

Colossians

Chapter 1

Greeting

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

1:1-2 The salutation was a standard part of any Greek letter in the first century A.D. In some of his letters, Paul uses the salutation to introduce important themes which he will treat in the body of the epistle (Rom 1:1–7; Gal 1:1–5; Titus 1:1–4). In the present letter, the apostle uses the overture (Col 1:3–20) for that purpose. Hence, his salutation is exceptionally brief, so that he may move on to introducing his subject matter in the overture (1:3–20). The main emphasis in the salutation is that Paul’s status as an apostle has come about through the *will* of God. By this Paul puts a stamp of divine authority on what he writes here. (CC p. 19)

1:1 Paul.† It was customary to put the writer’s name at the beginning of a letter for the convenience of the addressee(s), since letters were written on scrolls. (CSB)

an apostle – Although the term can be used in a general sense that includes co-workers of Paul (as in 1 Thess 2:6–7), when used in its specific sense, designating Paul or others personally called by Christ himself, it is a significant concept that is to be understood in light of the Hebrew term *shaliach* (שָׁלִיחַ). (CC p. 21)

The apostles of Jesus Christ were chosen from those who had been eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; 1 Cor 9:1). The NT identifies a limited number of individuals as these apostles: the Twelve (Acts 1:21–22), Paul (1 Cor 9:1), James the brother of the Lord (Gal 1:19; 2:9), and perhaps Barnabas (Acts 14:4, 14). (CC p. 22)

Paul bases his apostolic office on his being an eyewitness of the resurrection (1 Cor 9:1) through his calling on the road to Damascus (Gal 1:15–16; cf. 1 Cor 15:7–10). He was called to exercise his apostolate particularly for the benefit of non-Jews (Gal 1:15–16; see also Acts 9:16; 22:21; 26:17, 19, 23); hence, in Romans he identifies himself as the “apostle of the Gentiles” (11:13). (CC p. 22)

Christ. Paul is very Christ-centered, as seen by this short letter, in which he uses the title “Christ” 26 times and the title “Lord” (alone) 7 times. (CSB)

by the will of God – Paul did not choose to be an apostle but was called by God. (TLSB)

Timothy. Paul also mentions Timothy in 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1,2 Thessalonians and Philemon, but Paul is really the sole author, as seen by the constant use of “I” (see especially 4:18). (CSB)

Τιμόθεος—Timothy was one of the apostle’s most beloved co-workers. Although the son of a Gentile father and a Jewish mother, he was a devout adherent of the OT faith (Acts 16:1–2; 2 Tim 1:3–5) in much the same way as were Simeon and Anna (Lk 2:25–38). Because of his mixed bloodline, Paul had him circumcised before he joined the apostle’s traveling missionary band on the second missionary journey, lest there be an offense to potential Jewish converts (Acts 16:3). Timothy often worked alongside the apostle (Acts 19:22; Rom 16:21; 1 Cor 16:10; Phil 2:22) and was often sent places by Paul as his representative (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:19–21). He was especially dear to the apostle (1 Cor 4:17), who called him by the term “child” (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2) and described him as genuinely concerned

about those among whom he labored (Phil 2:19–21). Late in Paul’s career, he left Timothy to oversee the church at Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3). (CC p. 19)

A favorite co-worker of Paul. His father was a Gentile; his mother was Jewish. He often worked alongside Paul or was sent as his representative. (TLSB)

Paul was especially close to Timothy. He even referred to him as “my beloved and faithful child in the Lord” (1Co 4:17). Timothy should be considered a co-author of this Letter. (TLSB)

1 Corinthians 4:17 “For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.”

1:2 saints. Because of Christ’s substitutionary death for the Colossian believers, they are declared holy in the sight of God, and because of the Holy Spirit’s work, they are continuing to be made holy in their lives. (CSB)

faithful. By virtue of their Baptism, all believers are “in Christ,” i.e., they are connected to Christ or belong to Him (2:11–13; Rm 6:3, 11; Gal 3:26–27; Eph 1:13; 3:6). (TLSB)

in Christ. Paul mentions the spiritual union with Christ 13 times in Colossians. (CSB)

The addressees of this letter are said to be “in Christ.” This refers to an important concept in the letters of Paul, as seen both from the frequency of “in Christ” or equivalent phrases, such as “in him” or “in whom,” referring to Christ (by one count some 170 times in the thirteen letters by Paul) and from the near absence of “in Christ” throughout the rest of the NT. The phrase does not have a merely instrumental meaning, as though the preposition ἐν meant “by.” (CC p. 23)

Colossae. C 100 mi E of Ephesus. Most likely Epaphras brought the Gospel to Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. (TLSB)

1:1–2 Faithful Epaphras established a tiny foothold for the kingdom of God at Colossae and nearby cities. Now this young church is threatened by false belief, which directs people away from Christ and His work to themselves. But God does not give up. He uses Paul, Timothy, and other faithful servants to establish the truth and love of Christ in their hearts. God does not give up on us either, when we or those we love are tempted by false teachings. • O Lord, send from heaven and save me; put to shame him who tramples on me. Send out Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness! Amen. (paraphrase of Ps 57:4). (TLSB)

Thanksgiving and Prayer

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. 9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and

patience with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1:3 *We.* Paul and Timothy. (CSB)

thank God. Every one of Paul's letters, except Galatians, begins with thanks or praise (see note on Php 1:3–4). In Colossians thanks is an important theme (see v. 12; 2:7; 3:15–17; 4:2). (CSB)

Indicates God's triune nature in the loving relationship between Father and Son. Yet the Son is "Lord" (TLSB)

Paul sets a great example for all Christians by beginning his prayer for others by giving thanks for their spiritual qualities (VV. 4-6) (CSB)

pray for you – Paul often states that he prays for people (Romans 1:9; Eph.1:16; Phil 1:4). Jesus too prayed for others (Mt. 14:23 and parallels; 19:13; John 17). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 3)

Fervent prayer is an important part of Christian ministry. Cf 1:9; 4:2–3, 12. (TLSB)

1:4 *we have heard* – Apart from a few individuals, Paul had not met the Colossians face-to-face. Cf 2:1. (TLSB)

faith in Christ Jesus – ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ— "In Christ Jesus" denotes not the object of faith, but the saving relationship with Christ that one has through saving faith. (CC p. 29)

1:5 The three great Christian virtues of faith, love and hope appear also in Ro 5:2–5; 1Co 13:13; Gal 5:5–6; 1Th 1:3; 5:8; Heb 10:22–24. (CSB)

The meaning of three significant words in this section—faith, love, and hope—is seen not only from the contextual usage of the terms themselves but also from their relationship to one another. "Faith" (πίστις) is mentioned first by the apostle because of its importance and because love and hope are born of faith. Here it denotes the "state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted" (BDAG, 2), "faith in Christ" (BDAG, 2 b β). It is this faith that justifies a sinner, as Ap IV 48–121 expounds in detail. (CC p. 31)

Outside of biblical teaching, "hope" was largely absent in the ancient world (Eph 2:12). Some considered it preferable never to have been born. The *Pax Romana* under Augustus Caesar led to his birth being hailed as the beginning of a new hope, but such hopes quickly ended when Augustus was succeeded by "Tiberius and other emperors even more mad than he." (CC p. 31)

hope. Not wishful thinking but a firm assurance. For this unusual thought of faith and love coming from hope see Tit 1:2. (CSB)

Most people in the Greco-Roman world lived without hope (cf Eph 2:12). Hope can be thought of as faith directed toward the future. (TLSB)

1:6 *which has come to you* – As the founding missionary of the Colossian Church, Epaphras had brought the Gospel (v 7). (TLSB)

in the whole world. Hyperbole, to dramatize the rapid spread of the gospel into every quarter of the Roman empire within three decades of Pentecost (see v. 23; Ro 1:8; 10:18; 16:19). In refutation of the charge of the false teachers, Paul insists that the Christian faith is not merely local or regional but worldwide. (CSB)

In less than three decades since Pentecost, the Gospel was being proclaimed to the entire Roman world (cf 1Tm 3:16). (TLSB)

bearing fruit – This shows that God is at work through his Word. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 3)

Emphasizing both the truth and the power of the Word that was proclaimed to them under his auspices, Paul takes note of the great things that that Word has accomplished among his readers. Those great things are the work of Almighty God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—centering in the work of Jesus Christ and involving a relationship of faith in him. (Luther)

The Gospel (v 5) produces faith and good works. Cf Gal 5:22–23. (TLSB)

Isaiah 55:11 “so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

1:7 Epaphras. A native (4:12) and probably founder of the Colossian church, and an evangelist in nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13). Paul loved and admired him, calling him a “fellow prisoner” (Phm 23), his dear fellow servant and a faithful minister of Christ. Epaphras was the one who told Paul at Rome about the Colossian church problem and thereby stimulated him to write this letter (vv. 4, 8). His name, a shortened form of Epaphroditus (from “Aphrodite,” the Greek goddess of love), suggests that he was a convert from paganism. He is not the Epaphroditus of Php 2:25; 4:18. (CSB)

Paul was very close to him and called him a “fellow prisoner” in Phm 23. (TLSB)

beloved fellow servant – Some manuscripts have “your,” but many scholars prefer “our” because it shows the connection between Paul, Epaphras, and the Colossians. (TLSB)

faithful minister – Gk *doulos*, usually means “slave” or “one who is wholly owned and who owes undivided allegiance and obedience to a master.” See p 1903. Many OT believers were called slaves (servants) of God: Moses (Ps 105:26), Joshua (Jsh 24:29), David (2Sm 7:5), and Jeremiah (Jer 7:25). (TLSB)

1:8 your love in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the source of all Christian love. (CSB)

Love as well as faith is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. (TLSB)

1:9-14 Paul prays for our entire Christian life: for faith (v 9), for the living of our faith (v 10), for strength when we meet resistance (v 11), and for the final outcome of faith—eternal life (v 12). (TLSB)

1:9 have not ceased to pray for you – Paul’s attention to regular prayer is an integral aspect of his ministry. (TLSB)

the knowledge of his will. Biblical knowledge is not merely the possession of facts. Rather, knowledge and wisdom in the Bible are practical, having to do with godly living. This is borne out by vv. 10–12, where knowledge, wisdom and understanding result in a life worthy of the Lord. (CSB)

False teachers had promoted another kind of knowledge. Paul prays for knowledge that is centered in God's forgiveness in Christ (v 14) and revealed by the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

Using our sanctified minds we can gather facts listen to the advice of others, search the Word, pray for guidance and accept personal responsibility for our decisions. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 3)

wisdom – Gk *sophia*. Paul uses this word six times in Col (1:9, 28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5). It is the practical application of faith in Christ. (TLSB)

understanding – Insight. A clear analysis and application of knowledge guided by the Holy Spirit. (TLSB)

1:10 *walk in a manner worthy* – In verse 10-12 Paul identifies what the fruits of a sanctified life are. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 3)

περιπατήσαι— “Walk” here, as often in both testaments, refers to ethical conduct in Christian faith, one's “way of life.” In English, instead of “to walk,” we would more likely say “to live” or “to conduct yourselves.” (CC p. 35)

Gk *axios*, “suitable to.” Related to Eng “axiomatic,” “taken for granted.” We should have high expectations for the new life of faith, since it comes from Christ. (TLSB)

1:11 *strengthened...all power...glorious might* – Gk *dynamis*. Related to Eng “dynamite.” God empowers His people for service. *glorious might*. Great power; used only of God in the NT. (TLSB)

endurance – εἰς πᾶσαν ὑπομονήν— “Endurance” is perseverance in Christ in the face of attacks. It remains through suffering (2 Cor 1:6) by holding fast to its hope for the future according to God's promise (Rom 8:25; 15:4), so that it persists in good works (Rom 2:7) and produces proven character (Rom 5:4). (CC p. 36)

patience – καὶ μακροθυμίαν – “Patience” may also be rendered “longsuffering.” In human relationships, it includes giving the other person all the time he needs to deal with his defects. See further “The Relational Virtues of the Christian Life” at 3:5–17. (CC p. 36)

with joy – μετὰ χαρᾶς— “With joy” is an adverbial phrase best taken as modifying the following verb rather than being attached to the preceding clause. As that which is to characterize the giving of thanks, “joy” is deeper than mere happiness. As a fruit of saving faith (Phil 1:25) and gift of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22; 1 Thess 1:6), joy endures even in the face of affliction (2 Cor 7:4; 1 Thess 1:6). For more on “joy,” see “The Relational Virtues of the Christian Life” at Col 3:5–17. (CC p. 36)

1:12 *qualified* – Sin disqualifies us. God qualified us through Christ's redemption (v 14). (TLSB)

τῷ ἰκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς—ικανώσαντι, “made sufficient,” is a grace word, since the Father provided what we could not provide for ourselves (1 Cor 15:9; 2 Cor 3:5–6). The aorist participle denotes that the Father's act of making sufficient preceded that of the thanksgiving given to him. In the context of the aorist indicatives of Col 1:13, the participle here points to Baptism as a past event incorporating one into the past event of the death and resurrection of Christ. (CC pp.36-37)

inheritance – Recalls the inheritance of the Promised Land that was allotted to the families of Israel according to God’s promises and not because of their righteousness (Dt 9:5). (TLSB)

light. Symbolizes holiness (Mt 5:14; 6:23; Ac 26:18; 1Jn 1:5), truth (Ps 36:9; 119:105, 130; 2Co 4:6), love (Jas 1:17; 1Jn 2:9–10), glory (Isa 60:1–3; 1Ti 6:16) and life (Jn 1:4). Accordingly, God (1Jn 1:5), Christ (Jn 8:12) and the Christian (Eph 5:8) are characterized by light. The “kingdom of light” is the opposite of the “dominion of darkness” (v. 13). (CSB)

Believers are no longer separated from God, who is light (Jn 8:12). (TLSB)

1:13 *delivered* – The past tense points us back to Baptism, which incorporated us into Christ’s saving work (2:6–15). (TLSB)

domain of darkness – Human nature has been delivered into slavery and is held captive by the devil” (Ap II 47). The NT often uses light/darkness for the contrast between God/Satan, salvation/sin (Ac 26:18). Biblical usage differs from that of some later Gnostics and Manichaeans, who used this comparison as though God and Satan were equal forces. God’s power to save from the darkness of sin applies for all people. (TLSB)

kingdom. † Does not here refer to a territory but to the authority, rule or power of a king. Here it means that the Christian is no longer under the dominion of evil (darkness) but under the benevolent rule of God’s Son. (CSB)

Jesus taught that God’s kingdom was the rule of His grace, which began with His ministry (Mt 4:17). The beginning of God’s kingdom is the forgiveness of sins (v 14). (TLSB)

1:14 *redemption*. Deliverance and freedom from the penalty of sin by the payment of a ransom—the substitutionary death of Christ. (CSB)

Paul puts these (redemption and forgiveness) teachings together. This may have been in contrast to the idea that forgiveness was a preliminary step of salvation, a teaching held by later Gnostics. “No one is baptized in order that he may become a prince, but, as the words say, that he ‘be saved.’ We know that to be saved is nothing other than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil” (LC IV 24–25). (TLSB)

1:3–14 Paul cares very much for these new Christians, and he knows that God cares for them even more. Unfortunately, false teachings that lead people to look to themselves instead of looking to God compete for the Colossians’ attention. We have all been tempted to look to other things instead of Jesus for our salvation. God is the only one who can overcome this evil. In the background, Paul is praying fervently for them. In the foreground, Paul is boldly proclaiming the truth of salvation in Jesus. • Thank You, O God, for Your patience and persistence to save us through Your beloved Son. Amen. (TLSB)

The Preeminence of Christ

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by[f] him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. 21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to

present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

1:15–20 Perhaps an early Christian hymn on the supremacy of Christ—used here by Paul to counteract the false teaching at Colosse. It is divided into two parts: (1) Christ’s supremacy in creation (vv. 15–17); (2) Christ’s supremacy in redemption (vv. 18–20). (CSB)

1:15–20 Paul introduces his refutation of the Colossian heresy with a hymn, which summarizes early Christian Christology and likely predates Paul’s writing to the Colossians. In two parts, the hymn presents Jesus as Creator (vv 15–18a) and Redeemer (vv 18b–20). (TLSB)

1:15 *image*. Christ is called the “image of God” here and in 2Co 4:4. In Heb 1:3 he is described as the “radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.” This figure of the image suggests two truths: (1) God is invisible (“no one has ever seen God,” Jn 1:18); (2) Christ, who is the eternal Son of God and who became the God-man, reflects and reveals him (see also Jn 1:18; 14:9). (CSB)

Gk *eikon*, something that resembles the original. Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. Adam lost the image of God, but in Christ, the Second Adam, God’s image is restored (AC II 1–2; LC II 65). (TLSB)

firstborn over all creation. Just as the firstborn son had certain privileges and rights in the Biblical world, so also Christ has certain rights in relation to all creation—priority, preeminence and sovereignty (vv. 16–18). (CSB)

Arius (a fourth-century heretic) misunderstood this to mean “the first of many creatures,” as if Jesus were part of the creation. But elsewhere it means “one who is privileged” (e.g., Ex 4:22). St Athanasius also pointed out that the context clearly shows this “firstborn” is not a part of the creation but the cause of it (v 17; *NPNF* 2 4:383). (TLSB)

1:16 *by him all things were created*. See Jn 1:3. Seven times in six verses Paul mentions “all creation,” “all things” and “everything,” thus stressing that Christ is supreme over all. (CSB)

As Creator of “all things,” Jesus is supreme over all (Jn 1:3). (TLSB)

ἐκτίσθη—“Created” is in the aorist tense, referring to the act of creation. (CC)

invisible. The Colossians were particularly interested in angels. However, Paul asserts Jesus’ supremacy over the invisible angels. (TLSB)

thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. Angels. An angelic hierarchy figured prominently in the Colossian heresy (see Introduction: The Colossian Heresy). (CSB)

Names common to Judaism and the NT of angelic or demonic powers that were thought to control the universe. The false teachers apparently assigned to them power independent of Christ (2:8) and held them to be objects of worship (2:18). (TLSB)

The false teachers may have given lip service to Jesus and claimed to believe in him as the Savior, but it is clear that they also regarded other things and other powers as having saving value. (PBC)

through Him and for Him. The goal of creation is the redemption that Christ accomplishes (Rm 8:19–22). (TLSB)

1:17 *He is before all things.* Referring to time, as in Jn 1:1–2; 8:58. (CSB)

“His beloved Son” (v 13) existed before the creation (Jn 1:1–2; 3:16).

in Him all things hold together. Contradicts the heretical teaching that the creation is inherently evil. Jesus still cares very much about this created world, continues to sustain it, and will renew it. (TLSB)

1:18 *beginning.* Of the new creation. (CSB)

firstborn. Christ was the first to rise from the dead with a resurrection body. Elsewhere Paul calls him the “firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1Co 15:20). Others who were raised from the dead (2Ki 4:35; Lk 7:15; Jn 11:44; Ac 9:36–41; 20:7–11) were raised only to die again. (CSB)

“The pope is not, according to divine law or God’s Word, the head of all Christendom. This name belongs to One only, whose name is Jesus Christ” (SA II IV 1). (TLSB)

body. Indicates the intimate relationship between the Redeemer and the redeemed, similar to the “in Christ” terminology (v 22). This relationship is created in Baptism (2:11–13) and sustained in the Lord’s Supper (1Co 10:16–17). (TLSB)

firstborn from the dead. Just as Jesus is the “firstborn of all creation” (v 15) and thus the cause of creation, so Jesus is also the cause of the resurrection. (TLSB)

1:19 *fullness.* Part of the technical vocabulary of some Gnostic philosophies. In these systems it meant the sum of the supernatural forces controlling the fate of people. For Paul “fullness” meant the totality of God with all his powers and attributes (2:9). (CSB)

The totality of God with all His divine attributes began to dwell in Christ at the moment of His conception by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary (cf 2:9). (TLSB)

1:20 *reconcile to himself all things.* † Does not mean that all people will be saved. Scripture speaks of an eternal hell and makes clear that only believers are saved. When Adam and Eve sinned, not only was the harmony between God and man destroyed, but disorder also came into creation (Ro 8:19–22). So when Christ died on the cross, he made peace between God and man, and he restored in principle the harmony in the physical world, though the full realization of the latter will come only when Christ returns (Ro 8:21). (CSB)

Sin alienated the creation from the Creator. Christ reconciles all things, i.e., He brings everything back to its proper order. (TLSB)

making peace. Jesus’ death makes peace possible by faith, but it is also His victory over all who continue to oppose Him. Cf Eph 2:14–16. (TLSB)

1:21 *you* – Believers who were alienated from God (Eph 4:18), which was manifested externally in evil deeds. (TLSB)

were alienated and hostile in mind – ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους καὶ ἐχθρούς τῇ διανοίᾳ - “Alienated” (ἀπηλλοτριωμένους, perfect passive participle of ἀπαλλοτριῶ) describes a broken relationship, such as

of spouses in a broken marriage or of parents and children from one another. The periphrastic construction with the two participles ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένους denotes that alienation from God is the continual state of those without Christ. In the NT, ἐχθρός is used mostly, if not exclusively, to describe one who hates rather than one who is hated. Hence those without Christ are “hostile” toward God. (CC p. 66)

Isaiah 59:2 “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you.”

Ephesians 2:12 “remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise without hope and without God in the world.”

1:22 *has now reconciled* – The past tense indicates that this reconciliation is completed in Christ’s work. Reconciliation is not something Christ has started and we need to complete. (TLSB)

by his body of flesh – The false teachers taught that salvation came through knowledge. Paul emphasized that salvation came from God specifically through the incarnation, through Jesus’ physical life and death (cf 1Tm 2:5; 1Jn 4:2). (TLSB)

death. Christ’s death. (CSB)

above reproach – Un-accused, free of charges. Paul has in mind the whole picture of life with God: our justification (declared righteousness, forgiveness; Rm 3:23–26), our baptismal life on earth (sanctification; Rm 6–7), and our ultimate glorification (life in heaven; Rm 8). (TLSB)

1:23 *in all creation* – Faith in Christ must continue, just as it began—by hearing the Gospel (Jn 8:31–32; Rm 10:17). (TLSB)

every creature.† Jesus promised that the Gospel would be proclaimed to all the world (Mt 24:14). Earlier, Paul said the Gospel had come to all the world (v. 6). These are figures of speech that show the universal scope of the Gospel. This was in contrast to the message of the false teachers, that their secret knowledge was for a select few. (TLSB)

minister – Paul is completely bound in his service to the Gospel for the sake of the Church (v 25). (TLSB)

1:15–23 How can we sinners be sure that Christ’s work reconciles us to God? Paul says we have this assurance because of who Christ is: the image of the invisible God, the Creator, the one who is preeminent over all things. What else would you look to for assurance? To an angel? To yourself? No, look to God Himself in Christ. • “Through Jesus’ blood and merit I am at peace with God. What, then, can daunt my spirit, However dark my road? My courage shall not fail me, For God is on my side; Though hell itself assail me, Its rage I may deride.” Amen. (LSB 746:1) (TLSB)

Paul's Ministry to the Church

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, 25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, 26 the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. 27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching

everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

1:24 *in my suffering.* By Paul. By preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, he experienced all kinds of affliction, but here he was probably referring especially to his imprisonment. (CSB)

Christ's sufferings for our salvation are complete (vv 20, 22; 2:9–15). All Christians suffer with Christ (2Tm 3:12; Rm 8:17) as part of their service to Christ. Baptism connects us to Christ—both to His sufferings and to His salvation (Col 2:12; Rm 6:3–8; Php 3:10). Paul gladly accepted suffering for the sake of the Gospel (Php 2:17) and believed that it brought benefits to the Church (2Co 1:5–7; 4:10–12; Eph 3:13). (TLSB)

I am filling up ... what was lacking. Does not mean that there was a deficiency in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Rather, it means that Paul suffered afflictions because he was preaching the good news of Christ's atonement. Christ suffered on the cross to atone for sin, and Paul filled up Christ's afflictions by experiencing the added sufferings necessary to carry this good news to a lost world. (CSB)

Christ's afflictions – Christ's sufferings alone have redemptive value, and those redemptive sufferings were fulfilled completely and finished at his death on the cross. (CSB)

The church – Christ describes himself as continuing to suffer when the church, his body, is persecuted. These are the (non-redemptive) sufferings which are “still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions,” which Paul (and other servants of the Servant) must endure for the sake of the Gospel. (CSB)

1:25 *the stewardship from God* – Gk *oikonomia*, “management,” “plan,” from which Eng “economy” derives. Paul uses this word to describe God's overall plan of salvation as He guides history (Eph 1:10) and also the management plan entrusted to individual ministers of the Word (1Co 9:17). (TLSB)

to make the word of God fully known.† The meaning may be that the word of God is brought to completion, i.e., to its intended purpose, only when it is proclaimed (cf. Isa 55:11). Paul's commission to bring the word to completion, therefore, required him to make the word of God heard in Colosse as well as elsewhere. See Ro 15:19 for a similar statement. Or “fullness” may parallel the Great Commission: “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Mt 28:20). (CSB)

Could refer to the completeness of the Gospel message in contrast to the claim of the false teachers, who taught that it was deficient. Cf Mt 28:19–20. (TLSB)

1:26 *mystery.* The purpose of God, unknown to man except by revelation. This word was a popular, pagan religious term, used in the mystery religions to refer to secret information available only to an exclusive group of people. Paul changes that meaning radically by always combining it with words such as “disclosed” (here), “made known” (Eph 1:9), “make plain” (Eph 3:9) and “revelation” (Ro 16:25). The Christian mystery is not secret knowledge for a few. It is a revelation of divine truths—once hidden but now openly proclaimed. (CSB)

1:27 *Gentiles ... Christ in you.* The mystery is the fact that Christ indwells Gentiles, for it had not been previously revealed that the Gentiles would be admitted to the church on equal terms with Israel. (CSB)

The mystery is not only about Christ coming to this world but also about Christ coming personally to each individual. Through Word and Sacrament, Christ is in us (Rm 8:10). (TLSB)

Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God.”

Indicates the Law and Gospel outline of the Christian message. (TLSB)

hope of glory.† Employed by the mystery religions and the Gnostics to describe those who had become possessors of the secrets or knowledge boasted of by the particular religion (see Introduction to 1 John: Gnosticism). But in Christ every believer is one of the perfect, as a result of God’s grace and Jesus’ atonement. (CSB)

Literally, “perfect, complete.” Only by virtue of our Baptism into Christ can we be what God wants us to be. (TLSB)

1:29 Literally, “His working that is working in me.” Cf 2:12; Php 4:13. The power for faith and salvation, as well as the power to live by faith, comes from God. (TLSB)

1:24–29 All people suffer because of the fallen nature of the world. But Christians are called to a special form of suffering for the sake of Christ: rejection, ridicule, and persecution. No one likes suffering. Nevertheless, the tears of Christian suffering reflect the glory of the cross of Christ. Remember how God used Christ’s sufferings to save us. He will also use our sufferings to bring Christ’s saving work to others who have no hope. • “In suff’ring be Thy love my peace, In weakness be Thy love my pow’r; And when the storms of life shall cease, O Jesus, in that final hour, Be Thou my rod and staff and guide, And draw me safely to Thy side!” Amen. (LSB 683:4) (TLSB)