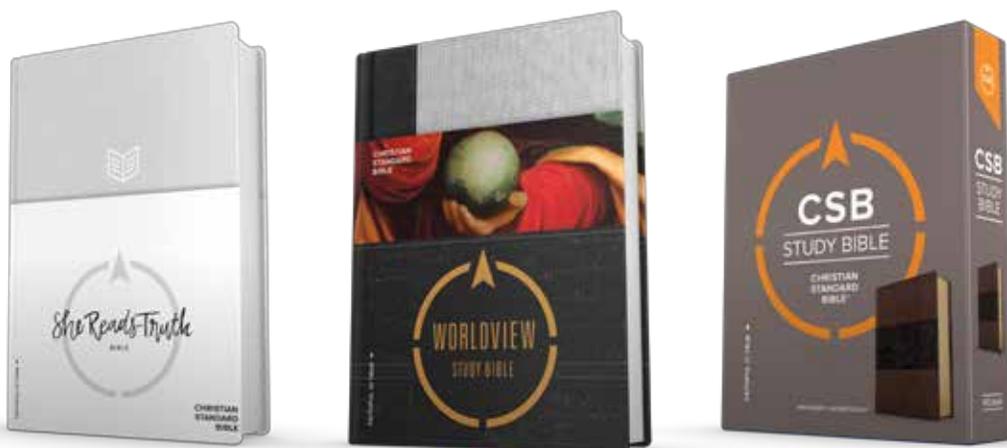
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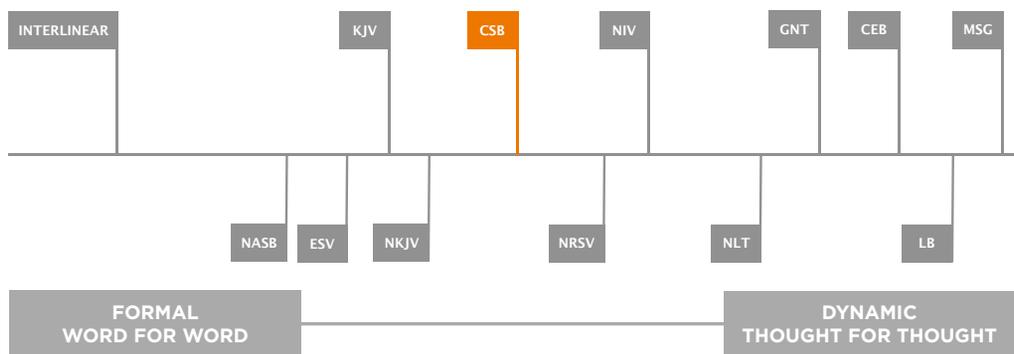
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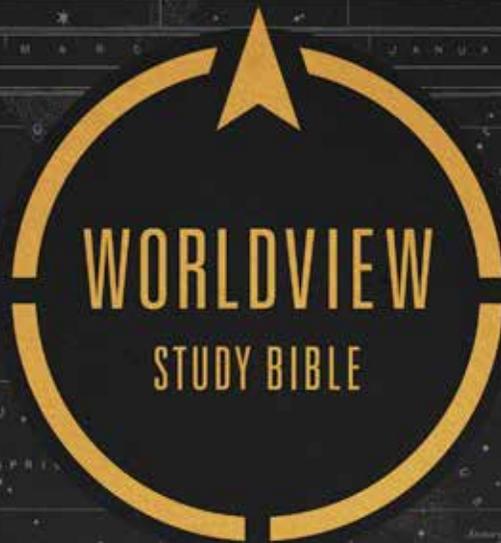
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# WORLDVIEW STUDY BIBLE



**DAVID S. DOCKERY** is president of Trinity International University in Deerfield, Illinois. He is the author or editor of more than thirty books, including the *Holman Concise Bible Commentary*, *Theology, Church, and Ministry: A Handbook for Theological Education*, and *Media, Journalism, and Communication: A Student's Guide (Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition)* among other published works. Dockery serves on several education and ministry boards and is a consulting editor for *Christianity Today*.



**TREVIN WAX** is the Bible and Reference Publisher for LifeWay Christian Resources. A former missionary to Romania, Trevin hosts a blog at The Gospel Coalition and regularly contributes to the *Washington Post*, *Religion News Service*, *World* and *Christianity Today*, which named him one of 33 millennials shaping the next generation of evangelicals. His books include *Eschatological Discipleship*, *This Is Our Time*, and *Gospel-Centered Teaching* among other published works. He and his wife, Corina, have three children.



A



B



C

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**Release Date:** May 15, 2018 **Pages:** 2208 **Size:** 6.6875 x 9.1875 **Font:** 9.75 pt. **Spine Width:** 2"  
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**GREETING**

**1** Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will,<sup>a</sup> and Timothy<sup>b</sup> our brother:

<sup>2</sup>To the saints in Christ at Colossae, who are faithful brothers and sisters.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.<sup>A</sup>

**THANKSGIVING**

<sup>3</sup>We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup>for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints <sup>5</sup>because of the hope reserved for you in heaven. You have already heard about this hope in the word of truth,<sup>c</sup> the gospel <sup>6</sup>that has come to you. It is bearing fruit<sup>d</sup> and growing all over the world,<sup>e</sup> just as it has among you since the day you heard it and came to truly appreciate<sup>f</sup> God's grace.<sup>g,h</sup> You learned this from Epaphras,<sup>i</sup> our dearly loved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ<sup>j</sup> on your<sup>c</sup> behalf, <sup>8</sup>and he has told us about your love in the Spirit.<sup>j</sup>

**PRAYER FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

<sup>9</sup>For this reason also, since the day we heard this, we haven't stopped praying for you. We are asking<sup>k</sup> that you may be filled with the knowledge<sup>l</sup> of his will<sup>m</sup> in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,<sup>n,o</sup> so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work<sup>n</sup> and growing in the knowledge of God,<sup>o</sup> <sup>11</sup>being strengthened<sup>p</sup> with all power,<sup>q</sup> according

<sup>a</sup>1:1 1Co 1:1; 2Co 1:1; Eph 1:1; 2Tm 1:1  
<sup>b</sup>Ac 16:1; 1Tm 1:2  
<sup>c</sup>1:5 Ps 119:142; Jn 14:6; 2Co 11:10; Eph 1:13; 2Tm 2:15; 3Jn 3  
<sup>d</sup>1:6 Mk 4:8  
<sup>e</sup>Mt 13:38; 24:14; Rm 3:6; 2Pt 2:20  
<sup>f</sup>2Th 2:10  
<sup>g</sup>2Pt 3:18  
<sup>h</sup>1:7 Col 4:12; Phm 23  
<sup>i</sup>Mt 1:17; Eph 5:2  
<sup>j</sup>1:8 Ps 51:11; Jn 1:33; Ac 2:4; Rm 8:9; Ti 3:5; Rv 1:10; 3:22  
<sup>k</sup>1:9 Jn 14:13; Jms 1:5  
<sup>l</sup>Pr 2:6; Col 3:10  
<sup>m</sup>Eph 1:9  
<sup>n</sup>1:10 2Co 9:8; Gl 3:10  
<sup>o</sup>Pr 2:6; Jn 17:3; 2Pt 1:2; 1Jn 4:8  
<sup>p</sup>1:11 Php 4:13  
<sup>q</sup>Ac 4:33; 2Co 13:4

<sup>r</sup>Lk 9:32; Jn 17:24; 2Co 3:18; 2Pt 3:18  
<sup>s</sup>1:12 Ps 36:9; Jn 12:46  
<sup>t</sup>1:13 Mt 27:43  
<sup>u</sup>Mt 3:2; Mk 1:15; Ac 20:25  
<sup>v</sup>Jn 5:19; Heb 1:2  
<sup>w</sup>Mt 3:17; Jn 3:16; 15:10; 17:26; 1Jn 4:16  
<sup>x</sup>1:15 Php 2:6  
<sup>y</sup>Jn 1:3; Rv 3:14  
<sup>z</sup>1:16 Gn 1:1; Mk 13:19

to his glorious<sup>r</sup> might, so that you may have great endurance and patience, joyfully<sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you<sup>t</sup> to share in the saints' inheritance in the light.<sup>s</sup> <sup>13</sup>He has rescued<sup>u</sup> us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom<sup>u</sup> of the Son<sup>v</sup> he loves.<sup>w</sup> <sup>14</sup>In him we have redemption,<sup>r</sup> the forgiveness of sins.

**THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST**

- <sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God,<sup>x</sup> the firstborn over all creation.<sup>y</sup>
- <sup>16</sup> For everything was created by him,<sup>z</sup> in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through him and for him.<sup>aa</sup>
- <sup>17</sup> He is before all things,<sup>ab</sup> and by him all things<sup>ac</sup> hold together.
- <sup>18</sup> He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning,<sup>ad</sup> the firstborn from the dead,<sup>ae</sup> so that he might come to have first place in everything.
- <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all his fullness<sup>af</sup> dwell in him,<sup>ag</sup>

<sup>aa</sup> Jn 1:3; Rm 11:36; 1Co 8:6; Eph 1:10,21 <sup>ab</sup> 1:17 Jn 1:1-2; 8:58; Heb 1:2-3 <sup>ac</sup> Ps 104:24 <sup>ad</sup> 1:18 Gn 1:1; Mk 1:1; Jn 1:1; Ac 26:4 <sup>ae</sup> Ac 26:23; 1Co 15:20,23; Rv 1:5 <sup>af</sup> 1:19 Ps 72:19; Is 6:3; Jr 23:24; Ezk 43:5; 44:4; Jn 1:14,16; Eph 3:19; Php 2:6; Col 2:9 <sup>ag</sup> Dt 12:5

<sup>A</sup>1:2 Other mss add *and the Lord Jesus Christ* <sup>B</sup>1:6 Or *and truly recognized God's grace* <sup>C</sup>1:7 Other mss read *our* <sup>D</sup>1:9 Or *all spiritual wisdom and understanding* <sup>E</sup>1:12 Other mss read *us* <sup>F</sup>1:14 Other mss add *through his blood*

**1:1** Paul's ministry does not spring simply from his desires, but from obedience to God's will.

**1:2** In the NT, all Christians are saints because they have been made holy in Christ and set apart for God (which is the basic meaning of the word).

**1:3** Thanksgivings are common in Paul's letters. In addition to the role they play in the letters as a whole, they underscore the importance of giving thanks, which is a fundamental aspect of life before God in both Testaments (see for example Pss 7:17; 9:1; 30:4; Eph 5:4, 20). See also Colossians 2:7; 3:15,17; 4:2.

**1:5** The hope reserved for the Colossians in heaven is the cause of their love for fellow believers (v. 4). Christian living is radically focused on eternity, and the certain hope in God's promises in the gospel animates living today. Furthermore, this gospel is the word of truth. God is the source of truth and has revealed it in his gospel (also v. 6,12).

**1:7** Epaphras is dearly loved by Paul. Terms of affection are used freely and often (cp. 4:7,9), demonstrating the type of community experienced by early Christians.

**1:9-10** Unceasing prayer for the churches is a common refrain in Paul's letters. Prayer for one another is a basic Christian practice. See also "Sources for Ethics," p. 1371.

**1:11** Strikingly, all God's strength and might is required for endurance and patience. These hallmarks of the Christian life are to shape our existence in this world.

**1:12** The inheritance recalls Israel's possession of the promised land of Canaan (Nm 18:20; Dt 10:19), but this is an inheritance in the light—it's not a physical place on earth, but a share in heavenly glory.

**1:13** Just as God rescued Israel from Egypt's rule and brought them to the promised land, so the Father has rescued us from the rule and tyranny of darkness (the opposite of light; v. 12), brought under the rule of Christ.

**1:15** The OT forbids any image of God, but Jesus is the proper image of God—the One who reveals to us what the invisible God is like (cp. Jn 1:18; 14:9). He is the firstborn over all creation, meaning he is the descendent of David who reigns as King: "I will also make him my firstborn, greatest of the kings of the earth" (Ps 89:27). The term "firstborn" does

not imply that Jesus is a created being (cp. Col 1:16). See also "Hinduism," p. 1408.

**1:16** Jesus is the Creator of everything . . . in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible. The Bible is clear that there is only one Creator God, and Paul identifies Jesus with him. He did not create by shaping preexistent material (Heb 11:3), and his creations are not limited to the visible realm. On the biblical view, the spiritual realm—including angels and heaven—are as real as any material aspect of creation. See also "A Biblical View of Angels," p. 1532.

**1:17** See "Divine Providence and Naturalism," p. 1355.

**1:18** As the firstborn from the dead, Jesus's resurrection is the guarantee of the resurrection of the righteous that will occur on the day of judgment.

**1:19** This is an important verse concerning the incarnation and deity of Jesus. All the fullness of God was in him (see also 2:9), so in Jesus we encounter the true God in all his fullness. See "Jehovah's Witnesses," p. 1576.

**T**he notion that colleges and universities can be deeply Christian in their mission is hardly a modern concept. Many of today's Christian institutions of higher learning were founded in the middle 1800s, while many European and North American schools were established centuries earlier and have deep roots in Christianity.

Over time, the leaders of many of these institutions untethered their decision making from the convictions of their forebears. As a result, these schools today do not resemble the Christian intent of their founders. Several reasons account for the drift away from Christ-centeredness and biblical authority. One is that over time faculty no longer were expected to teach from a perspective that all learning is connected to all truth—truth authored and ordered by God, truth that transcends all of life and all disciplines.

## **KNOWLEDGE AND THE GOD OF TRUTH**

Christians who see life from a biblical worldview understand learning differently. They do not believe that scholarship and faith are incompatible. Rather than education disconnected from faith, Christian thinkers believe that all knowledge falls within the realm of God's sovereignty and should be studied with that in mind. They believe that all matters related to the arts and sciences—in fact, the entirety of life—were created by God as good and contain truth that ultimately points back to him.

In Colossians 1, Paul summarizes Christ's dominion over all of life. It's a passage often cited in advocating for the great Christian intellectual tradition. Notice the repetition of the phrase "all things" in verses 16 and 17, strengthening the biblical argument that a Trinitarian God is the Creator of all things, the object of all things, and the connector of all things. Of Jesus the Son the passage says, "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born over all creation. For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and by him all things hold together" (1:15-17).

## **INTEGRATIVE TEACHING**

Christian colleges and universities teach from the perspective that God is the Creator of all things and that God holds all things together. Teaching this way is often referred to as "integrative teaching." In the ideal Christian higher education setting, God's created and connecting truth ought

to be evident throughout the entire curriculum and community. Christian higher education is not "Christian" because faculty members sign a faith statement or students are required to attend chapel. Christian higher education is "Christian" when the understanding throughout the institution is that the entirety of knowledge and wisdom comes from God and points toward God.

Being part of a Christian college or university, therefore, means students grapple with the truths within each academic discipline and among all academic disciplines by seeing them as under God's sovereignty. This is what the Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper meant when he said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, 'Mine!'" The same is argued by Christian scholars John Henry Newman, Arthur Holmes, Mark Noll, George Marsden, and others, who say that learning separated from faith is woefully incomplete.

This approach to learning is what characterizes Christian higher education, and it must stay as a distinguishing mark of an exemplary Christian university. In the world's marketplace of ideas, the person and work of Jesus Christ and the implications of a biblical worldview currently hold little sway, yet they are vitally important to the Christian's assessments of and responses to dominant cultural ideologies. The role of Christian higher education is to preserve and advance the Christian intellectual tradition and to glorify God.

## **CHRISTIANITY FOR ALL OF LIFE**

As Christian higher education enables Christians to think from the center of all knowledge—knowing that God is the Author of all truth—students begin asking new questions.

"How do faith and reason intersect in all of life and not run on separate tracks?"

"How should I live in a way that honors Christ and brings glory to God in the world of finance or law, medicine or politics, art or media?"

"What does it mean to think Christianly about the big questions of our times?"

"How does a biblical worldview influence the way I run my business or give away my money, nurture my family, or serve my community?"

Both the curricular programs in Christian higher education as well as cocurricular activities create a community in which students explore the answers to these and other worldview questions within a theological framework. Christian higher

education is far more than sprinkling Christian flavorings on a college degree. Instead, it is an intellectually robust and academically holistic way of thinking.

To get there, scholars at the university need to be intentional about integrative thinking—the idea that academic disciplines are not disconnected from each other but are held together, since all truth is within the realm of God’s ordered creation. An integrated faculty in Christian higher education allows professors to set aside time for discussing what God’s revealed Word brings to bear on their respective disciplines and on the educational mission of the institution. This notion of integration brings together faculty from the social sciences, theology, the arts, the physical sciences, the humanities, business, education, and so forth, into a community with a shared approach to the connectedness of all things. If most of what is taught in the classrooms of a self-identified Christian college is indistinguishable from what is taught in non-Christian schools, then integration is evidently not a priority, and a full understanding of a Christian worldview is being short-changed.

**EDUCATION AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

Since a Christian college or university provides a foundation for intellectual development, academic competence will accompany thought leadership in church and society. Much happens within the life of a university to cultivate this discipline of the mind and soul together. It is the idea Paul writes about to the church in Rome, explaining that spiritual transformation takes place “by the renewing of [the] mind” (Rm 12:2).

Colleges or universities that appoint faculty who are first-rate scholars, have a deep love

for Christ, and who are well-articulated integrators of scholarship and faith will impact generations of students. Such Christian thought leaders shape communities, congregations, and cultures for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom.

Because God’s Word bears witness to the truth of Christ at the core of all things, a Christ-centered university must be biblically grounded. The cornerstone of the evangelical movement from its starting point was an ineradicable belief in the authority of the Bible, alongside serious scholarship. Such commitment to the revealed Word of God is at the core of exemplary Christian universities. Being a Christian college or university means that the Christian Scriptures—as originally intended and as understood through the ages—have a central role in all programs.

**CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AS WORSHIP**

Christian higher education is an act of worship, built on the lordship of Christ over all things—including our lives. Scholarship separated from loving God is a type of idolatry. By seeing all of life and vocation as a holy calling, graduates of Christian higher education should be alive in a way that encourages others to see Christ’s redemptive work and to receive God’s grace.

Learning this way is not an act of self-enrichment. It is an act of worshiping Creator God. This is what Jesus meant when he called his followers to love the Lord with all their hearts, souls, strength, and minds (Mt 22:37; Lk 10:27). The purpose of theology is not mere intellectual exercise, but doxology, an expression of praise to God. We study all of God’s truths so that we may love God more.

BARRY H. COREY

20 and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace<sup>a</sup> through his blood,<sup>b</sup> shed on the cross.<sup>a,c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>1:20 Ac 7:26; Eph 2:14  
<sup>b</sup>Heb 9:12  
<sup>c</sup>Lk 9:23; 23:26

22 But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death,<sup>d</sup> to present you holy, faultless,<sup>e</sup> and blameless before him<sup>f</sup>—<sup>23</sup> if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith<sup>g</sup> and are not shifted away from the hope<sup>h</sup> of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has been proclaimed in all creation<sup>i</sup> under heaven,<sup>j</sup> and I, Paul,<sup>k</sup> have become a servant of it.

<sup>d</sup>1:22 Php 2:8  
<sup>e</sup>Jd 24  
<sup>f</sup>2Co 4:14

21 Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds expressed in your evil actions.

<sup>g</sup>1:23 Gl 2:16; Jd 3  
<sup>h</sup>1Th 1:3  
<sup>i</sup>Rv 3:14

<sup>j</sup>Rm 10:18; Eph 6:9 <sup>k</sup>Ac 13:9

<sup>a</sup>1:20 Other mss add *through him*

**1:20** At the cross God reconciles everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven. The cross has cosmic implications and cannot be reduced to merely personal terms. God is at work setting all things right, and individual salvation is a part of that work. See also “The Bible and Creation Care,” p. 24.

**1:21** See “The Bible and Intellectual Pursuit,” p. 1513.  
**1:23** If indeed you remain . . . steadfast in the faith. The NT consistently holds out the necessity of perseverance in the faith (e.g., Mt 24:12-13; Jn 15:6; Heb 3:12; Jms 5:19-20; 1Jn 2:19). Such perseverance is nevertheless

the result of God’s grace (Php 2:13). That the gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven probably refers to the cosmic scope of the gospel; Christ’s work has been made known to the spiritual and earthly realms.

# GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

1473

**T**wenty-four centuries after he lived in Athens, Plato's legacy looms large, for as A.N. Whitehead famously quipped, Western thought is "a series of footnotes to Plato." Given Plato's repute, his influence within Christian theology is unsurprising. Indeed, Christians have long grappled with Platonism, generally finding it useful for biblically grounded theology. C. S. Lewis validates Plato's theological worth in *The Last Battle* when Professor Digory Kirke exclaims, "It's all in Plato, all in Plato: bless me, what do they teach them in these schools?"

## EARLY CHRISTIAN VIEWS

Whether the Bible's authors knew Plato's dialogues or Platonist philosophers is debatable. We know, however, that the NT's authors lived in an age shaped by Platonic philosophy. We also know that the early church fathers studied and wrote about Platonism. Their interpretation of Scripture emerged in light of Greek philosophy, especially Platonism.

Tertullian (AD 160–220) questioned Platonism's value. He cited Colossians 2:8: "Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elements of the world, rather than Christ." He recalled Paul's missionary encounter with the Athenian philosophers, and posed some memorable questions: "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and Christians? . . . Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! . . . With our faith, we desire no further belief."

On a fideistic understanding of Tertullian, faith in Christ and philosophical reflection are irrelevant or even opposed. Fideism—from the Latin word *fides*, meaning "faith"—views faith and reason as separate, perhaps even contradictory endeavors.

Context matters, however, for rightly interpreting Paul's teaching and Tertullian's instruction. In the church's first centuries, various philosophies might easily have co-opted Christianity for their own purposes. Paul and Tertullian demonstrate appropriate concern for the preeminence of Christ and caution against heresy. Yet they do not reject philosophy. They confidently reason,

address complex ideas, and adopt concepts coined by philosophers, even while unstintingly putting Christ first. By testing Greek philosophy "according to Christ," they show how faithful Christians can discern truth and refute error.

Many church fathers accordingly used Platonism to aid biblical understanding, including Justin Martyr (AD 100–165), Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215), Origen (AD 182–254), Basil of Caesarea (AD 330–379), Gregory of Nyssa (AD 335–394), and Augustine of Hippo (AD 354–430). Justin Martyr wrote, "Whatever things were rightly said . . . are the property of us Christians. For next to God, we worship and love the Word . . . [and] all the writers were able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted word that was in them." Clement speculated that philosophy was God's gift, "a schoolmaster to bring the Hellenic mind—as the law, the Hebrews—to Christ." Philosophy was "a preparation . . . for him who is perfected in Christ." Augustine praised God for a providential encounter with "some books of the Platonists," whereby he discerned Christianity's intellectually fulfilling possibilities. He invoked a biblical metaphor: "I fixed my mind upon the gold which you willed that your people should bring with them from Egypt: for it was yours, wherever it was." God let the Israelites plunder Egyptian gold in their exodus for the promised land. Similarly, God invites us to exploit Plato's philosophical "gold" in our pilgrimage.

## CHRISTIAN USES OF PLATONISM

Platonism provides rich resources for expressing biblical instruction about (1) God's being, (2) the nature of evil, and (3) humanity's highest hopes.

The Bible teaches of God's perfection (Mt 5:48), eternity (Dt 33:27), and unfathomable wisdom, power, and goodness (Jb 38–42). Yet Scripture does not explain how the divine attributes relate to each other. Platonism can help. Plato developed a philosophy—a metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics—in which perfect being, knowledge, and goodness are inextricably interconnected. Platonism thereby offers philosophical categories that enrich biblical understanding and undergird Christian doctrine.

For example, Platonists perceive that perfection entails eternity, for what is perfect is necessarily changeless (since changing the perfect

would mar it), and what never changes is necessarily eternal (since it cannot cease to be unless it changes). What is perfect and eternal also outshines everything in truth, beauty, and goodness (since otherwise it would lack perfection). Plato could not conceive that something so described could be an impersonal force or property of matter. He envisioned it rather as a Being—a suprapersonal, superrational Mind, the “Maker and Father” of all, who desires that “all things should be good.” Plato’s conception of God, in short, binds together major biblical teachings about God’s nature, making sense of the inseparable unity of perfectly divine being and perfectly divine essence.

The same philosophical framework clarifies the nature of evil. Because ultimate being—God himself—is identical with perfect goodness, anything lacking goodness also in some way lacks being. Evil is a privation not only of goodness, but of existence. A good thing’s corruption mars its very being. Evil is therefore always lesser than, weaker than, good. Where evil seems to prevail, it succeeds only in a parasitic parody of good. The theological upshot is crucial. Through both biblical faith and philosophical reason we can speak confidently about evil’s limits. Wickedness shall not abide and evil will not stand (Ps 1), for God’s superabundant being and goodness ensure what Augustine confessed: “evil utterly is not.” C. S. Lewis offers a fine literary illustration. In *The Great Divorce*, his fabulous “dream” of heaven and hell, he encounters “Bright People” possessed of a grace-filled goodness that gives them a readily apparent solidity, a “weight of glory.” He also meets “Ghosts,” whose insubstantial presence reflects their manifold sins. Sin has deprived them of being. Evil has literally unmade them.

Platonism proves helpful in a final area. We know the Father’s loving adoption brings hope of eternal life through Christ (Jn 3:16; 1Pt 1:3), and we wait in the Spirit to gather in God’s light (Rv 22:5). Plato helps little with the substance of our highest hopes. Nevertheless, he offers an alluring account of the form of our heavenly sight of God. Our hearts’ desire finds rest atop a metaphorical “ladder of love,” which we ascend to behold divine Beauty itself. Tracing the lineaments of Plato’s dramatization of human longing, theologians write of contemplative wonder at the sight of God, whereby we see God in effortless, endlessly delightful, intellectual vision. And in what theologians call *theosis*, our adoration of God transforms us, making us more like

God as our participation in the divine life grows. Loving ascent, contemplative wonder, intellectual vision, participatory understanding, mimetic transformation—such theologically rich conceptions of heavenly life are indebted to Platonism. Plato has aided Augustine, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Dante, Milton, Bunyan, Tolkien, and Lewis in writing of our hoped-for sight of God.

#### PLATONISM’S SHORTCOMINGS

Lucy Beckett says Plato’s acknowledgement “of the unity in God of truth, goodness and beauty, fitfully intelligible but not yet visible in the Word made flesh, [is] unique in the pre-Christian world.” From the church’s early life to now, Platonic concepts and arguments have enriched biblical theology. Key elements of our doctrine of God, evil’s limits, and Christian beatitudes are indebted to Platonism. Yet Plato was not a Christian and his dialogues are not in the Bible.

Two major shortcomings arise. First, Plato denigrates the material world and the body instead of honoring God’s good creation. Plato thus embraces a body-soul dualism, privileges the soul over the body, and does not countenance bodily resurrection. Second, Plato cannot fathom the self-emptying love of the incarnate Son of God. It is not only that he lived before Jesus. That God could become a man is altogether beyond Plato’s imagination. Because he lacks Trinitarian theology and devalues matter, the idea of the Word become flesh (Jn 1:14) could not occur to him.

Recently so-called open theists have questioned traditional doctrines supposedly distorted by Platonism. God’s simplicity (the unity of his existence and essence), aseity (absolute independence and self-existence), and omniscience are allegedly defective doctrines supported by Platonism but not the Bible. However, we should be wary of abandoning centuries-old Christian teaching. Church fathers, medieval scholastics, reformation leaders, and modern theologians formulated doctrine “according to Christ,” realizing that Platonism offers subordinate assistance. Again, Beckett says it well: “It is not the case that Plato’s philosophy makes sense of the revelation of God in Christ, but that the revelation of God in Christ, the Incarnation and Resurrection that healed Plato’s soul-body dualism, makes sense of Plato’s philosophy, the sense that Plato himself could not make.”

DOUGLAS V. HENRY

## PAUL'S MINISTRY

<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings<sup>a</sup> for you, and I am completing in my flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for his body,<sup>b</sup> that is, the church. <sup>25</sup> I have become its servant, according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> God wanted to make known among the Gentiles the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is Christ<sup>c</sup> in you, the hope<sup>d</sup> of glory. <sup>28</sup> We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> I labor for this, striving<sup>e</sup> with his strength that works powerfully in me.<sup>f</sup>

**2** For I want you to know how greatly I am struggling<sup>g</sup> for you, for those in Laodicea,<sup>h</sup> and for all who have not seen me in person. <sup>2</sup> I want their hearts to be encouraged<sup>i</sup> and joined together in love, so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery<sup>j</sup> — Christ.<sup>k</sup> <sup>3</sup> In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom<sup>l</sup> and knowledge.<sup>m</sup>

## CHRIST VERSUS THE COLOSSIAN HERESY

<sup>4</sup> I am saying this so that no one will deceive you with arguments that sound reasonable. <sup>5</sup> For I may be absent in body, but I am with you in

<sup>a</sup>1:24 2Co 1:4; Php 1:29; 3:10  
<sup>b</sup>Eph 4:4  
<sup>c</sup>1:27 Col 2:2  
<sup>d</sup>1Th 1:3  
<sup>e</sup>1:29 Jd 3  
<sup>f</sup>1Co 15:10  
<sup>g</sup>2:1 2Tm 4:7  
<sup>h</sup>Col 4:13-16; Rv 1:11; 3:14  
<sup>i</sup>2:2 Lk 16:25; Col 4:8  
<sup>j</sup>Php 3:8  
<sup>k</sup>Col 1:27  
<sup>l</sup>2:3 Pr 3:19; Is 11:2; 45:3; Jr 23:5; Ac 7:22; 1Co 1:21  
<sup>m</sup>1Co 14:6

<sup>n</sup>2:5 Ps 51:12; 1Th 2:17  
<sup>o</sup>2:6 Jd 3  
<sup>p</sup>Eph 3:11  
<sup>q</sup>2:7 Eph 2:20  
<sup>r</sup>Eph 4:21; Heb 13:9  
<sup>s</sup>2:8 Mk 7:3  
<sup>t</sup>1Tm 6:20  
<sup>u</sup>2:9 Php 2:6; Col 1:19  
<sup>v</sup>2:10 1Co 11:3; Eph 1:22; 4:15; 5:23  
<sup>w</sup>2:11 Col 1:22; 3:9  
<sup>x</sup>Mt 1:17; Eph 5:2  
<sup>y</sup>2:12 Rm 6:4  
<sup>z</sup>Eph 2:6; Col 3:1  
<sup>aa</sup>Mt 17:9; Jn 5:25; 20:9; 21:14; Ac 2:24  
<sup>ab</sup>2:14 Lk 9:23; 23:26  
<sup>ac</sup>2:15 Lk 10:18; Jn 12:31; 16:11; Eph 6:12; Heb 2:14

spirit,<sup>r</sup> rejoicing to see how well ordered you are and the strength of your faith in Christ.

<sup>6</sup> So then, just as you have received<sup>o</sup> Christ Jesus as Lord,<sup>p</sup> continue to live in him,<sup>q</sup> being rooted and built up in him<sup>q</sup> and established in the faith, just as you were taught,<sup>r</sup> and overflowing with gratitude.

<sup>8</sup> Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition,<sup>s</sup> based on the elements of the world, rather than Christ.<sup>t</sup> <sup>9</sup> For the entire fullness<sup>u</sup> of God's nature dwells bodily<sup>u</sup> in Christ,<sup>10</sup> and you have been filled by him, who is the head<sup>v</sup> over every ruler and authority. <sup>11</sup> You were also circumcised in him with a circumcision not done with hands, by putting off the body of flesh,<sup>w</sup> in the circumcision of Christ,<sup>x</sup> <sup>12</sup> when you were buried with him<sup>y</sup> in baptism, in which you were also raised with him<sup>z</sup> through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.<sup>aa</sup> <sup>13</sup> And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses. <sup>14</sup> He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross.<sup>ab</sup> <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him.<sup>c,ac</sup>

<sup>a</sup>2:2 Other mss read *mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ*; other ms variations exist on this v. <sup>b</sup>2:9 Or *nature lives in a human body* <sup>c</sup>2:15 Or *them through it*

**1:24** What is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Paul is not saying that Christ's sufferings are inadequate for salvation. That would contradict what he says in 1:19-20 and 2:15 (and in other letters). Rather, he is referring to further suffering required of Christ's servants for the sake of **the church** (see 2Co 1:5-6; 4:10-12). The work of Christ must be made known in order for the church to grow (Col 1:25).

**1:26-27** For various religions in the first century, **mystery** referred to special knowledge reserved for certain people. In Paul's usage it refers to the secret of how all peoples would be blessed through Abraham (Gn 12:3). This mystery has now been made clear—it is **Christ in you**. Christ enables the Gentiles to participate in the blessings promised to Abraham.

**1:29** Divine sovereignty and human responsibility work together, rather than negating one another. Paul labors, knowing that his striving is possible because it is God's **strength that works powerfully** in him.

**2:3** In contrast to the so-called "Colossian heresy" (see the note on 2:16-18), Christ is the source of all **wisdom and knowledge**. Believers need not seek such things through other means, apart from Christ.

**2:6-7** The Colossians are exhorted to continue in the way they began—by receiving **Christ Jesus as Lord**. They are to continue in him in order to grow and become **established in the**

**faith**. There is no need to look elsewhere for the attainment of spiritual maturity.

**2:8** The concern here is not the discipline of **philosophy** per se, but any approach to understanding life that ignores God's revelation based in Christ and instead relies merely on human understanding. **Elements of the world** (also in v. 20) most likely refer to the fundamental building blocks of creation—the basic components of reality. Human thinking is based on observable elements of the world, but this cannot reveal the whole truth about God's creation.

**2:9-10** The **fullness of God dwells bodily in Christ**, and believers **have been filled by Christ** (see "The Incarnation of Jesus Christ," p. 1271). This means that true spiritual fullness is attained through our union with Jesus, not through the so-called "Colossian heresy" (see the note on vv. 16-18). **Every ruler and authority** includes demonic forces of darkness. Since Christ is **the head over** even those powers, Christians need not fear them. More broadly (since every authority is in view), Christians must be obedient to Christ before any other authority (see Ac 5:29). These two verses affirm the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus. He is head over all other powers (he is supreme), and in him the fullness of God is attained (he is sufficient).

**2:11** Physical **circumcision** was the mark of membership in the old covenant. In the new

covenant, God's people are no longer marked by this physical sign but by being spiritually united to Christ (**a circumcision not done with hands**).

**2:12** Being **buried with him and raised with him** refers to our participation with Christ. By **faith**, believers are connected to Christ so that his death becomes our spiritual death. His resurrection is our spiritual resurrection.

**2:14** **A certificate of debt** was a common means of tracking indebtedness in the ancient world. Whatever their level of debt to God, following their many trespasses (v. 13), God has canceled the debt by **nailing it to the cross**.

**2:15** **Rulers and authorities** refer to forces of evil in the spiritual realm. By Christ's work on the cross (v. 14), God has **disarmed and disgraced** these rulers. His triumph over them draws on the image of a Roman triumph, in which the conquering Roman army would celebrate its success with a triumphal procession through Rome. The defeated king and his warriors were humiliated by being shackled at the back of the parade, turned into a spectacle for mockery and insult. The irony is that in going to a cross, Jesus was likewise shamed and mocked. But in this apparent weakness, God was overpowering the rulers of darkness. This demonstrates the cosmic scope of the work of Christ; it is not limited to the atonement of human sin. Rather, by dealing with human sin, Christ has overcome the evil powers that work in concert with it (cp.

**P**ostmodernism is a term that has numerous, sometimes contradictory meanings. As the expression suggests, it signifies a reaction against, or a stage after modernism. While the notion of the modern itself carries several meanings, the one intended by advocates of the postmodern turn is no doubt the one favored in the Enlightenment and beyond: the belief in improvement; in a more satisfactory, more efficient approach to thought and life than that embraced before modernity.

René Descartes is regarded the father of modern thought because of his affirmation that human rationality is a “rock of indubitability.” This view is sometimes known as foundationalism. According to advocates of postmodernism, this modern ethos has led to an oppressive use of rationality. The essence of the postmodern approach is thus anti-foundationalist. According to Jean-François Lyotard, the postmodern condition centers on “incredulity toward metanarratives.” As he explains, “The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language.” And then he raises this question: “Where, after the metanarratives, can legitimacy reside?” His own answer is that it must lie in “mini-narratives.”

The major root of postmodernism is the exhaustion of the modern belief in objective truth. Realism gave way to anti-realism. In a world that was becoming increasingly global and overloaded with information, postmodernism seemed to face such confusion with a philosophy of relativism. As culture critic Terry Eagleton puts it, “Post-modernism gets off the ground when it is no longer a matter of having information about the world, but a matter of the world as information.” And, he adds, instead of the disciplined method of the modern we have the rather “cynical openness” of the postmodern.

#### POSTMODERNISM AND LATE MODERNITY

One of the more obvious self-defeating aspects of postmodernism is its near relativism. Lyotard’s claim that there are no meta-narratives, for example, seems close to becoming a narrative of its own. Declaring that there are no absolute truths is dangerously close to stating an absolute truth. Here is the struggle, felt by postmodernist Stanley Fish:

Moreover, not only is there no one who could spot a transcendent truth if it

happened to pass through the neighborhood, but it is difficult even to say what one would be like. Of course we would know what it would not be like; it would not speak to any particular condition, or be identified with any historical production, or be formulated in the terms of any national, ethnic, racial, economic, or class traditions. (*There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech: And It’s a Good Thing, Too*, 1994, p. 8)

It is difficult to imagine that someone with professor Fish’s acumen could miss the irony here. His dictum that transcendent truth cannot be manifested sounds strangely like a transcendent truth.

This has led commentators like Henri Blocher to affirm that we are not, nor can be, truly postmodern, but we are perhaps in “modernity-post,” or late, “hyper-modernity.” That is, we may be in the death throes of the modern ethos but we have not left it. In this he follows Craig M. Gay who affirms that the expression “postmodern” is “increasingly used to suggest that we have entered into an entirely new cultural situation in which none of the old ‘modern’ rules and habits of mind need be taken seriously anymore. All such suggestions are mistaken and misleading.” He goes on to say, “the essential features of ‘postmodernism’—however this term is defined—are demonstrably modern in origin. Indeed, I would contend that ‘postmodernity’ represents only a kind of extension of modernity, a kind of ‘hyper-modernity.’”

Does such a logical impossibility mean we are no longer postmodern? Some have contended that we now are in a phase of post-postmodernism. But that is rather difficult to grasp. Jacques Derrida was once asked whether deconstruction was dead. “Of course it is,” he answered, “and yet it is all around us.” Perhaps this is one of the conundrums of our times. By rights postmodernism ought to have died under the weight of its own claims. Yet it lingers on in the atmosphere. One finds it present in some sectors more than others. For example, in literary criticism, there is still a strong postmodern partiality. Popular culture, and expressions of it such as MTV, will carry some of the pastiche, sound-bite mentality of the postmodern. Other sectors, such as science and technology, are less inclined to the postmodern. Most of us would not like our airplane pilot or surgeon to be postmodern!

### THE CHRISTIAN ALTERNATIVE

What is the Christian and biblical alternative to postmodernism? It certainly is not a return to the Enlightenment, foundationalist view of truth. Based as it was on Cartesian rationalism, it leaves us with no real “rock of indubitability,” because human reason is not connected with anything beyond it, anything transcendental. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) tried to remain modern by rescuing the possibility of valid human knowledge from skepticism, connecting human experience to ideals. But this only leaves us without any warrant for the authority of such ideals. At the same time, we cannot embrace the pure relativism to which postmodernism can lead.

Various thinkers have offered the worldview of “critical realism” as an alternative to both the

modern and the postmodern approach. According to this view a connection can be made between some of our sense data and real objects, but other sense data cannot be so connected. The difficulty with this approach is that one has not truly objective nor transcendental warrant for making *any* connection.

A better way is to ground all knowledge in God himself, the Creator. We may know truly (though never exhaustively) because God has condescended to reveal himself to his creatures. That connection is sure, because God has the power and authority to make it. Thus, we need be neither postmodern nor modern. Instead we are dependent on divine revelation.

WILLIAM EDGAR

<sup>16</sup>Therefore, don't let anyone judge<sup>a</sup> you in regard to food and drink<sup>b</sup> or in the matter of a festival or a new moon<sup>c</sup> or a Sabbath day.<sup>a</sup> <sup>17</sup>These are a shadow<sup>d</sup> of what was to come;<sup>e</sup> the substance is<sup>b</sup> Christ.<sup>f</sup> <sup>18</sup>Let no one condemn<sup>c</sup> you<sup>g</sup> by delighting in ascetic practices<sup>h</sup> and the worship of angels, claiming access to a visionary realm. Such people are inflated<sup>i</sup> by empty notions of their unspiritual<sup>p</sup> mind. <sup>19</sup>He doesn't hold on to the head, from whom the whole body,<sup>j</sup> nourished and held together by its ligaments and tendons, grows with growth from God.

<sup>20</sup>If you died with Christ<sup>k</sup> to the elements of this world, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations:<sup>21</sup> “Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch”? <sup>22</sup>All these regulations refer to what is destined to perish by being used up; they are human commands and doctrines. <sup>23</sup>Although

<sup>a</sup>2:16 Lk 6:37  
<sup>b</sup>Jn 6:55; Rm 14:3,17; 1Co 8:4; Heb 9:10  
<sup>c</sup>Ps 81:3  
<sup>d</sup>2:17 Heb 8:5; 10:1  
<sup>e</sup>Rm 8:38  
<sup>f</sup>Gl 3:24; 5:2  
<sup>g</sup>2:18 1Co 9:24; Php 3:14  
<sup>h</sup>Col 3:12  
<sup>i</sup>1Co 4:6  
<sup>j</sup>2:19 1Co 6:13; Eph 4:4  
<sup>k</sup>2:20 Rm 6:8; 1Pt 2:24

<sup>l</sup>2:23 Ac 7:22  
<sup>m</sup>1Tm 4:8  
<sup>n</sup>3:1 Heb 10:12  
<sup>o</sup>3:2 Php 3:19  
<sup>p</sup>3:3 Rm 6:8  
<sup>q</sup>3:4 2Co 4:11; 1Jn 1:2; 2:28

these have a reputation for wisdom<sup>l</sup> by promoting self-made religion, false humility, and severe treatment of the body, they are not of any value in curbing self-indulgence.<sup>5,m</sup>

### THE LIFE OF THE NEW MAN

**3** So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.<sup>n</sup> <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.<sup>o</sup> <sup>3</sup>For you died,<sup>p</sup> and your life is hidden with Christ in God.<sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your<sup>f</sup> life, appears,<sup>q</sup> then you also will appear with him in glory.<sup>r</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity,<sup>s</sup> lust,<sup>t</sup> evil desire, and greed,<sup>u</sup>

<sup>l</sup>Lk 9:32; Jn 17:24; 2Co 3:18; 2Pt 3:18  
<sup>m</sup>3:5 1Th 4:3,7  
<sup>n</sup>Rm 1:26; 1Th 4:5  
<sup>o</sup>Eph 5:3

<sup>a</sup>2:16 Or or sabbaths <sup>b</sup>2:17 Or substance belongs to <sup>c</sup>2:18 Or disqualify <sup>d</sup>2:18 Lit fleshly <sup>e</sup>2:23 Lit value against indulgence of the flesh <sup>f</sup>3:4 Other mss read our

Eph 2:1-3; see also “Spiritual Warfare,” p. 1454; “Satan and Demons,” p. 1612).

**2:16-18** These verses describe what scholars have dubbed “the Colossian heresy,” which is a mishmash of Jewish and pagan religious practices followed to attain spiritual fulfillment. Since it is known only from this letter, some scholars have doubted that Paul describes a formal spiritual movement, but rather a collection of practices known in the region at this time. See also “A Biblical View of Angels,” p. 1532.

**2:16** Food and drink, a festival, a new moon, and a Sabbath all refer to Jewish religious practices and observances.

**2:18** Ascetic practices refer to different forms of self-denial, which were thought to attract God's favor (see also 2:23). The worship of angels and visionary experiences reflect pagan spiritual practices.

**2:20-23** The elements of this world—see the note on v. 8—come with regulations—**Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch**. But these regulations are human commands and doctrines, having no value in dealing with inner spiritual realities.

**3:1** Participation in the resurrection of Christ has ethical implications; believers are to seek the things above.

**3:2** Earthly things must not be understood as everyday life, while things above refers to spiritual—as opposed to physical—realities. The biblical worldview does not divide life into the categories of sacred and secular. Rather, “earthly things” refers to sin—the same Greek phrase occurs in 3:5, where it is translated “what belongs to your earthly nature” and is clearly identified with sin.

**3:3-4** The old lives we knew prior to placing faith in Jesus have already died, and our new lives are hidden with Christ. This refers to the invisibility of the spiritual reality of being with Christ. However, when Christ . . . appears, believers will appear with him in glory. The reality, now hidden, will one day be revealed for all to see.

**3:5** We must not toy with sin or seek merely to contain it. It must be put to death (see also Rm 6:11; 8:13). Believers have already died with Christ (Col 2:20), so this instruction involves putting into practice what is already a spiritual reality. Sexual immorality refers to any kind of sexual practice outside marriage. Greed is singled out as idolatry, indicating that the love of money and love of God are incompatible (Mt 6:24).

**W**ork is central to human life. Between work in the home, on the job, in schools, and in neighborhoods, the overwhelming majority of our waking hours is taken up by it. How we work, and how we view work, is a major factor determining the shape of our whole lives. And a culture's understanding of work is one of its most important defining elements, as important to its identity and functioning as its understanding of sexuality, justice, or worship.

When the Holy Spirit changes the way we work, he changes the way we live—all day, every day. This is why, throughout history, a biblical view of work has been central to Christian spiritual and cultural revival. From Gregory the Great and the scholars of the High Middle Ages to Martin Luther and John Calvin to the Wesleyan movement and twentieth-century heroes like Martin Luther King Jr., it's always the same story: if you look at Christian reformers who had a huge impact on our lives, you always find they had a lot to say about work.

Work presents one of the most central and far-reaching contrasts between the Bible's teaching and the way human cultures naturally tend to think. In the ancient world, a common element among pagan religions was the teaching that the gods don't work; they made people to work so they wouldn't have to. Work is mere toil and drudgery in this view, a curse. In the modern world, as the influence of Christianity on our worldview has receded, we increasingly view work either in similar terms—as a curse, mere toil, and drudgery—or else as an idol, an obsession, what we trust in to provide money, power, status, security, and self-expression.

We certainly do experience pain, frustration, and injustice in our work. Most people aren't going to pay attention to any view of work if it doesn't begin from our lived experience of suffering. Moreover, those who idolize work are right that human work is one of the world's most powerful forces: it can take a pile of sand, a puddle of oil, and a few other basic elements, and transform them into a smartphone capable of recording video and beaming it around the world.

## GOD AS A WORKER

The Bible makes a shocking and outrageous claim that transforms both the suffering of work and the power of work. It makes this claim boldly right on its first page (Gn 1:26-30;

2:15) and again on its last (Rv 21:24-26; 22:5). In the OT, this claim has a central place in the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:9), the Mosaic law (Lv 19:9-18; Dt 25:13-16), the Wisdom books (Pr 12:11-14; 16:3; 18:9; 22:29; 24:27; 31:1,13-31; Ec 3:22; 5:6; 9:10), the prophetic witness against injustice to the poor (1Sm 8:14; 1Kg 21:1-19; Is 3:13-15; 5:8-10; 10:1-2; Hs 5:10; Mc 2:1-4,8-9), and much more. In the NT it has a central place in the parables (forty-five of the fifty-two parables draw on work and business as images of spiritual life). It also appears in the teachings of Jesus (Mk 10:42-45; Jn 13:1-20), the conflict between Jesus and his enemies (Mt 12:1-8; Mk 2:23-3:6; Lk 6:1-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; Jn 5:1-18; 7:23; 9:14-41), and the ethics of the letters (Eph 4:28; Col 3:23-24; 1Th 4:11; 2Th 3:10-12; 1Tm 5:8; 2Tm 2:6; 1Pt 2:18-25).

The Bible claims that God is a Worker, and work is a primary reason he created humanity, because when we work rightly, we glorify God by loving him and neighbor. Because he is love, God works (Gn 2:2-3; Jn 5:17), and so do we. God also rests, appreciating the beauty of the divine work (Gn 1:31-2:3), and so do we. Through our work we exercise stewardship over the world God created. When we work faithfully as God's stewards, we manifest the glory of the holy love of God, and we make the world under our care manifest it as well.

## WORK AS STEWARDSHIP

We serve God as stewards of his world individually, and also collectively, as we labor together in households and businesses and trade our work with each other through economic exchange. Thus we were made as an image of the holy love that is the triune God, unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

This claim is shocking and outrageous to our natural sensibilities because it transforms the suffering of work. We experience toil, frustration, and injustice in our work not because work is bad, but because we are bad (Rm 3:23). Work is not a curse, but our work is one of the main places where we experience the curse on our sin that God, in his holy love, has ordained (Gn 3:17-19).

This is also a reason why the Bible's shocking claim is necessary if we are to have any hope for joy, peace, and righteousness. If Jesus is in us through our faith in the gospel, we can take comfort that God is using our

perseverance through the suffering of our work to transform us (cp. Jms 1:2-4; Rm 8:28). Worldly people working in worldly ways are shaping themselves, all day every day, into ever more worldly people. But we, as we make the difficult choice to keep on working faithfully, day in and day out, are shaped into Christlikeness by King Jesus.

### THE POWER OF WORK

The Bible's claim about work is also shocking and outrageous to our natural sensibilities because it transforms the power of work. The enormous power of our work is indeed breathtaking; even God himself seems amazed at it (Gn 11:6). But this power was given to us to glorify the holy love of God by serving God and neighbor. When we trust in our work rather than in God for identity, security, and provision, we fall into a monstrous evil that will enslave us, turn us against each other, make us miserable, and bring us to ruin.

Doing our daily work with ethical integrity for the love of God and neighbor in Jesus is a high and difficult calling. Moreover, a special responsibility rests on business leaders to order work ethically, as an expression of voluntary stewardship and mutual love. Another responsibility falls on political leaders to protect this ordering of work. The complex challenge of extending the opportunity of gainful work to the poor and the oppressed also weighs on us.

But this too is a reason why the Bible's shocking claim is necessary if we are to have any hope for joy, peace, and righteousness. Those who follow God's calling in their work discover a new kind of life. For them, glorifying God by loving God and neighbor as a citizen of God's kingdom is not a special activity they squeeze into a few hours a week, or an add-on they are constantly straining to shoehorn into their daily routine. It is their daily routine. Our work, done in this way, is the main way we give God a return on his investment in us (Mt 25:14-30). It allows us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick (Mt 25:31-46). These are among the good works we were saved to do (Eph 2:10), which force even the enemies of God to give him glory (Mt 5:16; 1Pt 2:15).

This is not just one more biblical truth among thousands of others. It is a central pattern in the narrative of Scripture. It is one of the deep, defining elements of the biblical testimony. That only makes sense. Work takes up the overwhelming majority of our lives and is central to our understanding of who we are as individuals and as cultures. Why are we surprised that the Bible says God designed us with work at the center? Or that Holy Spirit transformation of our work has always been—and continues to be today—one of the most important paths to spiritual and cultural reformation?

GREGORY B. FORSTER

which is idolatry.<sup>a</sup> <sup>6</sup> Because of these, God's wrath<sup>b</sup> is coming upon the disobedient,<sup>a</sup> <sup>7</sup> and you once walked in these things when you were living<sup>c</sup> in them. <sup>8</sup> But now, put away<sup>d</sup> all the following: anger,<sup>e</sup> wrath,<sup>f</sup> malice,<sup>g</sup> slander,<sup>h</sup> and filthy language from your mouth.<sup>i</sup> <sup>9</sup> Do not lie<sup>j</sup> to one another, since you have put off<sup>k</sup> the old self<sup>l</sup> with its practices<sup>10</sup> and have put on<sup>m</sup> the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your<sup>n</sup> Creator.<sup>n</sup> <sup>11</sup> In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.<sup>o</sup>

<sup>a</sup>3:5 1Co 10:14; Gl 5:20; 1Pt 4:3  
<sup>b</sup>3:6 Jms 1:19; Rv 6:16  
<sup>c</sup>3:7 Lk 15:13; Rm 6:2  
<sup>d</sup>3:8 Rm 13:12  
<sup>e</sup>Jms 1:19  
<sup>f</sup>Rv 14:19  
<sup>g</sup>1Co 14:20  
<sup>h</sup>Jn 10:33; Rv 13:6  
<sup>i</sup>Eph 4:22-31  
<sup>j</sup>3:9 Lv 19:11; 1Tm 2:7  
<sup>k</sup>Col 2:15  
<sup>l</sup>Eph 4:22  
<sup>m</sup>3:10 Pr 31:25  
<sup>n</sup>Mk 13:19; Jn 1:3; Rv 3:14  
<sup>o</sup>3:11 Eph 1:23

### THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved,<sup>p</sup> put on compassion, kindness,<sup>q</sup> humility,<sup>r</sup> gentleness,<sup>s</sup> and patience,<sup>t</sup> <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive.<sup>u</sup> <sup>14</sup> Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.<sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called<sup>v</sup> in one body, rule your

<sup>p</sup>3:12 Jn 3:16; 2Th 2:13; Rv 12:11 <sup>q</sup>2Co 6:6 <sup>r</sup>Ac 20:19; Eph 4:2; Php 2:3; Col 2:18,23; 1Pt 5:5 <sup>s</sup>Jms 3:13 <sup>t</sup>2Tm 3:10  
<sup>u</sup>3:13 2Co 2:7,10; 12:13; Eph 4:32 <sup>v</sup>3:15 Jn 14:27; 1Co 7:15; Php 4:7

<sup>a</sup>3:6 Other mss omit upon the disobedient <sup>b</sup>3:10 Lit his

**3:9-10** Putting off the old self and putting on the new draws on the metaphor of clothing, which was common in the ancient world. Clothing was seen to define a person's status. Removing the old self means that believers will no longer live in their former ways. The new self is being renewed . . . according to Christ.

**3:11** The gospel overcomes all cultural barriers, uniting believers in Christ. Greeks typically divided the world into two groups, Greek and barbarian (with Scythians being an even lower level of barbarians). Jews divided the world into Jew and Gentile (circumcision and uncircumcision). In the church, no such distinctions stand.

**3:12-14** Believers are to be "clothed" with these characteristics (see note on vv. 9-10), with love being the garment placed over the top of all others.

**3:13** Christian ethics are always grounded in Christ, as here we are to forgive because Christ has forgiven us.

hearts. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,<sup>a</sup> singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name<sup>a</sup> of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

**CHRIST IN YOUR HOME**

<sup>18</sup> Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.<sup>b</sup> <sup>19</sup> Husbands,<sup>c</sup> love your wives<sup>d</sup> and don't be bitter<sup>e</sup> toward them. <sup>20</sup> Children,<sup>f</sup> obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Fathers,<sup>g</sup> do not exasperate<sup>h</sup> your children, so that they won't become discouraged. <sup>22</sup> Slaves, obey your human<sup>i</sup> masters in everything. Don't work only while being watched, as people-pleasers, but work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.<sup>j</sup> <sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people,<sup>k</sup> <sup>24</sup> knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup> For the wrongdoer<sup>l</sup> will be paid back for whatever wrong he has done, and there is no favoritism.

**4** Masters,<sup>m</sup> deal with your slaves justly and fairly, since you know that you too have a Master in heaven.

**SPEAKING TO GOD AND OTHERS**

<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves<sup>n</sup> to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. <sup>3</sup> At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door<sup>o</sup> to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ,<sup>p</sup> for which I am in chains,<sup>q</sup> <sup>4</sup> so that

<sup>3:17</sup> Jn 14:13; Php 2:10  
<sup>3:18-4:1</sup> Eph 5:22-6:9  
<sup>3:19</sup> 1Pt 3:1  
<sup>4</sup>Eph 5:25; 1Pt 3:1  
<sup>4</sup>Rv 8:11; 10:9-10  
<sup>3:20</sup> Gn 3:16; Lv 10:14; Dt 31:12; Ps 37:25; Pr 20:7; Lk 1:7; Ac 2:39; Heb 2:13  
<sup>3:21</sup> Ps 103:13; Eph 6:4; Heb 11:23  
<sup>2</sup>Co 9:2  
<sup>3:22</sup> Rm 1:3; 4:1; 8:4-5,12-13; 9:3-5; 1Co 1:26; 10:18; 2Co 1:17; 5:16; 10:2-3; 11:18; Gl 4:23,29; Eph 6:5  
<sup>1</sup>Pr 1:7; Rv 14:7  
<sup>3:23</sup> Eph 6:7  
<sup>3:25</sup> Rv 2:11  
<sup>4:1</sup> Col 3:22  
<sup>4:2</sup> Rm 12:12  
<sup>4:3</sup> Ac 14:27; 1Co 16:9; 2Co 2:12  
<sup>1</sup>Co 2:7; Eph 3:4; 5:2  
<sup>4</sup>Ac 27:2; 28:16,30; Eph 6:18-20

<sup>4:5</sup> Eph 5:15-17  
<sup>4:6</sup> Mk 9:50; Lk 14:34  
<sup>1</sup>Pt 3:15  
<sup>4:7</sup> Ac 20:4; Ti 3:12  
<sup>1</sup>Nm 23:19  
<sup>4:8</sup> Lk 16:25  
<sup>2</sup>Eph 6:21-22; Col 2:2  
<sup>4:9</sup> Phm 10,16  
<sup>4:10</sup> Phm 24  
<sup>4</sup>Ac 4:36

I may make it known as I should. <sup>5</sup> Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.<sup>r</sup> <sup>6</sup> Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt,<sup>s</sup> so that you may know how you should answer each person.<sup>t</sup>

**FINAL GREETINGS**

<sup>7</sup>Tychicus,<sup>u</sup> our dearly loved brother, faithful<sup>v</sup> minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. <sup>8</sup> I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are<sup>b</sup> and so that he may encourage<sup>w</sup> your hearts. <sup>9</sup> He is coming with Onesimus,<sup>y</sup> a faithful and dearly loved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.

<sup>10</sup> Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you greetings, as does Mark,<sup>z</sup> Barnabas's<sup>aa</sup> cousin (concerning whom you have received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him),<sup>11</sup> and so does Jesus who is called Justus. These alone of the circumcised are my coworkers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. <sup>12</sup> Epaphras,<sup>ab</sup> who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. He is always wrestling<sup>ac</sup> for you in his prayers, so that you can stand mature and fully assured<sup>c</sup> in everything God wills.<sup>ad</sup> <sup>13</sup> For I testify about him that he works hard<sup>ba,ae</sup> for you, for those in Laodicea,<sup>af</sup> and for those in Hierapolis. <sup>14</sup> Luke, the dearly loved physician, and Demas<sup>ag</sup> send you greetings. <sup>15</sup> Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the

<sup>ab</sup> 4:12 Col 1:7; Phm 23  
<sup>ac</sup> Jd 3  
<sup>ad</sup> Gl 1:4; Eph 1:9  
<sup>ae</sup> 4:13 Jd 3  
<sup>af</sup> Col 2:1  
<sup>ag</sup> 4:14 2Tm 4:10

<sup>a</sup>3:16 Or and songs prompted by the Spirit <sup>b</sup>4:8 Other mss read that he may know how you are <sup>c</sup>4:12 Other mss read and complete <sup>d</sup>4:13 Other mss read he has a great zeal

**3:16-17** The importance of thankfulness in the Christian life is stressed as the word of Christ leads to gratitude, and we are to give thanks to God in all that we do.

**3:16** The church as a whole, and thus believers individually, are to be saturated with the gospel (the word of Christ). The singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are to be a vehicle for teaching and admonishing one another, as well as an opportunity for the expressing gratitude in your hearts. See "A Biblical View of Music," p. 727.

**3:17** That everything we do can and should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus shows that all of life matters to God. We must not think of certain activities as spiritual and others as unspiritual. All appropriate activities are spiritual when done in his name.

**3:18-4:1** This section expands on the idea of doing everything in the name of the Lord, emphasizing family life. The gospel shapes every area of life. Thus, the exhortations given here are not merely cultural ideas but flow out of

the gospel (3:16). A number of first-century writings address family responsibilities in a format similar to this, but they do not typically address the responsibility of the one in leadership (husbands, parents, masters). The gospel shapes leadership as well as submission.

**3:22-4:1** The instructions to slaves and masters is not an endorsement of slavery (see "The Bible and Slavery," p. 1528). Slavery in the Roman Empire was significantly different from the kind of slavery typified in North America in the nineteenth century, which constituted one third of society. Slavery was not ethnicity-based, and people under considerable debt would put themselves into slavery until their debt was repaid. Moreover, slaves could rise to significant positions of authority within a household, and even within civic government. Nevertheless, slaves were regarded as the property of their owners. Paul does not challenge the institution of slavery; rather, he instructs believers as to how they should con-

duct themselves within it. See also "Biblical Models for Business," p. 782.

**4:5** Making the most of the time in this context refers to taking every opportunity to explain the gospel ("the mystery of Christ;" v. 3) to outsiders, i.e., unbelievers. Here the concern has moved from behavior within the church to engagement with those outside it. See also "A Biblical View of Retirement," p. 175.

**4:6** Speech that is seasoned with salt may draw on the use of salt for flavoring or possibly its use as a preservative. Either way, believers' speech is to be of benefit to others.

**4:9** Onesimus is the subject of Paul's letter to Philemon. He was a runaway slave who became a Christian through Paul's ministry.

**4:10** Mark (also known as John Mark) abandoned Paul during his first missionary journey (Ac 13:13), but here we see that he has been reconciled to Paul. Mark is the author of the Gospel bearing his name.

**4:12** The prayer of Epaphras for the Colossians mirrors Paul's prayer in 1:9-14.

church in her home.<sup>a</sup> <sup>16</sup> After this letter has been read at your gathering, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. <sup>17</sup> And tell Archippus, <sup>b</sup> "Pay attention to the ministry

<sup>a</sup>4:15 Ac 12:12; Rm 16:5  
<sup>b</sup>4:17 Phm 2  
<sup>c</sup>2Tm 4:5  
<sup>d</sup>4:18 Php 1:7  
<sup>e</sup>1Tm 6:21; 2Tm 4:22; Ti 3:15

you have received in the Lord, so that you can accomplish it."<sup>c</sup>

<sup>18</sup> I, Paul, am writing this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains.<sup>d</sup> Grace be with you.<sup>A,e</sup>

<sup>A</sup>4:18 Other mss add *Amen*.

**4:16** The letter from Laodicea refers to a nonextant letter Paul wrote to the church in that city. Paul's instruction reflects the early church practice of sharing Paul's letters with other churches. By the end of the first century, multiple churches had their own collections of Paul's letters.









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