

# Paul's Prison Epistles

## Lesson 2

## Paul and the Colossians

Faculty Forum



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# **Paul's Prison Epistles**

## **Lesson Two: Paul and the Colossians**

### **Forum**

With  
Dr. Reggie Kidd

Students  
Christopher Caudle  
Larry Gwaltney

#### **Question 1:**

#### **How did Paul decide which cities to visit?**

**Student:** The list mentioned that Colossae was the least important city to get a letter from the apostle Paul. How did Paul decide which cities to visit? Was it by design or just more based on circumstances?

**Dr. Kidd:** That's a great question and it fascinates me that we would have in our Canon a letter not to a big, fabulous, big steeple church kind of place. It was Paul's missionary strategy, it appears, to go to major metropolitan areas to follow the travel patterns of his time and ultimately he was seeking to get to Rome. Colossae was when the sphere of influence was in the church was at Ephesus, so the church at Colossae seems to have been founded by following Paul's ministry in Ephesus and so it's a part of Paul's ministry in that area which was centered in a major metropolitan area. But the fact that he would write to a church that probably seemed pretty insignificant, I think, says something wonderful about the whole nature of Paul's mission and behind him, Jesus' mission. It's not that there aren't unimportant people and there aren't unimportant little cow-town churches as far as the Lord is concerned. Paul's heart was for people, important and unimportant, Jewish and gentile, male and female, slave and free. So, it was very much a part of his heart, which was shaped like Jesus' heart that would make him want to write to these folks. Especially when he sees an opportunity in ministering to them, to articulate his gospel at a deeper level. I mean they're messing around with venerations and spirits and stuff. I think it really became an occasion for him to think a little bit more out loud and on paper about ideas that were already in his theology.

#### **Question 2:**

#### **If we discover another letter from Paul, should we add it to the Bible?**

**Student:** Just talking about this has got me thinking about something else. If he had written to one small town he may well have written to another small town in records that we don't have. Now, what would happen if we were to uncover one of these today, let's say he wrote to

**Laodicea, do we just stick that in the Bible? How would that be determined?**

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, it would be really interesting if something like that happened and I think we always have to be open to the possibility that something like that might happen. One of the things that we'd also have to recognize is that the situation that existed for the first at least, half millennium of the church's life that enabled the Canon to be acknowledged with the unanimity that it was acknowledged. That situation, those circumstances don't exist. We are at the beginning of the third millennium, and around 1000 the Eastern and the Western churches divided and then the middle of the second millennium the Catholic and Protestant churches divided among themselves. And it would be very, very, very difficult for the church at large to come together and deliberate in charity and before the Lord in prayer, under his Word about whether the letter that got surfaced really did come from Paul. And, just what we should do about it. It's really quite possible. It's more than likely that Paul wrote letters that we didn't get into our Canon and I think the best posture we can take is to be grateful for what's here, assumed that since nothing has really emerged since Paul wrote that has credible claim to be his that we got that God wanted us to have, but we always have to be open to the prospect that something else could emerge. But, it would take a lot of time for something like that to be acknowledged as really being his.

### **Question 3:**

#### **How common was syncretism in the ancient world?**

**Student: Reggie,** our lesson talks quite a bit really about how other beliefs and systems kind of mixed and merged with Christianity in Colossae and this is what Paul is talking about. My question is, was this a common thing in the ancient world? Does this happen in everyone's belief system?

**Dr. Kidd:** My goodness, Larry. That is like the number one issue that Israel always had to deal with. Coming out of Egypt, God had come in with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm to rescue his people from slavery. And while Moses is on the mountain getting the words from the finger of God to outline the terms of the relationship and while he was being given the instructions for the place that was to picture the presence of God with his people, the people are down there making a golden calf because they need to have in their own terms a picture of who their God is. And the cow or the bull that they brought, that was a conception they had brought with them from Egypt. So, they were trying, and they were like "here is your lord," the one who brought you out. So, Israel characteristically was syncretistic, trying to add worship of cultural artifacts along with the God who was revealing himself to them. It was the story of the struggle over the Baals and Asherahs; it was what stole

Solomon's heart away from the Lord through the gods that his thousands of wives introduced him to.

And what is so unique about Judaism and Christianity is that they call in their best voices for exclusive loyalty to one and only one Lord. And that's in contrast...like in Paul's world, it was the Greeks and the Romans who lived with syncretism; they were adding deities upon and deities and then reconciling worship of deities with philosophical systems. And what was striking about Jews was they kept calling one another to exclusive loyalty to Yahweh alone. What would distinguish Christians from the Jews was their recognizing that the God that was to be worshiped was three persons and not just one but they weren't becoming polytheists either; they weren't creating a new pantheon, they were simply recognizing that there was a deep texture to the nature of the deity who had been revealing himself all along.

### **Question 4:**

#### **Did syncretism come just from Gentile converts, or also from Jewish Christians?**

**Student:** So, was Syncretism just primarily a problem that Gentile converts brought into the church, or was this an ongoing struggle with Jews who recognized Jesus as Messiah?

**Dr. Kidd:** It was definitely a struggle that Jews wrestled with as well. In fact, if you go to Israel today and you go over to Tiberius, which was the large city on the southwest corner of the Sea of Galilee that Jesus just seemed to pretty much ignore, no record of his ever having gone in there, but there are ruins of an ancient Jewish synagogue that has on the floor a stunning mosaic of God as the pagan god Helios, the sun god, and he is surrounded by the signs of the zodiac. And there is a synagogue with a floor like that in Cephorus as well, which was just a couple miles away from Nazareth where Jesus was born. Now, those synagogues emerged probably three or four centuries or so after Jesus' birth because what seems to happen in Jewish worship in Palestine after Christians start coming in, after Constantine's mother Helena becomes a believer and they start building buildings to honor places where Jesus was that Jews start doing these depictions of God, which was just an extraordinary thing for Jews to do in view of the second commandment.

But there was very little written, in fact, none that I am aware of that was written to articulate why they would do this. And so, modern scholars are having the conversation among themselves whether this was just pure selling out, syncretism or whether it was Jews trying to say, "No, it's not Helios. Who's really the Lord? It's our God." But what's striking is that they felt the need to depict in human terms who their God was, personally I think, prompted to do so by the emergence of Christianity worshiping God in a whole different way since he had taken on flesh for them. But it simply reflects the fact that Jews, as well as Gentiles, wrestled mightily with syncretism all the time. And that is what

makes it interesting here in Colossians where you have people probably from a more pagan background but they are living in an environment where the likelihood is they have Jews who are also wrestling with how you reconcile exclusive loyalty to the true God with all these competing claims of powers and spiritual powers that are out there.

### **Question 5:** **Why is syncretism dangerous?**

**Student:** Given that syncretism was so common in the ancient world, what makes it so dangerous? People were mistaken about lots of things. If there is one true God then why does it really matter if people are spending their time on things that are not true?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, the scriptural God says he's a jealous God and he made us for a relationship with himself and it's an exclusive relationship and he puts it in terms of the intimacy of marriage. He says that the intention of marriage is exclusive, an exclusive relationship. So, I don't know that there is any more of a profound answer than that. He wants a relationship with us and he doesn't want our eyes focused on some other lover.

### **Question 6:** **Is syncretism still an issue in the modern church?**

**Student:** What's gotten me thinking about all this, for instance, the only mercury I know is about the car but we talk about all these ancient gods and I wonder if this has any relationship to today. For the modern person today is syncretism an issue?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, one of the advantages that people in the ancient world had over the people in the modern and postmodern world is they at least were able to give names to their gods. They recognized that they were worshiping money in the form of the god "money" or they were worshiping fate or fortune or they would go to healing gods to get healing. We, because we live in the secular world where no really thoughtful person believes in the supernatural out there, we tend to worship without being able to acknowledge that it's worship. So, we worship things, we worship relationships, we worship success, we worship money, we worship power and prestige. But we are not really able to own that it is worship. And the great danger for the church is that we, just like people in the ancient world, can say, "I love God." But we can also be loving mammon, or we could be loving success or we can have other relationships that are in competition with the Lord. So, it's as much a problem for us as it was for them. If anything though it's just more difficult for us to name it because in the post-enlightenment West, we were supposed to have banished all the gods from the heavens and we are just left with ourselves.



**Question 7:****Are there real spiritual powers other than God, or are they just personified concepts?**

**Student:** Which way of thinking about this is more true: Are there really spiritual powers that people in our time have just turned into metaphors or concepts or are there really just metaphors and concepts that ancient people turned into spiritual powers?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, the view of the Bible — and it is one that had impressed itself on me for being real — is that we only see a part of the real and that there are all around us spiritual forces and beings that we can't see. One of the great things about the letter to the Colossians is Paul not just acknowledging that there are powers and principalities that we can't see but that when believers have to wrestle with, what is their relationship to those powers, it's the same answer as they have when they wrestle with how good do I have to be to have a relationship with God. Christ did it all; Christ did everything that I need to be seen as being obedient to the Father. And Christ did everything that is necessary to subdue whatever forces there are out there and I don't need to be afraid of any boogiemán. I don't need to be afraid of any avatars; I don't need to be afraid of any other deities that other religions say are out there because I'm told that Jesus is the one who made all spiritual forces. And in the cross there was, for now, a pacification imposed even on that world and that the Devil and his minions cannot do anything more than God will give them permission to do. And I don't need to honor them, I don't need to revere them, I don't need to fear them; I need to just stay in Jesus.

**Question 8:****How real is spiritual warfare?**

**Student:** I have a question about what a lot of people talk about nowadays; they call it spiritual warfare. Some churches talk about it quite a bit, others hardly mention it and I think at this juncture I'd like to know how real spiritual warfare is.

**Dr. Kidd:** It's very real. I'm not always so sure that the churches who are addressing it most forthrightly know how deep and how subtle it is. And sadly, churches that don't address it are having to wrestle with it even without knowing. Tim Keller has said that the believing church in the West has spent a lot of its energy in the last couple hundred years trying to prove its respectability to the enlightened secular West. But now, what we are finding is the emergence of the church in other parts of the world where the issue for Western believers is not to persuade these brothers and sisters that we are intellectually respectable enough but the challenge for us is to convince them a) that we are as



concerned as the Bible is about the morality out of which we live. And that we take it seriously as the world has described in the Bible.

Many believers in the Western church are taking courageous stands in their own churches resisting secular forces in theology and just downright disobedience to the Word and are coming under the authority of spiritual leaders in third world country churches and are finding that those spiritual leaders are themselves much more aware of the presence and the reality of spiritual supernatural forces. And what is going to be really interesting I think over time — and this is not going to be like next week's news headlines or even next year's, it's going to take generations for these new relationships to emerge. And probably what we will find is that we Westerners will find that our imaginations really have to be re-stimulated by the strong supernaturalism that under girds biblical revelation. And our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world are probably going to find that the Word tames lots of wild speculation and provides means of testing spirits. It's going to be really exciting and interesting to see how these relationships emerge.

For me, the writer who has been the most help in understanding spiritual warfare has been C.S. Lewis. I think he really understands the struggle that people in the West have had in reckoning with the reality of the supernatural and with spiritual powers. A great place to start is his *Screwtape Letters* where the tempting organization is presented as a Western bureaucracy. And where the challenges that we face are far more subtle than just looking for demons around every corner; and his space trilogy that starts with *That Hideous Strength* and then goes to *Perelandra* which is Venus and then to *That Hideous Strength* which is about — did I get that right — the first book is *Out of The Sight of The Planet*, which is about Mars and which he just creates this world — and the title says it all — and as far as the heavens are concerned earth has been the silent place, where the bent one has taken over and they are waiting for things to be resolved and for earth to be brought back into communion with the whole rest of the universe. And then *Perelandra* is his retelling of the story of the garden of Eden, set on Venus. And *That Hideous Strength* is set back on earth and it's a story of the tower of Babel. The story hinges on this conspiracy by supposed secularist scientists to bring Merlin up from the grave and to use magical powers that they think he might have for their ends, not realizing that there are — and they were kind of doing it like play. It's a cynical thing, just one more possible way of getting power — But what they fail to realize is they are calling very real, very sinister evil powers down on themselves. And then on the other side are the angelic powers that are actually coming in to overthrow them, working through very ordinary small and weak people.

And where C.S. Lewis helps me in dealing with spiritual warfare is to let me know that there are spiritual forces, but the way that you fight against them isn't necessarily a frontal assault, it's staying in Jesus and living in the reality of his person and work, leaning more and more daily into my share of his death and his resurrection, and calling upon him for wisdom and for guidance, for protection and covering, and for power. And what happens is, as I obey the Lord Jesus Christ he fights my battles. And to me that's the great trick; it's not so much...Paul calls us to battle against spiritual forces. But our role is very simple: it's faith, it's hope, it's love, it's prayer, it's obedience, it's knowing

Jesus. And then the real warrior here is him who fights for us and we have no way of knowing how he is fighting for us day in and day out.

### **Question 9:**

#### **How should Christians think about angels and demons?**

**Student:** Well, given that reality of spiritual warfare and the importance of being centered in Christ, what is a healthy way for Christians today to think about angels and demons? Should we pay any attention to them at all? Should we study these two topics at all?

**Dr. Kidd:** One of my spiritual mentors' professors was a theologian named John Murray who was a Scottish man. And he used to talk about knowing that there were angels because he knew that angels were controlling his foot on the break in his car. The writers of the Hebrews were first angels as ministering spirits. We don't know how the Lord uses them in our lives and I think the thing to do is to take confidence that our life is hidden with Christ in God. And to know that part of his provision for us is to put around us what protection we need. There are millions of contingent forces that we don't know; there is so much about our lives that we have no control over.

About a year ago, I was hit when I was driving. I was hit by a drunk red-light runner, going 65 mph and I was at a red light and the light turned green and I couldn't see what was happening because there was a car next to me — I was in a two-lane turn lane — and I couldn't see past the guy who was next to me. And of course, he could see that a car was coming and I couldn't. I waited just long enough that only the front of my car got out there and this guy just plowed right through. You know, what are all the factors that preserved me in that? Well, it was the wonderful technology of Toyota that built a very safe car. There was the fact that I hesitated, prudently. But beyond that how was the Lord himself through angelic intervention working in the crafting of the technology, in that little the "don't go just yet," whether there was an angelic finger on my shoulder; we don't know. All I know to do is to seek to stay centered in Jesus knowing that I don't have to know; he knows. And that somehow these spiritual forces are in his control and play a role in my protection and in the advancement of his kingdom, in the forming of his church, and in making his kingdom life possible.

### **Question 10:**

#### **Why did the false teachings sound wise to the Colossians?**

**Student:** Reggie, the lesson mentioned that Paul criticized the false teachers as having the appearance of wisdom; in fact, their advice wasn't really wise. What made their teaching sound wise to the Colossian Christians?

**Dr. Kidd:** I think that their teaching probably gave people a sense of control over forces that were beyond them, a sense of control over their own sinfulness, control over the power of their own flesh, and control over these forces that are out there. I think that's a hallmark of pretend wisdom when it is offering a control that you can't have on your own and a sort of a simplistic way to deal with your personal stuff. What Paul argues for is a wisdom that comes from above, and wisdom just takes a slower... Proverbs 9 talks about "lady wisdom" who builds her house, goes into the kitchen and processes things and then knows how to speak and just doesn't kind of fly off the handle with really simplistic answers that don't get to the heart of things. So, I think one of the things that give the appearance of wisdom for these folks is just answers that are just too simple, that put them in charge instead of bringing them deeper into an obedient relationship with the Lord Jesus himself.

### **Question 11:** **Are Paul's arguments against false teaching effective against modern philosophies?**

**Student:** Well, Reggie — this has gotten me to thinking — there is an ancient philosophy but philosophies change a lot over the years and one thing has been spilling over the other: modernism, Marxism, logical positivism, existentialism, and now the hot thing is deconstructionism. And what I was wondering is, the argumentation that Paul uses, is that effective against these modern philosophies?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, in the end Paul's call to bow at the feet of Jesus and no other "ism" is always the answer. The church has always had to struggle with how to articulate its vision of truth and to stay under the authority of Jesus and nobody else in any generation because we are as much shaped by the worldview that's around us as the people around us are. The only thing that distinguishes us — and it's like we can't help but to think in terms of the language and the categories of thought that's around us — but what distinguishes us is that by God's grace, and totally by God's grace, we have some altitude so we can be in it but not of it and we can speak meaningful words of hope to the problems that are often very well diagnosed by contemporary philosophies but where there aren't answers because the answer comes from a redeemer that's outside any particular philosophical system.

But from the very beginning, Christians have had to try self-consciously to figure out how Christ relates to the philosophy of the day. From Augustine, who could not help but think in terms of platonic philosophy, Aquinas who really thought that in the recent discovery of Aristotle's thinking that you had a way of creating a grand Christian philosophy. And in many ways I think Aquinas' thinking was very helpful but there are also places where it looks like it is more of a compromise than redemption. We saw especially in the 19th century, you mentioned Marxism but in that form of materialism, the positivism, the romanticism, and the Western church, I think, failed in large measure

to find a way to stand above these and find redemptive words to say. In the 20th century, I think the mainstream churches in the U.S. and in Europe especially came under the sway of Existentialism. And especially under the leadership of the systematician, Paul Tilliche and in the biblical scholar Rudolf Bultmann, there was just this self-conscious blending of Christianity and Existentialism, in which, guess who won? Existentialism won and churches have really been struggling.

I think what God has done in the meantime was raised us, an evangelical believing voice, that has listened to the analysis of existentialism and its explanation of our cosmic alone-ness; but have gone to the Scriptures to say, "But you know this helps us understand why we feel so alienated." But you can't just accommodate Christianity and make its worldview fit this worldview and find hope. No, you have to go back to the Word itself and take seriously that, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." And he himself came and took our flesh to bear our sins to rise, to be the beginning of a new humanity and one in whom we can have a real hope for eternal life.

And deconstructionism has helped those of us who are pretty aware of the fallibility of our own motives, the fallibility of any authority that's out there, and has made us pretty aware of how many competing stories there are around which to orient our lives and those voices give us the ability to go back and say, but you know there is one story that is compelling and that we can commend as true. And we don't have to have all the answers; all we have to do is know that there is one who does know all the answers. So, I think it's a matter of having an ear to the diagnosis and the analysis of the human situation that a contemporary philosophy will often have keen insight into but then we have to build bridges. We have to stay anchored in Scripture and tell its story, sing its song, and to proclaim its truth as nobly, as winsomely, and as passionately as we can.

### **Question 12:**

#### **What ideas did the false teachers in Colossae promote?**

**Student:** Given the need for the church to provide gospel answers to questions that philosophies raise, what question was the false teaching in Colossae saying that Paul gave an answer to?

**Dr. Kidd:** I think they were suggesting that there was another source of wisdom beyond Jesus and that there were these rival powers that they needed to placate in order to know their security and the assurance of their salvation. It was put in terms of Sabbath cycles. It was put in terms of foods that you avoid to gain security. And Paul's answer was to say, "Christ has come and the calendar is about him. It's not your getting control. And you don't control your flesh by controlling what foods you eat or don't eat. You control your flesh by going deeper into Jesus."

### Question 13:

#### How can Christ be both God and the image of God?

**Student:** Reggie, I saw something in our lesson and I guess it's also reflected in Scripture but I think some people might be confused by it. But it refers to Christ as God and it also refers to Christ as the image of God, and how can something be an image of itself?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, Larry, you're right at the heart of the great mystery that Christians have been trying to understand and articulate from the very beginning. In the early church, they formulated what has come to be called the "hypo-static union," this understanding that Jesus is one person who happens to have two natures, unlike any individual who ever was or ever will be, who is God of God, very God of very Gods. And at the same time, is one of us. And it was the early churches understanding that because he is God, he has the power and the strength to come and actually heal us. But because he is one of us, well it's us that he is able to come and heal. He is able to take on our afflictions and our diseases and thus he is able really to heal us and to raise us up. He comes as the Son of God down to us because we need him to come but as the Son of Man, he rises so that our humanity can be redeemed.

And I really love the way that Paul reflects on Jesus as the very image of God, who yes, is God but is also able to reflect on God and show us what God is like. And, in showing us what God is like, it shows us what we have been made to be like. I love what he does in chapter 3 where he talks about putting to death what's earthly in you and then he lists some things like fornication, impurity, passion, evil desires, covetousness, idolatry, and talks about how we used to live in those things. But then tells us in verse 12 to put on, as God's chosen ones, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven. And I think part of what he is talking about is we have a relationship with one who came to live all of these things. We have a relationship not with a theological concept, redemption, or a thing, a cross; we have a relationship with a person who imaged God and showed us what it was like to be made after the fashion of God. And he comes to live in us teaching us forbearance, and patience, and love.

I think verses like this for Paul were a sort of a call — well, I don't think I mean sort of a call — I think they were a call to these people to pay attention to the Jesus that his traveling companion, Luke was writing about and collecting stories about. And in Jesus you had a model of what it is to be a real live human being, who was obedient to his mom and dad, who grew in favor with God and man, in wisdom, and in stature, who went to the temple and who worshiped the Lord, and who came bearing God's heart and showed us...and would call Zacchaeus down from a tree and who would show forgiveness to a woman who washed his feet with her tears and with her hair. So, I think the image of God thing is remarkable and there is a theological mystery there. How can he be God and the

image of God? But by being the image of God, he shows us a picture of who God is but he shows us there in a sense in which we are called to be images of God. And we won't be an image of God quite the same way he is because we won't be perfect, and we won't have this hypo-static union going on. We are mere humans, but we are redeemed humans and his life is what we are called into in our redemption.

### **Question 14:** **Why is Christianity superior to other faiths?**

**Student:** Reggie, the lesson made an emphatic point that Christ was superior to the other spiritual beings, but it also made the point that Christian faith was superior to those other faiths. How is it that Christian faith, which has people like us in it, how is it that that in fact is superior?

**Dr. Kidd:** The only thing that makes it superior is him and it's the faithfulness of his ministers that make them superior. It's not that I'm a perfect person or you're a perfect person or that any Christian minister has some magic line. It's simply that they are called to proclaim his Word. And their superiority really lies in their recognizing their inferiority to him. What made the Colossian false teachers inferior was that they took a position that compromised Christ's lordship and they were offering other lords as being in competition with him. And they were offering another route to personal growth through their own control of their bodies and their own veneration of these angels. And that's what made them inferior. The only thing that made Paul superior and the ministers that he was endorsing was that they did not step from underneath Jesus' lordship and they did not step from underneath the authority of God's Word and they did not try to find wisdom from some place besides the Lord himself.

### **Question 15:** **How are Christian ministers superior to ministers of other religions?**

**Student:** This touches upon what I was going to ask you. I am a church leader myself; I am a church elder and part of our job is to get other people interested in various ministries including being an elder. But so many times I hear the answer from people that they're not good enough, or that God expects a certain high level of performance, or that, "there is something lacking in my life." When we say, for instance, that Christian ministers are superior we really have to qualify that I think, for our people.

**Dr. Kidd:** We really do. I mentioned my spiritual mentor a while ago — his name was Mort Whitman — and he is a missionary in Romania even as we speak. And when I was in college, he was a minister at a church in that local town, and early on in my Christian

journey I said to him, “I don’t see how I could ever be called to ministry because I sin, and I wrestle with sin and sometimes I don’t even wrestle with it; I just have this overwhelming sense of my unworthiness.” And he had the wisdom to look me in the eye and say, “That is the number one qualification: to recognize that you are not worthy.” The moment you recognize your unworthiness and inadequacy you have placed yourself under his authority and that's where you start. And he can take all your stuff, he took it to the cross and he is so committed to seeing you through to the end of the goal that he has for you to be perfectly conformed to his image, he is not going to let go of you and your only job is to keep your eyes on him and maintain the sober awareness of your need for him, not just when you pray the prayer but daily to have him wash your feet and to cleanse you from each day’s measure of your sinfulness.

**Student:** So, I guess it’s a good thing that after I have taught Sunday school for an hour I think, you know, that really wasn’t that good. So many people I talk to have the same feeling after they look back at something that just went one or something they did in the past week. I guess that’s just the common feature of just the understanding of how inadequate we all are.

**Dr. Kidd:** The point isn’t our inadequacy; the point is his adequacy. And that I think is what set Paul apart, is his keen awareness of it not being about him but being about this Lord who loved him and loved the people enough to use him as an earthly vessel. I think we need to hear that when we hear him say things like, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” it’s talking about his adequacy not being from himself. I mean, he really did believe that there was an adequacy that was provided to him. So, he had this ability to not focus on his adequacy or his inadequacy but just on the task at hand, and to keep his eyes on the Lord and the people that the Lord was calling him to love.

### **Question 16:**

**Is our present salvation really better than the salvation other religions offer?**

**Student:** Our lesson talks about the present superiority of our salvation and for a lot of people in America that may be fine. We’re comfortable. We live in suburbs and nice homes; things are comfortable. But for a lot of Christians, it’s not. A lot of our leaders are in prison overseas, some being tortured, and have died for their faith. Is it really true and accurate to say that our present salvation is superior when all this is going on?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, Larry, that’s a great question. What is so different about Paul’s, and Luke’s, and the New Testament writers’ understanding of salvation — what made it different from people in their own day — was that their salvation was not about rescue from sickness, rescue from financial insecurity, it was a salvation out of the dominion of



Satan, out of his ultimate claim on us, out of his desire to destroy us for eternity and to cripple us emotionally, and to crush us. And what Paul believed is that Jesus had taken the full weight of God's wrath against our sin and in his death and his resurrection had promised that all of creation would ultimately be restored. But between now and then there would be a path of knowing him that would follow his own path of humiliation and then glorification. So, our salvation is not about being taken out of hard things and put on easy street; our salvation is about being rescued from the claim of the evil one to take us out. And it's a salvation that's to a relationship of becoming more like Christ himself.

So, the hope that Christians have always known is a knowing of him in the midst of whatever circumstances we're in. You are right, for some Christians the circumstances look easy. For other Christians, the circumstances look hard. But the reality is...the reality is, the reality may be very different than the perception for some people that life of apparent ease is not easy at all. For people who look like they live in very comfortable circumstances are often beset by crippling physical problems, crippling relational problems and sometimes people who are called to live in what from the outside might look like catastrophic circumstances simply know a joy, simply know a privilege in the nobility of suffering with him, for him, and in him. So, it's just not really possible to judge how a person is doing or how they are experiencing salvation on the basis of those external things. And I think it's because what Jesus did when he came and strapped our humanity to himself and became one of us and suffered, died, and was raised again was that he turned everything upside-down. So, that sickness can just be a means to health in him and so that pleasurable circumstances can often belie very difficult psychological, personal, financial, relational struggles that become the place where Jesus is known.

And I think a lot of it has to do with recognizing the pattern that we keep taking about in these lessons over and over again. And that's the "already and the not yet," the coming of the kingdom, and a partial sense now in our forgiveness, in his assertion of his rule and authority in our lives, and his promise that he is with us and the "not yet," where his work is not done. Part of the "not yet" is that we are called to know a measure ourselves of his sufferings, and that is the privilege. Part of the key, I think, in the Christian life, is recognizing that every day's measure of sufferings, struggling with limitations is the privilege of knowing him better in a way that we would not have known him otherwise if it were not for those limitations that seem to be so bad but really are the occasions of his pressing his own life further upon us or taking his life deeper into us.

### **Question 17:**

**Was Paul's view of Christian liberty in Colossians consistent with his view in 1 Corinthians?**

**Student: Reggie, something in this lesson reminded me of a different passage in 1 Corinthians when Paul encouraged the believers there for the sake of other Christians, they should lay aside their liberties to not eat meat, and to not participate in some things that they were free to**

**do. But in this book, Paul seems to tell Christians that they should go ahead and taste and touch and that it was important for them to do so. Is Paul talking out of both sides of his mouth here or is there an underlying truth that we should see?**

**Dr. Kidd:** Chris, that's a great observation. It so happens that there are different sicknesses that call for different medications and it's important to know where people are and what part of the gospel truth they need to hear. And sometimes it's going to sound really different. And here's where I think the "already, not yet" configuration that we have talked about in these lessons is exceedingly helpful. The Corinthians thought that they had arrived; they thought they were king's kids. They thought they could just enjoy every aspect of the "eschaton," the arrival. And what they were doing was exercising their liberties at one another's expense and they were leaving unattended problems of pride and lovelessness and Paul said, "It's important for you all to understand that you need to keep God's commandments and you need to not go beyond what is written." So, yeah, he was reeling them in and I think it's because they thought that they were in a resurrection state where they could write their own rules.

The Colossians are at a different place. They did not yet understand how much Christ's death and resurrection had benefited them. They needed to know more about the "already." The Corinthians needed to be reminded that there was a "not yet," that they had not yet arrived. Therefore the obligation to keep the commandments, especially to love one another and to defer to one another was still in play. In the case of the Colossians, they like the Galatians were not appreciating how much had already been done for them on the cross and in the resurrection of Jesus and in his presence among them. So, they were being coward into offering obeisance and veneration into gods that were not gods. And they were being told, "Okay, if you want to deal with your flesh, well, then you need to do this and you need to do that." Instead, they needed to be pointed to Christ in whom there is wisdom, in whom there is forgiveness. They need to be aware of the way that Christ had been... He was the circumcision of the human race. His blood had been shed so that their sins could be forgiven and he had been raised and they have life in him and they have been joined to all Jews and Gentiles, males and females, slaves and free who belong to him and are being shaped and refashioned to bear his image. So, they needed to be alerted to the value of the "already" and the Corinthians needed reminded that we're not yet there.

### **Question 18:**

**How can modern Christians enjoy liberty and still be sensitive to others?**

**Student:** Well, Reggie, in listening to you and Christopher talk, I was thinking and wondering if today's churches have the same confusion

**as to where they are positionally as the Corinthians did versus the Colossians, and what does that mean for us as church leaders and teachers for being sensitive to the situation we are in?**

**Dr. Kidd:** Sure, Larry, I think there are a lot of similarities to the modern day church. Some churches are so bound by legalism that believers need to be challenged to come out of their shell and appreciate the freedom that is theirs in Christ, the forgiveness, the grace, and the fact that God's not mad at them anymore. There are other churches that so have that that there are no boundaries and there are presumptive prayers about, well, if I believe enough then I can freedom from sickness, if I believe enough then God will give me financial security, if I believe enough God will do anything I want him to do. And pastoral wisdom calls for a community of leaders to be on our knees as we seek to relate to our congregation and understand what are the kinds of bonds are that we need to address and attack. And in some cases, we are going to find the need to proclaim more of the freedom and the liberty that are ours in Christ. And in other places, we are going to need to say, "You all think that you are in the liberty and freedoms of Christ but you're in an area of presumption. You're claiming promises that are not ours for this age." So again, I think this is one of the really helpful things about the "already, not yet" paradigm. It helps us appreciate the fact that there are some believers that are bound up by pre-cross fear and need to be taken deeper into the reality that has already been delivered. And that there are other people that are in a bondage of thinking that they are beyond a need for discipline, care, for caution, that are themselves apart of going deeper into the wisdom, and the prudence, and the grace and the love that are in Jesus as well.

### **Question 19:**

**How should we express our loyalty to Christ in discussion with other religions?**

**Student:** You talk about loyalty to Christ in this lesson and what does that mean when it comes to challenging other belief systems, other religions? What does that imply for us today?

**Dr. Kidd:** Larry, in the world that we're called to minister in, I think it does mean that we are called to differentiate the claims of Christ from other claims. And just thinking off the top of my head, I think that to go back to something that Tim Keller had said about the need of Christians these days to add to our concern, to explain to the liberal secular West that Christianity is intellectually responsible, we need to add the responsibility to say to that part of the world that is being responsive to the rise of militant Islam that even though Islam promises a better way of living, a way to make you a better person, that its premise about how God is and how you have a relationship with him is wrong in the first place. In the face of Mormonism, the Church of the Latter Day Saints, which also is getting a real audience in the West and around the world largely because they promise community, they promise to help you live a better life, we need to say, "But no, we are not going to be gods ourselves. And it is not about doing good and being good that puts

you in favor with God. No, the only way to have a relationship with God is through his Son's death on the cross and growing into what it is to bear his image in our full humanity, not thinking that we are going to cross over the line into the deity ourselves and that the way to live the good life is to respond to his Holy Spirit." So, we do need to pay a lot of attention to the way that living in Christ shapes us and makes us new and different kinds of people, and the rise of some false religions like Islam, Mormonism — and I could add Jehovah's Witnesses and a lot of new age speculation too — we need to distinguish our view of who God is and particularly the need for a relationship through and only through his Son.

### **Question 20:**

#### **How should we express our loyalty to Christ when interacting with other Christians?**

**Student:** Well, Reggie, to bring the question of your loyalty to Christ a little bit closer to home, how do we express our loyalty to Christ when we are interacting with other Christians, especially if we are convinced that they have some error in their teachings?

**Dr. Kidd:** Well, Chris, it's important to distinguish between the kinds of issues that we disagree on. It's very important to keep clear on the person and the nature of who God is, the person and work of his Son, and you start messing with this delicate articulation of his being a hundred percent divine and a hundred percent human; that's really important to go the mat for. And then, when you talk about the importance of understanding that salvation is what he did for us and not what we can do for ourselves, and the absolute authority of God's word, those are matters where we need to stay very firm. And yet, we also have to recognize that there are other kinds of issues where we're just going to have to extend some grace to each other and recognize that it's really possible for people who are trying to be obedient and trying to be submissive to God's Word, to come to some different conclusions. And to recognize that in the history of the church, the conversation has gone on and on and will continue to go on about things like, well, how old should a person be when they get baptized, and should water be put on them or should they be put under the water? And questions about how we should govern the churches, whether more hierarchically, more democratically, or with some sort of compromise. Matters like even the conversation over how do we understand or unpack the mystery of the fact that God's totally in charge and yet we are also responsible for making decisions.

And we've just got to lean into the importance of the central truths and find ways to become passionately and whole-heartedly persuaded on matters that are not central but also factor in that other brothers and sisters are going to come down differently and somehow we have to learn to love one another, listen to one another, and serve one another with those differences. And if we have anything to offer to the world, it is this ability to love one another on the basis of a common creed, a common faith, a common

person, and just because of his love for us and for one another, we learn to defer to one another and care about each other even though we are going to differ with some things.

And if I may, I think that in Richard Pratt's lessons on Building Your Theology, he has some great things to say about thinking less in binary terms on some issues and thinking more in analog terms where there are degrees of how certain you can be about some things. Some things you can be really certain about and other things, not so certain about and thinking in terms of a cone of certainty. Thinking about putting central truths at the center of things and more peripheral things on the outside and then sort of developing a scale for how you access those things. Richard has some very helpful things to say in Building Your Theology, the 3rd lesson.

**Question 21:**  
**How can we focus on things above without neglecting  
our earthly responsibilities?**

**Student:** Reggie, Paul encourages Christians to put their minds on things above. But how do Christians avoid the trap of focusing on things above without neglecting their earthly responsibilities?

**Dr. Kidd:** Yeah, Chris, that's a great question because I think a lot of people are naturally afraid that if they focus so much on heavenly things they will be no earthly good. But the reality is the reality couldn't be any further away from that. What is so wonderful, and I think this is one of the reasons that Colossians is such a gift to us, is that Paul speaks directly to that. He talks in the beginning of chapter 3 about the need to seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God and to set our minds on things that are above and not on things of this earth. Then he reminds us that we have died and our lives are hid with Christ in God. But then he turns to, okay, what does it mean to set your mind of heavenly things? And what he talks about is the very practical stuff of living in this life; we live in this life with a heavenly mindset. And what that means is that we do the things that are in the rest of Colossians 3 and chapter 4, putting to death that which is earthly in us: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desires, covetousness, which is idolatry, and recognizing that we used to be characterized by these things but we don't have to be characterized by them anymore.

So, in a word, to set our minds on things above is to put to death the things in us that are not like him. Then on the positive side, to put on precisely as those who know that we have been chosen and are called to be holy and beloved by him, to put on who Christ is: compassion as he was compassionate, kindness as he was kind, lowliness as he was lowly, meekness as he was meek, patience as he was patient, forgiving one another the way that he has forgiven us. And above all these things, to put on love, which pretty much defines who he was and who he is. So, living a heavenly mindset is living in union with him in the here and now down here on earth and then he goes on to talking about how we worship together, and then he goes on to talk about living in relationships, as

husbands and wives, as parents and children, as masters and slaves and seasoning our whole lives with prayer. So, it's living before him and in him and with him but knowing that his interest is in filling our lives with him in the here and now. So, it's becoming so heavenly minded that we are actually of earthly good.

**Question 22:**  
**Is regeneration a one-time event?**

**Student:** Well, if I'm hearing you right, and I'm thinking about regeneration, the tendency of a lot of Christians is to think of being born again as a one-time event and that's it and we are onto other things. But what I'm hearing from you is that regeneration involves a lot more than just that one-time historical.

**Dr. Kidd:** But, Larry, praise God, there is a one-time regeneration where those of us who were just lost as can be, find ourselves grabbed by a life that comes upon us and comes into us outside of ourselves. As Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again; you must be born from above," — that life has come into us. But the wonderful thing — and it's the part that makes Colossians so powerful — is that it's a regeneration that goes on and on. Paul's way of talking about it is the renewal of the mind. Once God takes hold of us he wakes us up and he makes us new, but it's like daily he is making us new. There is the call in Romans 12 to present our bodies as living sacrifices and to be conformed, to be — help me with this verse — "I appeal to you brothers by the mercy of God, to present your bodies as living sacrifices. Don't be conformed to this world..."

**Student:** "...Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."

**Dr. Kidd:** Thank you. "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." That's something that we live in and that's very much a process. It has a beginning, but the beginning is just that. It's the start of something wonderful that goes on the rest of our lives. And he talks about it here in Colossians 3:9-10 as well. "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put up the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge, after the image of its creator." A lot of what Paul is doing in this letter is helping to prime the pump for people like you and me being progressively renewed, to be progressively renewed in our minds so that we might know him better, proclaim him more boldly and truly, and live him well.

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