

2. Questions for Reflection (Borchert, p 102)

- a. How does the portrait of Christ in Colossians impact you as a Christian? What aspects do you find most powerful? What aspects do you think may speak most powerfully to those in our growing biblically illiterate generation? How did the portrait of Christ affect the way Paul directed his message to the Colossians?
- b. As you have reflected on the household codes in Colossians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter, how might understanding their origins make a difference in the perspectives of our faith communities?
- c. How is baptism viewed in your Christian fellowship? Could Paul's model of understanding have any implications among your family of faith? Explain.

Homework

2. Read 1 Corinthians at least once and in one-sitting, if possible.
3. Read Borchert chapter 5, pp 103-123.
4. Think about your response to the *Questions for Reflection* on p 123.
 - a. The Corinthians were convinced that they understood the implications of the gospel. But in what ways did Paul show them that they were biblically illiterate? How does this treatment of knowledge have any relevance for us today? What are the implications of Paul's advice for us today in terms of our generation's views of sexual immorality?
 - b. How do you think Paul would confront us on the matter of idolatry today?
 - c. Where do you stand on the role of women in the church? What is the significance of baptism and the Lord's Supper for your faith community? How does your church treat the issue of speaking in tongues? How important is the role of the Holy Spirit for you? For your church? Is the resurrection of Jesus central in your life? Explain.
 - d. Are you ready to challenge your faith community to take Jesus as the model for life? What implications may follow for them and for you?

Portraits of Jesus

A Portrait of Jesus by Paul in Colossians

A. Colossians Overview

1. Author

- a. Salutation: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God . . .” (Col 1:1).
- b. Conclusion – “I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand” (Col 4:18a).
- c. However, not all scholars are convinced that this letter was written by Paul.
 - 1) Analysis of its style (i.e., grammar and syntax), changes in vocabulary (e.g., no use of terms “sin,” “law,” “justification,” “salvation”) and theological emphases (e.g., no mention of *parousia*/eschaton, emphasis on “the faith” as a body of teaching, and inclusion of the household code (i.e., 3:18-4:1) point to another author (Andrew T. Lincoln, *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. XI, 578-79).
 - 2) It may have been written after Paul’s death by a follower who attributed it to Paul.

2. Audience

- a. “To God’s holy people in Colossae . . .” (Col 1:2).
 - 1) Colosse was a small town on the banks of the Lycus River in southeast Asia Minor, modern Turkey.
 - 2) Paul had not visited this city, which was most likely evangelized by Epaphras, Paul’s co-worker (cf., Col 1:7-8).
 - 3) Eusebius, an early church father, said that Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae were destroyed by an earthquake in CE 63-64. Laodicea and Hierapolis were quickly rebuilt but Colosse appears to have remained uninhabited for a longer period (Eusebius, *Chronicle*, 1.21-22).
- b. Paul wrote to a church filled with young believers who may have been confused by bad/false teaching of others who followed after Epaphras.
- c. N. T. Wright says, “Scholars have long held that Colossians was written to combat a particular danger within the young church. False teachers were inculcating spurious doctrines and practices, demoting Christ from his position of unique pre-eminence, and encouraging various dubious mystical and ascetic religious practices. But there is no agreement on the identity of these teachers or the nature of their teaching. Some suggest a pagan cult of one sort or another; others some form of sectarian Judaism; others, an early form of Gnosticism; others, a blend of some or all of these” (N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, vol. 12, 23).
- d. “After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea” (Col 4:16).
 - 1) Most scholars believe that the “letter from Laodicea” is most likely the letter we know as Ephesians, which is a general but more detailed exposition based on the outline of Colossians.
 - 2) Paul’s letters, while often written to specific churches on specific occasions, were generally circulated and read by all the churches. This is the beginning of the processes of canonization.

3. Date

- a. Paul’s statement, “Remember my chains,” in the letter’s closing (i.e., Col 4:18b) indicates that the letter most likely was written by the apostle from prison.
- b. Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, and Philippians are Paul’s prison epistles.
- c. The question is from which prison did he write? This would fix the date of writing.
 - 1) Ephesus (cf., 2 Cor 1:8, 1 Cor 15:32) – CE 52-56 (N.T. Wright’s view)
 - 2) Caesarea (cf., Acts 24:27) – CE 57-59
 - 3) Rome (cf., Acts 28:16ff) – CE 61-62 (View of the majority of scholars)
 - 4) Another unknown imprisonment (cf., 2 Cor 6:5, 11:23)

B. The Portrait of Jesus by Paul in Colossians

1. Images of Jesus in Colossians (Borchert, pp 95-102)

- How does the portrait of Christ in Colossians impact you as a Christian? What aspects do you find most powerful?
- What aspects do you think may speak most powerfully to those in our growing biblically illiterate generation?
- “. . . Paul is drawing upon his overall theological understanding to help his readers find that genuine human and spiritual maturity which God wills for his people” (Wright, 39).

a. **The Image of God**

- 1) “The description of Jesus in Colossians 1:15-20 is one of the highest Christological assertions in the New Testament . . .” (Borchert, 97).
- 2) “. . . virtually every section and sub-section in the main body of the letter could be accurately summed up with reference to Christ himself. This indicates an important truth about Colossians: its driving force comes from that which is stated in 1:15-20. The main reason why the Colossians should give thanks to God is because of Jesus Christ; if they do this with full knowledge and understanding about who he is and what he has achieved, everything else will fall into place (Wright, 21).
- 3) **Read Col 1:15-20.** – This key passage paints four key components of Jesus’ portrait in Colossians.
- 4) Borchert states, “This christological hymn of Colossians is a magnificent portrait of Christ Jesus who is portrayed as being in the very image (*eikon*) of God, even though God is invisible (Col 1:15)” (Borchert, 98).
- 5) The Greek word that Paul used to describe Jesus is *eikon* from which we get our modern term icon.
 - a) Today we use icons or little images on our phones and computers to represent a resource that we want to access but cannot see. By going through the icon, we can activate the full function or tool that the icon represents.
 - b) Jesus is the icon who perfectly represents God the Father to us, reconciles us to him, grants us full access into his presence, and connects us with his power.
- 6) Paul’s claim about Jesus is consistent with that of the Apostle John and of Jesus himself.
 - a) John testified, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14).
 - b) “Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’ Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves” (Jn 14:8-11).
 - c) In his high priestly prayer, Jesus said, “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them” (Jn 17:25-26).

- 7) What aspects of God's character and nature does Jesus most clearly reveal to you?
 - a) "Another synonym for 'gospel' is the term 'mystery,' with its connotation of a previously hidden purpose of God that has now been disclosed. . . . This exclusive focus on Christ as being at the heart of the gospel message is reinforced when the notion of proclaiming the gospel can be expressed simply as proclaiming him (1:28). The gospel not only has at its center a person, but it also entails received teaching about this person" (Lincoln, 569).
 - b) In Jesus, God reveals the "mystery" (Gk., *mysterion*) of both who he is and his plan for the redemption of sinful humanity.

b. **The Firstborn**

1) **Read Col 1:15-17.**

- 2) ". . . Jesus is to be understood as the firstborn (*prototokos*) in all the created order . . ." (Borchert, 98).
- 3) The Greek word that Paul used to describe Jesus was *prototokos* which literally means "first born."
- 4) Various Church Fathers explained why this particular word was used by Paul. The term "first born" and not "first created" was used to distinguish the Son, who has no beginning, from someone/something with a beginning (i.e., that was created).
- 5) On this issue, the church father Athanasius said, "Not then because he was from the Father was he called "Firstborn," but because in him the creation came to be; and as before the creation he was the Son, through whom was the creation, so also before he was called the Firstborn of the whole creation, the Word himself was with God and the Word was God. . . . If then the Word also were one of the creatures, Scripture would have said of him also that he was Firstborn of other creatures; but in fact, the saints' saying that he is "Firstborn of the whole creation" demonstrates that the Son of God is other than the whole creation and not a creature (Athanasius in *Discourses Against the Arians* II.63)
- 6) Scripture is united on the supremacy of Jesus as God and creator of all that is.
 - a) "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1:1).
 - b) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (Jn 1:1-3).
 - c) "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Ro 8:29)
 - d) "For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'? Or again, 'I will be his Father, and he will be my Son'? And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him'" (Hb 1:5-6).

c. **Head of the Church**

1) **Read Col 1:18.**

- 2) A logical extension of Christ's supremacy as the firstborn and image of God is that he is the head of the church (cf., Col 1:18).
- 3) Borchert notes, "Accordingly, this Jesus the Christ is the supreme head of the church and the ultimate Lord of everything. For Paul, this supreme ranking of Christ reflects the immense significance and power of the resurrection (1:18). Just think about this picture of Jesus the Christ. Does it not send shivers up our spine?" (Borchert, 98).

- 4) The image of Jesus as head of the church/body is central in Paul's theology.
 - a) "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority" (Col 2:9-10).
 - b) "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Eph 1:22-23).
 - c) "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." (Eph 5:23-24).
 - d) In 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, which we will study next week, Paul developed this theology of the church as the body of Christ more fully.

d. Fullness of God

1) Read Col 1:19-20.

2) Borchert observes, "In spite of Christ's incredible power and standing, his goal was not self-serving but was to bring reconciliation and peace to all humanity—indeed all creation—through his sacrificial death. This reconciliation will ultimately be possible because the fullness or completeness (*pleroma*) of God resides in him (1:18-20; cf. Phil 2:4-11)" (Borchert, 98).

3) Read Col 2:8-10.

4) Borchert well summarizes, "Paul is familiar with the dangers and weaknesses of Greek philosophical thinking concerning their gods and their speculations about the elemental powers or spiritual forces in the universe. So, he reminds them that in Christ the 'full power' (*pleroma*) of God is present (2:8-10). They do not need any other power because after the death and resurrection of Jesus, those so-called 'powers' were rendered powerless for those who live in Christ (2:15)!" (Borchert, 99)

e. One in Whom Believers are Baptized and Raised

1) How is baptism viewed in your Christian fellowship?

2) Read Col 2:9-12.

3) Borchert says, "If the Colossian Christians understand Christian baptism correctly, they would recognize that they have been circumcised internally by God and do not need such external tattoos or human markings. . . . Having thus introduced the subject of baptism in chapter 2, Paul uses that introduction to summon Christians to live for Christ in the power of their risen Lord. . . . Accepting and living out one's baptism is a key component of being a Christian. Baptism for Paul is not a passive acceptance of a past event in one's life. For him, baptism must be an active and ongoing reality in life. Otherwise, it has no eschatological (futuristic) significance" (Borchert, 99-100).

a) Could Paul's model of understanding have any implications among your family of faith? Explain.

b) How do we make our baptism "an active and ongoing reality in life"?

4) In speaking of being "buried with [Jesus] in baptism" and also "being raised with him," Paul points to our on-going walk with the Lord; our relationship with him. Because we have entered into a new life walking with Jesus there are two important implications for living: 1) We choose to "put to death" or "rid" ourselves or our earthly, sinful nature; 2) We choose to "put on" or "clothe" ourselves with godly words and actions that honor our head, Christ Jesus.

5) **Read Col 3:1-17.**

- a) Things that we must “put to death” or “rid” from our lives in our walk: vv. 5-9
 - b) Things that we “put on” or clothe ourselves with in our walk: vv. 10-17
- 6) We put off and put on not because of rules, regulations, or requirements but because we walk/live in relationship with Jesus and want to model our lives after him out of love and respect for who he is and what he has done. Ultimately, putting off and putting on the things Paul mentions here lead us to a happier, meaningful, more abundant life on our way to eternity.
- 7) One of the outcomes of living out our baptism is seen in our relationships with others in life, especially with those whom the world sees as our superiors and those whom the world views as our inferiors.
- a) Borchert writes, “It is crucial for contemporary Christians to recognize that all Christian relationships are to be understood as subject to the Lordship of Christ” (Borchert, 101).
 - b) **Read Col 3:18-4:1.**
 - c) This is the household code for Christian relationships that harmonizes with Greek cultural norms of submission by wives, children and slaves, but also contains startling instructions to husbands, fathers, and masters based on ultimate submission to Christ.
 - d) As you have reflected on the household codes in Colossians 3:18-4:1, Ephesians 5:21-6:9, and 1 Peter 2:11-3:22, how might understanding their origins make a difference in the perspectives of our faith communities?

C. Homework

1. Read 1 Corinthians at least once and in one-sitting, if possible.
2. Read Borchert chapter 5, pp 103-123.
3. Think about your response to the *Questions for Reflection* on p 123.
 - a. The Corinthians were convinced that they understood the implications of the gospel. But in what ways did Paul show them that they were biblically illiterate? How does this treatment of knowledge have any relevance for us today? What are the implications of Paul’s advice for us today in terms of our generation’s views of sexual immorality?
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 - d. Are you ready to challenge your faith community to take Jesus as the model for life? What implications may follow for them and for you?