



HE IS THE
IMAGE OF
THE INVISIBLE
GOD, THE
FIRSTBORN OF
ALL CREATION.

COLOSSIANS 1:15

WHO CHRIST IS

THE STORY
OF CHANGE

DATE

November 14 & 15

WEEK

2 of 4

OVERVIEW

Colossians 1

KEY VERSE

Colossians 1:15

TEACHERS: It is important to read all four lessons to understand the flow of content.

SETTING THE STAGE

Paul knew better than most what it was like to believe something that was not the whole truth. Paul was highly educated on the law and based his life on the law of Moses and the Old Testament. However, once he had the encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he came to believe the full truth of the gospel. Paul came to know Jesus as the Son of God, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy as the Messiah. Based on his personal experience, he wanted to make sure that the early church and Christ-followers were not deceived by half-truths or flat out false teaching. It was with this sincere heart of concern that he wrote many of the letters we have in the New Testament, including Colossians.

Paul is writing this letter from house arrest under Roman guard. He wrote the letters to the Colossians, the Ephesians, and to Philemon around the same time: approximately 62 A.D. Paul had never visited Colossae; still, he cared deeply about the maturation of the church in this city. Paul heard a report about certain false teachers within the church who were devaluing the person and work of Jesus Christ.² In response, Paul writes a letter not detailing the error of the false teaching but correcting the falsehood with a proper view of who Jesus is and what He accomplished through the cross and the empty tomb. *Continued on page 60 >*

LESSON OUTLINE

1. He is Visible
2. He Creates
3. He Holds All Things Together
4. He Reconciles Us to Himself and the Father

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Greek word “*Eikon*” is translated “image;” it means, “mirror-like representation,” referring to what is very close in **resemblance**, like a “high-definition” projection, as defined by the context.¹
- John 14:9b (Jesus speaking) “*If you have seen Me you have seen the Father.*”
- Triune God = God, the Father, Jesus, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

W H O CHRIST IS

Setting the Stage, continued > Paul knew the key to spiritual maturity was not argumentation but exaltation of truth. When the truth is heralded, falsehood is exposed. In Colossians, Paul exalts the truth of the preeminence of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

In Ancient Greek Mythology, there was a man named Narcissus. Narcissus was a very handsome man, and he knew it. He was proud and obsessed with his own beauty. One day, as the story goes, Narcissus was led to a pool and found his reflection on the water. He fell in love with the representation of himself. For hours he gazed at the pool. Eventually, he fell into the pool where he drowned in his own reflection.

It is an ancient story, but a modern-day indictment on us and our culture today. We, too, are people enamored with ourselves. We are enamored with our own reflection, enamored with our appearance and the way that people perceive us. We do not hunch over a reflection pool; instead, we hunch over our screens and phones, looking at ourselves and drowning in our own reflection.

According to a global study in 2018, there were 259 selfie deaths between 2011-2017. ³ People were so enamored with photographing themselves in extreme settings that it was literally the last thing they did on this earth. In 2016, the typical cellphone user touched his or her smartphone 2,617 times a day on average. But extreme users handle their phones more than 5,400 times a day. The average user spends over 145 minutes on their phone daily. ⁴

In a survey of nearly 7,000 people, most admitted that their phone has control over them. 46% of men and 55% of women surveyed check their phones before getting out of bed and around the same percentage check their phones while trying to fall asleep at night. Their relationship with their phone is preventing them from pursuing flesh-and-blood relationships while also providing an entrée into temptation that negatively impacts their walk with God. What used to be sacred moments: a morning prayer before the day started, a moment to recite Scripture at a traffic light, and times of reflection and thanksgiving while our heads are on our pillows at night, have all been replaced by screen time. ⁵

The advent of the cell phone did not invent the problem of self-absorption; it merely made our self-absorption more visible. Blaise Pascal would write, centuries before the arrival of the iPhone, “take away their diversion, and you will see them dried up.” Later he would say, “Men so much

¹ www.biblehub.com/greek

² C. E. Arnold, Introduction to Colossians [Introduction]. In *ESV Study Bible: English Standard Version*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016, p. 2289-2292.

³ www.bbc.com

⁴ J. Naftulin, www.businessinsider.com/dscout-research-people-touch-cell-phones-2617-times-a-day-2016-7

⁵ T. Reinke, www.crossway.org/articles/infographic-how-is-your-phone-changing-you/



love noise and stir; hence it comes that the prison is so horrible a punishment; hence it comes that the pleasure of solitude is a thing incomprehensible.”⁶ We desperately want distraction from our internal problems and to disrupt our reality. This is why, in moments when our phone runs out of battery, or we realize we left it at home, dread and anxiety overtake our hearts. We are forced to deal with our thoughts.

As we learned last week, we are sinful people. Sin has always caused us to drown in the reflection pool of our own image. Sin corrupts our thinking, causing us to think selfishly. It skews the way we perceive ourselves, the world, others, and God. Sin pollutes our hearts, turning our desires from loving God to hating God. As John Calvin so eloquently stated, “man’s nature is a perpetual factory of idols,” that the “mind begets an idol, and the hand gives it birth.”⁷ Sin affects our actions. Instead of people who honor God with our relationships and cause others to flourish, we rebel against God, slander, and hate our brothers and sisters (Romans 3:13-18).

What we need is something bigger and more significant than ourselves to turn our attention from our reflection pool. The only thing that will pull us out of the self-absorption of sin is a high view of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Colossians chapter 1, the Apostle Paul turns our focus. He knows the only way to correct this self-absorption error is by exalting Jesus.

1. HE IS VISIBLE

COLOSSIANS 1:15 *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*

All of us are familiar with images. Typically, we think of an “image” as it refers to a representation of something in the art world. For instance, the Statue of Liberty represents the essence of American freedom. Michelangelo’s David is a visible representation of the renaissance era. However, the word “image” used in this verse is the Greek word “*eikon*” which means “mirror-like representation,” exactly representing its source.⁸

Statues and images attempt to represent an idea or a person. Paul tells us that Jesus Christ is the mirror-like representation of the invisible God. One translation puts it as “*the visible image of the invisible God.*” (NLT) Jesus perfectly represents God to mankind. Jesus makes God known to us. When we look at Jesus Christ, we can see God with skin on. The apostle John put it like this in his Gospel, John 1:14a “*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory.*” The Bible, specifically the gospels, allows us to see God in the flesh through the life, ministry, miracles, and message of Jesus Christ.

Because of Jesus we can see a visible representation of the love of God from the manger to the cross. Through the person of Jesus, we can see the power of God expressed through His miracles. Through the person of Jesus, we can see the compassion of God as He wept at Lazarus’ tomb. We see the forgiveness of God through Jesus when He looked at the adulterous woman and said in John 8:11b “*I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.*”

Jesus communicates the character of God to us, perfectly. God, who is by nature utterly transcendent and unable to be looked at by finite mortals, has made known His attributes, character, power, will, and works through His Son.⁹ If we want to

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⁶ B. Pascal, *Pensées: Pascal Vol. 2*. Ontario, Canada: Devoted, 2018, p. 27.

⁷ B. Parsons, *The Heart of John Calvin*, 2019, <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/heart-john-calvin/>

⁸ www.biblehub.com/greek

⁹ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Living Insights-Colossians*; Tyndale House Publishing, Carol Stream, IL; 2017, p. 124.

know what God is like, we need not look any further than the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus fully expressed the nature and character of God to humanity, with one hundred percent authenticity and accuracy. Yet, this is so counter-cultural to who we are as people.

We often try to present our projected self instead of our actual self. Think of a job interview or a first date. We want to put our “best foot” forward. We want to be ourselves, but we do not want our date or our future boss to know the real authentic us. We want them to see all the good parts of us, so we edit all the things we do not like about ourselves and our lives. We want to display the projected self.

Jesus never had a projected self. He was always the image of God. He was always, as the author of Hebrews said, “*the exact representation of His nature.*” (Hebrews 1:3) If we want to know what God is like, we look at the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We can know God’s character in a relational way through the Son of Man. Jesus makes the invisible God a visible reality to us.

2. HE CREATES

COLOSSIANS 1:16 *For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities all things have been created through Him and for Him.*

Jesus has astronomical power to create. John 1:1-4 puts it like this, referring to Jesus as the Word.

JOHN 1:1-4 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴ In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.”*

The Triune God that you and I have the privilege of knowing personally, created everything that you see and everything you cannot see. He has created every pebble, every grain of sand, every blade of grass. He created the roly-poly, and He created the blue whale. He hand-drew every snowflake on the top of Mount Everest (29,029 ft), and He designed every Deep-Sea Dragonfish in the Mariana Trench (36,201 ft below the surface of the Pacific). He created the toucan, and He created the tiger.

Jesus, the Light of the World, created light, that allows us to see, function, grow, and live. A beam of light could circle the earth 7.5 times in one second.¹⁰ When you look up in the nighttime sky, remember Jesus created all that is in the heavens. If we counted all of the stars in the Milky Way Galaxy 1 second at a time, it would take us 2,500 years.¹¹ To visualize the grandeur of the creative mind of God, consider this: if our solar system was the size of a quarter, the Milky Way Galaxy would be the size of the North American continent.¹² If we want to bring it a little closer to home, 1.3 million earth’s could fit inside the sun.¹³ To put that in perspective, if the sun were as tall as a typical door, the earth would be the size of a nickel.¹⁴

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¹⁰ www.space.com

¹¹ www.space.com

¹² www.nasa.gov

¹³ www.coolcosmos.ipac.caltech.edu

¹⁴ www.nasa.gov

All the wonders of earth and heavens were created by Jesus and for Jesus. He has creative power and authority over all the earth. What does that mean for us? We may find ourselves in a desperate situation today, where we need a new opportunity created for us. We may find ourselves in an apathetic place where we need a new passion created for us. We may find ourselves in a hopeless position where we need a new job opportunity created for us. Jesus creates. If Jesus was able to create all that is in heaven and on earth, then certainly, Jesus can create what we need in line with His will. We can look at the creative hand of the Triune God and say if the Rocky Mountains can be formed out of the dirt, Jesus can create an opportunity for me as I continue to walk in obedience. If the Grand Canyon can be carved with water, He can create a new work in my heart and my life.

3. HE HOLDS ALL THINGS TOGETHER

COLOSSIANS 1:17 *He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.*

The Apostle Paul takes us on a journey from the telescope to the microscope. Deep down inside the smallest levels of atomic structure, Jesus is holding it all together. Without the intervention of the Triune God, everything would fall apart. At the base level of material is the atom. The atom consists of the proton, neutron, and electron. Deep down in the infinitesimal level of the proton and the neutron, in the very quarks of the atom is a substance called the gluon. Gluon is essentially the electromagnetic force that holds all atoms together.¹⁵ In layman's terms, it is very much like the sound of its name; it is the glue that holds the atoms together.

Almost 2,000 years ago, the Apostle Paul wrote, "*in Him (Jesus) all things hold together.*" Paul had no clue about subatomic particles. He had no clue about quarks and protons. But he did have the experience that Jesus was holding his life together. Paul knew Jesus had the power and capability to hold all things together when he was being stoned outside of Lystra (Acts 14:19-28). He knew that Jesus was holding all things together as he was lowered down in a basket outside the city walls of Damascus (Acts 9:25). Paul knew what it was to be held together as he was tossed to and from in the Adriatic Sea and shipwrecked in Malta (Acts 27:27-28:5). He knew that the Triune God was holding the church together in times of persecution and opposition. For Paul, Jesus' ability to hold all things together was not just a theological statement; it was the testimony of his life.

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This should bolster our confidence in Jesus. If the Triune God is holding our world together at the subatomic level, if He could be the glue that held the life and ministry of Paul together, He can certainly hold us together. Jesus holds us together and sustains during times of great difficulty and hardship. He can glue our emotions back together. He can glue our broken families back together. He can glue our broken hearts back together. Jesus can hold us together through His omnipotent love.

4. HE RECONCILES US TO HIMSELF AND THE FATHER

COLOSSIANS 1:19-22 *For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.²¹ And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,²² yet He has*

¹⁵ R. Kunzig, *The Glue That Holds the World Together*, 2000, from <https://www.discovermagazine.com/the-sciences/the-glue-that-holds-the-world-together>

now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.

In these verses, Paul uses the word “reconcile” twice. He uses this term in future tense and in the present tense. He tells us that Jesus is going to reconcile all things to Himself at the end of the age. Universal reconciliation is not the same as universal salvation.¹⁶ Jesus had created all things as we have seen in these verses, which means He is reconciling a world that became broken after the fall of man.

The Apostle Paul tells us that at the end of the age, God will bring all things back into their proper relationship with Him through Jesus. This world and God will once again have a harmonious relationship that does not feel the effects of sin and evil, because of Jesus. The curse will be removed. That will be a magnificent day. The world will no longer be plagued with viruses, wars, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes. The lion and the lamb will lay down together. There will be restoration and reconciliation of that which had been torn apart and separated.

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But Paul also tells us about a great reconciliation that has *already* occurred, Jesus has reconciled us to Himself, in a very personal way. The word “reconcile” is the Greek word, “*Apokatallaso*” which simply means to bring into right relationship, a former state of harmony.¹⁷ It is the reconciliation that occurred on the cross. He tells the church at Colossae that they were once *alienated*, which means estranged. There was a separation in our relationship with God because of our sinfulness. Our sin made us *hostile* to God. Because of our sin, we had an estranged and hostile relationship with God (Ephesians 2:1-4). But God sent Jesus Christ as the means of mercy to mend the broken relationship. In Christ, God reconciles us unto Himself. Because Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, He is able to do what no mere man could ever do; reconcile lost sinners to a holy God.¹⁸

God extended His mercy and grace through His Son Jesus Christ. Our standing with God is no longer “alienated” it is *holy, blameless, and beyond reproach*. All because of what Jesus did for us in dying on the cross for our sins. The Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) enacted peace on our behalf *by the blood of His cross*. He is our reconciler. He is the one who brings us into a right relationship with God.

¹⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary-NT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs; 2007, p. 671.

¹⁷ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

¹⁸ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary-NT*; David C. Cook, Colorado Springs; 2007, p. 671.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The Story of Change is truly all about change. We are changing our perspective and changing our self-absorption with the person we see in the mirror. Our eyes should focus on the One who is the mirror image of God. Changing the direction of our eyes, the focus of our hearts and the understanding of our minds will cause us to want to be closer to Jesus each day.

Our minds become renewed when we begin to think about the goodness of God. Our hearts become renewed when we start to meditate on Jesus' heart for us. Our actions change when we stand in awe of who God is and what He has done for us in Christ.

When we begin to take our eyes off ourselves, and we begin to behold Jesus as the visible image of the invisible God and appreciate who He is, we begin to change. Paul would tell the Colossian church exactly that in Colossians 3:1-2 *Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*
² *Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*

God's plan is for us to know in our minds and in our hearts who Jesus is, what He has done, and who we are in Him.