

THE CHRIST REVEALED IN COLOSSIANS: THE CENTRALITY AND UNIVERSALITY OF GOD'S ECONOMY

by David Yoon

In the unsearchable wisdom of God, the many problems in the early church afforded the apostles rich opportunities to present manifold revelations of Christ as the unique solution to every issue and the surpassing provision for every need among the saints. Hence, although the serious problems in the church should warn us to not be oblivious of the enemy's schemes, to be preoccupied with them would be to miss the divine wisdom and to neglect God's unwavering focus—Christ. This principle obtains in interpreting Colossians. While we must be aware of the negative background that was the occasion for Paul to write this Epistle, we should avoid the shortcoming of the many commentators who dwell more on Paul's opposition to the situation than on his solution and thereby miss the height and depth of the revelation of Christ in this Epistle.

The battle that Paul waged was against a mysticism, then prevailing in Colossae, composed of both Gentile and Jewish elements in the form of Gnostic philosophy (2:8) and Mosaic ordinances (v. 14), which brought the saints in Colossae into various ascetic practices and the worship of angels (vv. 18, 21-23) and subjected them to regulations concerning circumcision, the Sabbath, various religious feasts, and what was acceptable to eat and drink (vv. 11, 16). This battle continues today, for although their manifestations have varied across time and space, worldly philosophies, human traditions, and religious rules of conduct have ceaselessly buffeted the churches. They are what Paul calls "the elements of the world" (vv. 8, 20) and may be collectively referred to as "culture."

In essence, the influence of human culture had a twofold effect on the Colossian believers and threatens to do the same wherever it can: it displaced Christ as the preeminent One in the church and led the believers into living according to human traditions, retaining them under the authority of darkness in the earthly sphere of ritualistic Jewish religion and empty Greek philosophy (3:2, 5; 1:13). Paul's response was to open to them the highest revelation of Christ in the entire New Testament, unveiling item after item of His supremacy in every realm in order to ground the believers in the incomparable divine truths concerning the person and work of Christ as a safeguard against the encroaching deceptions of human philosophy and religion. But what is often missed by theological treatments of Colossians is that this Epistle is more than a Christological treatise defending objective truths concerning the supremacy of Christ; it is a loving exhortation from the apostle aimed at restoring the believers to the subjective experience and enjoyment of Christ as their God-allotted portion (1:12; 2:18) for God's purpose to gain the church as the Body of Christ (v. 19; 3:15) and the new man (v. 10). The insidious effect of culture is not only to diminish the position of Christ by erroneous teachings but also to replace the all-inclusive Christ in the believers' life and experience with traditions and ordinances. Paul's struggle was therefore not only for the saints to have a proper knowledge of the preeminent Christ (1:9—2:23) but also for them to enter into a living in which the all-inclusive and extensive Christ replaces every element of culture (3:1—4:6). Colossians

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strongly emphasizes that for the proper church life in the will of God, Christ must not only be preeminent in all things (1:18) but also be the unique constituent of the church (3:11). Sadly, however, the condition of many Christians today mirrors that of the Colossians—culture has dethroned and even subtly replaced Christ, resulting in a church life that is a mixture of Christ and culture instead of a pure constitution and expression of Christ. And the many expositions of this Epistle that convey the orthodox teachings of Christ's supremacy yet leave Him as a distant object of worship are powerless in the fight to bring the believers wholly out of the sphere of culture into the heavenly realm of God's New Testament economy concerning Christ and the church.

Paul counteracted the assault of culture on the church in Colossae by ministering the riches of Christ to an incomparable degree. In particular, in his struggle for the saints to have the full knowledge of God's will, he presents to them the twofold mystery of the divine economy: the mystery of God and the mystery of Christ. In two crucial passages the apostle speaks of his commission from God to make this mystery known. In Colossians 1:25-27 Paul declares that he became a minister according to the stewardship of God in order to complete the word of God, that is, "the mystery" hidden from the ages and the generations: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Similarly, in Ephesians 3:2-10 Paul proclaims that he became a minister according to the stewardship of the grace of God in order to enlighten all that they may see "the economy of the mystery," which was hidden in God throughout the ages. Juxtaposing these portions makes clear that the economy of God—His plan to accomplish His eternal will and the long-concealed mystery now revealed to the saints—is summarized concisely in the expression *Christ in you, the hope of glory*. In other words, the kernel of God's New Testament economy is Christ as the Head dwelling in and joined to the believers as the Body in an organic, mystical, and spiritual union for the realization of the hope of glory, which will be the mature corporate expression of God in Christ as the glorious manifestation of the believers' growth in the divine life (Col. 3:4; Eph. 3:16-21). This tremendous vision of God's economy is detailed in Ephesians 3:8-10, which unveils that the economy of the mystery is to impart the unsearchable riches of Christ into the believers for the producing of the church as the universal display of God's multifarious wisdom. God's hidden purpose is concerned exclusively with these two mysteries: Christ as the mystery of God and the church as the mystery of Christ, which Paul collectively refers to as the great mystery (5:32).

Accordingly, in unfolding the mystery of the divine economy in Colossians, Paul presents an extensive revelation of Christ as the mystery of God, the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead (2:2, 9), and also unveils the church as the mystery of Christ, the fullness of Christ (4:3; Eph. 1:23). Colossians reveals first that Christ is the centrality (referring to His preeminence, to His having the first place) and universality (referring to His all-inclusiveness, to His being everything) of the Triune God, the created universe, and the church as the new creation. Then Colossians speaks concerning the church as the mystery of Christ revealed as the mystical Body of Christ and the universal new man—the corporate enlargement and expression of Christ produced by the dispensing of Christ as the Spirit into the believers. The complete divine revelation in Colossians is therefore the eternal will of God to impart Christ as the mystery of God, who is the centrality and universality of God, into the believers' entire being so that this preeminent, all-inclusive, and extensive Christ may be their centrality and universality for the constituting and building up of the church as the mystery of Christ, in which He has the preeminence and is all and in all.

Christ as the Mystery of God

Alluding to its significance to secret pagan societies called mystery cults (Vine 424), the apostle Paul in his Epistles uses *mystery* to denote not only something beyond understanding (Eph. 5:32) but also an essential piece of knowledge that, once possessed, unlocks access

to the secret of the universe concerning God and His will. Whereas the cults carefully guarded their mysteries from all outsiders, Paul's commission from God was to openly proclaim His once-hidden mystery concerning His eternal purpose and economy to all human beings, including the Gentiles (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:9-10). In Colossians 2:2 Paul places *the mystery of God* in apposition to *Christ*, indicating that it is a title of Christ. Indeed, it is "an aggregate title" of Christ, including every aspect of Christ's person and work, a title that unfolds to the believers both the intrinsic being and eternal economy of God (Lee, *Subjective* 11). Charles John Ellicott states in *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, "Here Christ is the 'mystery of God'—*i.e.* (according to the Scriptural meaning of the word 'mystery'), He in whom the inscrutable nature of God, rich in the 'hidden treasure of wisdom and knowledge,' is revealed to us. The name again leads up to the doctrine of 'the Word of God'" (105). Christ being the Word of God tells of His eternal function in the Divine Trinity to define, express, and explain God (John 1:1; Rev. 19:13); similarly, Christ being the mystery of God bespeaks His unique role to make known the hidden God (Isa. 45:15) and His untraceable economy (Job 10:13; Eph. 3:9). Apart from Christ, God is unapproachable, invisible, unknown, and concealed in a mystery beyond human imagination (1 Tim. 6:16; John 1:18; Acts 17:23; 1 Cor. 2:9). But in Christ and through the Spirit, God with His plan and purpose is knowable and understandable, even revealed and manifested (v. 10; John 17:2-3; Col. 1:9-10; Eph. 1:17-18; 1 Tim. 3:16). Though no one has ever seen God, the only begotten Son in the bosom of the Father has declared Him (John 1:18), and though no one in the past fully knew God the Father, He is now made known "to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27). Christ and Christ alone is the explanation and manifestation of God; without exception, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Him (Col. 2:3).

What constitutes Christ the mystery of God is His function in the Godhead, of which Colossians emphasizes three significant aspects. First, Colossians 1:19 says that in Christ "all the fullness was pleased to dwell." The fullness is personified in the expression *pleased to dwell*, pointing to a living and divine person: God Himself with His riches expressed in Christ. Similarly, Colossians 2:9, speaking of Christ, says, "In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Since the Godhead comprises the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, the fullness of the Godhead here refers to the complete Triune God—including the eternal Father with His unfathomable wealth, the all-filling Son with His unsearchable riches, and the immeasurable Spirit with His bountiful supply—embodied and expressed in Christ (Isa. 9:6; Rom. 11:33-34; 1 Cor. 2:10; 2 Cor. 9:8; Eph. 1:23; 4:10; 3:8; John 3:34; Phil. 1:19). Apart from Christ as the embodiment of God, we cannot find, see, or know God, because all that God is and has is embodied in Him; outside of Christ there is no God. Second, Colossians designates Christ as the Son of God's love (1:13). As the beloved Son of God in whom the Father delights, Christ manifests God the Father. In the Son's own words, to see, behold, hear, know, and have the Son is to see, behold, hear, know, and have the Father (John 12:45; 14:10-11; 1 John 2:23). Third, Colossians states that Christ is "the image of the invisible God" (1:15), the expression of God, for He as the Son is "the effulgence of [God's] glory" and "the impress of His substance" (Heb. 1:2-3). Since Christ is the image of God, "the *visible* manifestation of that in God which is *invisible*" (Alford 1286), Christ is none other than God Himself expressed eternally. As the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, the Son of God's love, and the image of God, Christ is the totality, the manifestation, and the revelation of God in the Godhead.

Colossians further discloses that as the mystery of God, Christ is not only the embodiment and expression of God in the Godhead but also the entire story of God in the divine economy for the fulfillment of the divine will. After stating in Colossians 1:9 that he prayed on behalf of the Colossians that they would be filled with "the full knowledge of [God's] will," Paul declares in 2:1-2 that he had a great struggle to comfort their hearts unto "the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ." Here Christ as the mystery of God is identified with the will of God because He is the center and circumference of

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God's will, which is intrinsically related to His purpose and His economy (Eph. 1:5, 9-11). According to Ephesians 3:10-11, God "made" His "eternal purpose," His eternal economy, "in Christ Jesus our Lord." The Greek word translated "made" may also be rendered "carried out," "fulfilled," or "accomplished," indicating that God not only formed but also executes His eternal economy in Christ, who is "the center, circumference, element, sphere, means, goal, and aim of this economy" (Lee, *Conclusion* 17). As the One in whom God's economy is fulfilled, Christ is the embodiment of the processed and consummated Triune God, as clearly revealed in Colossians. The Triune God's process began with incarnation, which is wonderfully implied with the word *bodily* in 2:9. Christ as the incarnate God was then crucified to obtain an eternal redemption, the forgiveness of sins (1:14; 2:13; Heb. 9:12); to accomplish a universal reconciliation of all things to God, making peace through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:20, 22; Eph. 2:11-18); and to put off the body of the flesh, executing a spiritual circumcision, or a cutting off, of every negative thing (Col. 2:11, 20). In that victorious death, God abolished the law of the commandments in ordinances (v. 14) and put the angelic rulers and authorities to open shame, triumphing over them in the Son on the cross (v. 15). Christ was then buried and raised by God from the dead to be the Firstborn from the dead, the Head of the Body, the church (v. 12; 1:18), and seated at God's right hand (3:1) to be the Head of all rule and authority (2:10). In passing through such a process, Christ was consummated to become a life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b) so that He could be in us (Col. 1:27) as our life (3:4), arbitrating in us as peace (v. 15) and dwelling in us as the richly supplying word (v. 16). Because we are in a coinhering union with Christ in the divine life, wherein He is in us (1:27; 2:6) and we are in Him (1:28; 2:7, 10-11), all of Christ's processes have become our spiritual history to become our subjective experience: in His crucifixion and burial we died with Christ from the elements of the world and were buried together with Him (vv. 20, 11-12; 3:3, 5; Gal. 6:14); in His resurrection and ascension we were made alive and raised together with Christ so that we should seek the things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God (Col. 2:12-13; 3:1; Eph. 2:5-6). Today our life is hidden with the resurrected and ascended Christ in God, whom the world cannot behold at present (Col. 3:3; John 14:19), and when the Christ who is concealed within us as our life is manifested in His second coming, we also will be manifested with Him in glory (Col. 3:4; Rom. 8:17; 2 Thes. 1:10). Colossians unveils that as the mystery of God, Christ is the focus of God's entire New Testament economy, the One in whom the Triune God underwent a mysterious process and also the One in whom the believers were included for their full salvation (John 14:20; 1 Cor. 1:30).

The Centrality and Universality of Christ in the Triune God

According to Colossians 1:18, Christ, who has the first place in all things, is the centrality of the Triune God, having the preeminence even in the Godhead. This is not to say that the Son is first in rank or that the Father and Spirit are subordinate to the Son, but that as the Son who expresses the Father and is realized as the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), Christ is the focus of the revelation of the Triune God in the holy Word. All that the Father purposed He purposed in, through, and for the Son; all that the Spirit does also is for the Son; and the unique center and focus of the Bible is Christ. Since Christ is the Son of God's love (Col. 1:13), the unique object of God's love and delight (Matt. 3:17), the Father commanded the disciples to hear the Son (17:5). The Father "has given all judgment to the Son, in order that all may honor the Son even as they honor the Father" (John 5:22-23). After Christ emptied and humbled Himself through His incarnation, human living, and crucifixion, in His ascension God highly exalted Him, bestowing on Him the name which is above every name (Phil. 2:6-11). In Christ's exaltation God "crowned" Christ "with glory and honor" and "set Him over the works" of His hands (Heb. 2:7-9; 2 Pet. 1:17), enthroning Christ as God's King in the heavens (Psa. 2:6) so that in His second coming He may receive the nations as His inheritance and the limits of the earth as His possession (v. 8). Just as the Father always exalts the Son, so also the Spirit of reality testifies concerning the Son (John 15:26). The Spirit guides the believers

into the Son as the reality, making all that the Son is and has real to them (16:13; 14:6), and the Spirit glorifies the Son by declaring the riches of the Son with the fullness of the Father to the believers (16:13-15). Furthermore, the Spirit-inspired Bible is uniquely a revelation of Christ (cf. Rev. 1:1; 19:10). The first name and the last name mentioned in the New Testament is Jesus (Matt. 1:1; Rev. 22:21), and all the Old Testament Scriptures testify concerning Him (Luke 24:27, 44-45; John 5:39). Hence, the Son is the supreme object to the Father, to the Spirit, and in all Scripture, showing that in the divine revelation and for the divine economy, Christ the Son occupies the place of centrality in the Godhead.

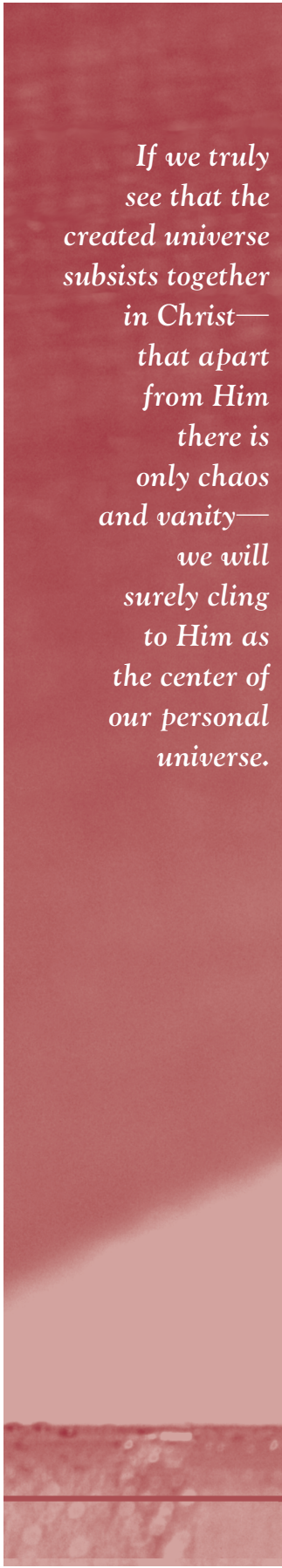
Christ is not only the centrality but also the universality of the Divine Trinity. As the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, Christ is not just the Son but the complete God—the inexhaustible manifestation of God in whom God in His totality resides and in whom the Triune God carries out every operation for the fulfillment of His purpose. Hence, although the Bible does not say that the Father is the Son or that the Spirit is the Son, it does say that the Son is called “Eternal Father” (Isa. 9:6) and that “the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:17), proving that “the Triune God is one person who is focused on the Son as the center” (Lee, *Four Crucial Elements* 91). The Son being both the Father and the Spirit indicates that Christ is not only the centrality but also the universality of the Triune God. When we have Christ, we have the entirety of the Triune God in His excelling person, through His tremendous process, and with His eternal accomplishments.

The Centrality and Universality of Christ in the Creation

The preeminent, all-inclusive Christ is the centrality and universality not only of the Triune God but also of the whole created universe. Paul unveils Christ as the center of creation by speaking of Him as “the Firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15) and the One in whom “all things cohere” (v. 17). The title *Firstborn of all creation* in Colossians 1:15 is inaccurately interpreted by many modern commentators on account of its historical association with Arianism. Since this verse was used as the basis for the heresy that Christ is not God but merely a creature of God, the traditional reflex is to forcefully argue the opposite. But it does require some force to make the text mean that Christ is only the Creator. While modern Protestant commentators strongly affirm that the word *firstborn* indicates only the divine preexistence and preeminence of Christ in reference to creation, this word actually does not distance Christ from the creation; indeed, if only Christ’s divine preexistence and priority were in view, clearer alternatives were available to Paul (compare verse 17 of the same chapter; John 1:15). Commentators attempt to avoid this difficulty by saying *firstborn* is a metaphorical reference to a kind of cosmic primogeniture, indicating Christ’s right to inherit all creation. While not wrong, that interpretation neglects the fact that if one is the firstborn of a family, he is necessarily part of the family; if mere heirship were at issue, Paul once again had a more suitable alternative (compare Heb. 1:2). Paul’s profound concept of Christ—whom Paul did not treat as a theological object divisible into two natures but always, rather, as a historical person, inseparably divine and human—as the *firstborn* (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18) is precisely that He in His intimate relationship with creation, both old and new, is the centrality and universality of the divine economy (Robichaux 30-38).

The divine revelation concerning the person of Christ is wondrously balanced. On the one hand, Christ has eternal preexistence and eternal deity in the Godhead (Phil. 2:6; John 17:5), for He is Jehovah from eternity to eternity, the self-existing and ever-existing God (Col. 1:17; John 8:58; Rom. 9:5; Isa. 43:13; Exo. 3:14; Psa. 90:2). On the other hand, since Christ is the Word become flesh, a man who partook of created blood and flesh, He is part of the creation, a creature (John 1:14; Heb. 2:14; 10:5). As the Firstborn of creation—which is not a figurative title—Christ needed to be born, as prophesied in Isaiah 9:6: “A child is born to us, /...And His name will be called / ...Mighty

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to the Spirit,
and in all
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the divine
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of centrality
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to Him as
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our personal
universe.

God, / Eternal Father.” In His divinity the incarnated Christ is the mighty God and the eternal Father, but as a human child, Christ had to be born—that is, created, for birth is the carrying out of creation. Although this astounding truth surpasses the limits of our natural understanding, we should uphold the pure revelation in the Word that Christ, the mysterious God-man, is both Creator and creature.

In our reckoning, Christ was born two thousand years ago, because human understanding is constrained by time. However, from the divine perspective unbound by time, Christ is “the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). “If He was slain from the foundation of the world, certainly He must have been born before then”; therefore, “according to God’s perspective in eternity, Christ was born in eternity past” (Lee, *Life-study of Colossians* 68). From the point of creation onward, God viewed Christ as a creature, making Him the first creature. Only as such could He be crucified from the time when creation came into existence. For this reason, the Lord Jesus referred to Himself as “the beginning of the creation of God” (3:14), indicating that “in God’s eyes Christ was a creature when creation began,” that is, “a creature at the beginning of creation” (Lee, *Christ and the Cross* 22). Therefore, from the divine viewpoint, Christ is the First-born and thus preeminent among all creation.

The centrality of Christ in the creation pertains not only to its inception but also to its continued existence, as revealed in Colossians 1:17, which says that “all things cohere in” Christ; that is, all things consist in harmony and abide by principle because of Him in whom they were created (v. 16). Just as the spokes of a wheel are held together by the hub, all things in the universe exist by Christ as their holding center. As Athanasius, quoted by Marvin R. Vincent in *Word Studies in the New Testament*, says of Christ, “He it is who, binding all with each, and ordering all things by His will and pleasure, produces the perfect unity of nature and the harmonious reign of law. While He abides unmoved forever with the Father, He yet moves all things by His own appointment according to the Father’s will” (471). The universe not only coheres in Christ but also subsists by Christ (Heb. 1:3), pointing to His universality—that is, not only does the unity of nature depend on Christ as the center, but also the maintenance of every item to the farthest reaches of the universe depends every moment on His pervasive power. If we truly see that the created universe subsists together in Christ—that apart from Him there is only chaos and vanity—we will surely cling to Him as the center of our personal universe and depend on Him as the holding power of our human life, Christian life, and church life.

In Colossians 1:16 Paul reveals the universality of Christ in the creation by showing that Christ is related to the process of creation in a subjective way: “Because in Him all things were created, in the heavens and on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or lordships or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and unto Him.” Here *in Him* means that all things were created in the power of Christ’s person and in Christ as the sphere and that all creation bears the characteristics of His intrinsic power. Indeed, the created things in the universe manifest the eternal power and divine characteristics of God the Creator, who is embodied in Christ and is Christ (Rom. 1:19-21; 9:5; Col. 2:9). *Through Him* in Colossians 1:16 indicates that “Christ is the active instrument through which the creation of all things was accomplished in sequence” (Lee, *Recovery Version*, v. 16, note 4). In accord with this truth, John 1:3 says, “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not one thing came into being which has come into being.” Christ is the means through which creation was processed and came into existence. The fact that all things have been created *unto* Christ (Col. 1:16) indicates that Christ as the Heir of all things is the end, the consummation, of all creation, for His possession (Heb. 1:2). The creation was created in Him as the sphere, through Him as the means, and unto Him as the end, showing that Christ is subjectively involved with creation. Christ is not merely the objective Creator; He is also the intrinsic power in which, the subjective instrument through which, and the consummate goal to which

all things were created. Since Christ is the sphere, means, and goal of creation as well as the Creator, Upholder, and Bearer of all things in the universe (vv. 2-3, 7, 10), Christ is truly everything in the creation.

The Centrality and Universality of Christ in the New Creation

After highlighting in Colossians 1:15-17 Christ as the first in creation, Paul goes on to show in verse 18 that Christ is the first in the new creation of God, the church as the Body of Christ: "He is the Head of the Body, the church; He is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things." The title of the resurrected Christ—the *Firstborn from the dead*—recalls 1 Corinthians 15:20, which says, "Now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Christ as the firstfruits of resurrection is the Firstborn from the dead, "the first to rise from the dead" (Acts 26:23), that He might be the Head of the Body, the church as God's new creation, the new man (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:20-23). In Christ's resurrection God raised Him from the dead and enlivened Him by imparting His indestructible life into His crucified humanity, thereby sanctifying and glorifying His humanity, bringing it into immortal divinity, and germinating it into a new creation in order to open the way for the believers in Christ to become the new creation of God (Heb. 7:16; Col. 2:12-13; Eph. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:18; 2 Cor. 5:17; cf. Rom. 8:11).

In Paul's mind, resurrection was a birth to Christ in which He became the Firstborn from the dead and the firstborn Son of God (Acts 13:33; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 1:6; 2:10-11). Through incarnation Christ as the only begotten Son of God became the Son of Man, the seed of David, and in resurrection He was designated the Son of God in His humanity (Rom. 1:3-4). In that same resurrection the believers were regenerated to become the many sons of God (1 Pet. 1:3), who are now the brothers of Christ and the members of His Body (John 20:17; Heb. 2:11; Rom. 12:4-5). As the Firstborn from the dead, who is the Head of the Body, the beginning of the new creation, and the Firstborn among many brothers (8:29), Christ occupies the place of preeminence in God's new creation in resurrection and serves as a prototype to produce the believers as members of the new creation and the many sons of God destined to be conformed to the image of the Firstborn. Hence, Christ is the centrality and universality of the new creation.

In order to reveal that Christ is everything to the believers as God's new creation, Paul in Colossians presents two marvelous aspects of the all-inclusive and all-extensive Christ: the allotted portion of the saints and the body of the shadows. Colossians 1:12 says, "Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you for a share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light." In *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* James D. G. Dunn says, "Certainly the phrase 'the share of the inheritance of the saints' is unmistakably Jewish in character. And for anyone familiar with the Jewish scriptures it would immediately evoke the characteristic talk of the promised land" (75-76). The exceedingly good land (Num. 14:7) is a full type of the all-inclusive Christ, and the history of the children of Israel is a complete type of the history of the New Testament believers (1 Cor. 10:11). Just as in the Old Testament God brought the children of Israel out of Pharaoh's enslavement in Egypt and planted them in the good land (Exo. 3:17; Psa. 44:2; Jer. 32:41), where He allotted a portion to each of the twelve tribes of Israel for their inheritance and enjoyment (Num. 26:55-56; 33:53-54), so also in the New Testament God has delivered the believers out of the authority of darkness and planted them in Christ as the reality of the good land allotted to the saints as their divine inheritance and enjoyment so that they may be rooted in Him and absorb His riches (Col. 2:7). The good land provided everything the children of Israel needed for their living: waterbrooks, springs, fountains, wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olive trees, animals, milk, honey, stones, iron, and copper (Deut. 6:3; 8:7-10; 1 Chron. 4:40), all of which are types of the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, whose riches are untraceable and whose breadth, length, height, and depth are immeasurable

*In resurrection
He was designated
the Son of God
in His humanity.
In that same
resurrection
the believers
were regenerated
to become
the many sons
of God,
who are now
the brothers
of Christ
and the members
of His Body.*

*By enjoying
the riches
of the
all-inclusive
and all-extensive
Christ, we may
participate in
building up
the church
as the
Body of Christ,
which is
the habitation
of God and
the kingdom
of God.*

(Exo. 3:8; Eph. 1:19-21; 3:8, 17-19). Just as the vast land of Canaan was everything to the Israelites, so also the infinitely rich Christ, the reality of the land of Canaan, is everything to the New Testament saints. The children of Israel who properly enjoyed the good land would lack nothing in the land and be satisfied with its riches, blessing God for the rich land (Deut. 8:9-10). Likewise, as those who are made full in Christ as their good land, we ought to rejoice in Him and abound in thanksgiving to God the Father for the bountiful supply of the divine riches in Christ (Col. 1:11-12; 2:7, 10; 3:17; Phil. 4:4).

It was by appropriating the riches of the land of Canaan that the Israelites were able to build up the temple as God's dwelling place and the city of Jerusalem for the establishment of God's kingdom. Similarly, it is by enjoying the riches of the all-inclusive and all-extensive Christ that we may participate in building up the church as the Body of Christ, which is the habitation of God and the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 1:2, 9; 3:12, 16-17; 14:3-4; Matt. 16:18-19; 1 Tim. 3:15; Rom. 14:17; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:19-22). If we see the vision of the universal inclusiveness and extensiveness of Christ, we will be rescued from vain substitutes for Christ, including the most refined products of human culture, and we will be motivated to experience and enjoy Him as our portion in full so that He may be all in all to us for the building up of the Body of Christ as the house of God and the kingdom of God.

In Colossians 2:16-17 Paul goes on to unveil another aspect of the all-inclusive Christ: "Let no one therefore judge you in eating and in drinking or in respect of a feast or of a new moon or of the Sabbath, which are a shadow of the things to come, but the body is of Christ." According to these verses, as the mystery of God, Christ is the reality of all the items of the Jewish ceremonial law in the Old Testament in the sense in which a person's physical body is the substance, the reality, of its shadow. The items that Paul describes point to the extensiveness of the reality in Christ by allusion to different measures of time. Daily, Christ is our true food and drink for our satisfaction and strengthening (John 6:57; 1 Cor. 10:3-4); weekly, Christ is our genuine Sabbath for our completion and rest in Him (Matt. 11:28-30); monthly, Christ is the real new moon as a new beginning with light in darkness (1 John 1:5; John 1:4-5; 8:12); and throughout the year, Christ is a spiritual feast for our joy and enjoyment (1 Cor. 5:8). This points to a profound truth that every positive aspect of our daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly existence is a shadow of Christ and that, by extension, He is the reality of all the positive things in the universe. We do not assert that Christ is literally every positive thing in the universe, nor are the things of the physical creation identified with Christ. Nevertheless, the all-inclusive Christ requires multitudinous items to capture in picture what He is in reality to the believers. This is particularly evident in the Gospel of John, which unveils that as the unique reality (14:6), Christ is the Lamb of God, the ladder, the bronze serpent, the grain of wheat, the resurrection, the way, the life, our breath, our drink, our food, our light, our abode, our Bridegroom, the door, our Shepherd, our pasture, and the vine (1:4, 29, 51; 3:14, 29-30; 4:10, 14; 6:35, 57; 7:37-39; 10:9, 11; 12:24; 15:5, 7; 20:22). Since the vast universe was created for the purpose of portraying the unlimited riches of Christ, the creation should remind us all the time to contact and experience the rich and infinite Christ as the reality of all the detailed aspects of our daily walk so that He may truly be all in all to us in our practical living (cf. Phil. 4:11-13).

The Church as the Mystery of Christ

Paul's antidote to the influence of culture on the church in Colossae was not only to reveal Christ as the mystery of God but also to unveil what he designates "the mystery of Christ." This mystery of a mystery is none other than the church, the Body of Christ, as can be seen in two passages. In Colossians 1:27 the gloriously rich mystery is not only Christ Himself but Christ in the believers, His Body. In Ephesians 3:6, having just spoken of the mystery of Christ in verse 4, Paul unveils the content of this mystery: in Christ Jesus the believing Gentiles and the believing Jews are fellow heirs of God as their portion

and are fellow members of the Body of Christ. In Colossians 4:3-4 Paul underscores the paramount importance of the mystery of Christ: "Praying at the same time for us also, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ (because of which also I am bound), that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak." Paul identifies this mystery as the crucial content of his ministry to complete the word of God and speaks of it as the intrinsic cause of his imprisonment. Few Christians are sufficiently impressed with the fact that the apostle Paul's bonds were not only in Christ, the mystery of God (v. 18; Phil. 1:17), but also for the church, the mystery of Christ. Paul became a minister not only of Christ (Rom. 15:16) but also of the church (Eph. 3:7), and as such, he suffered on the believers' behalf, filling up on his part that which was lacking of the afflictions of Christ for His Body (Col. 1:23-24). The church as the mystery of Christ is revealed in Colossians in two principal aspects: the Body of Christ and the new man. Colossians 2 unveils that the believers' participation in the preeminent and all-inclusive Christ as the mystery of God issues in the Body, and Colossians 3 proceeds to unfold that the full apprehension and enjoyment of Christ as the replacement of all culture ultimately results in the new man.

The Body of Christ

Paul's aim in Colossians 2 is to turn the distracted Colossians from the pursuit of the products of human culture to Christ as the mystery of God (v. 2) by presenting an awe-inspiring view of Christ as the reality of all the shadows (v. 17). Paul then reveals that Christ, who is the body of all the shadows, is none other than the Head of the Body (v. 19). This development in thought from the body of the shadows to the Head of the Body indicates that as we continually enjoy Christ as the body of all the shadows, we eventually reach the pinnacle of our experience of Him, which is to hold Him as the Head in order for us to grow as His Body. In stark contrast to common notions concerning the believers' knowledge and pursuit of Christ, which often focus on the development of individual piety or spirituality, Paul's view is that the believers' participation in the all-inclusive Christ as the centrality and universality of the divine economy is for the growth of the corporate expression of Christ in the church as the Body of Christ. As the believers know and apprehend Christ as the mystery of God, they are built up as His enlarged expression to become the mystery of Christ, making Him known in His unsearchable riches, which they have experienced and been constituted with.

The human body with its organic order presents a beautiful picture of the relationship of Christ with the church as His mystical Body, in which He is both central and universal. Although Christ is thoroughly identified with the Body through the organic joining in the divine life between Christ and the believers, He alone occupies the position of the Head. The inviolable distinction between Christ as the Head and the believers as the Body attests to Christ's centrality, His preeminence, in the Body, whereas the thorough identification of Christ with the Body points to His universality, His being everything, in the Body. Regarding the centrality of Christ in the Body, Paul declares in 1:18 that Christ is "the Firstborn from the dead, that He Himself might have the first place in all things." This clearly establishes Christ's incomparable position in God's new creation produced in resurrection and His unique preeminence in the Body of Christ, the new man (Eph. 2:15-16). In Colossians Paul highlights Christ's supreme authority in the Body by speaking of the believers' being transferred into the kingdom of the Son of God's love (1:13), indicating that the beloved Son of God reigns as the King in this kingdom, which is the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; 14:17; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:19). Although we are united with Christ as His Body, the resurrected and ascended Christ alone is worthy to bear the titles that testify to His preeminence in the divine administration: "Head over all things," "the head of every man," "Lord of all," "Lord both of the dead and of the living," "the Lord of glory," "Leader," "the Judge of the living and the dead," "the Ruler of the kings of the earth," "King of kings and Lord of lords," and the One to whom "all authority" "in heaven and on earth" has been given (1:22; 1 Cor. 11:3; Rom. 10:12; 14:9;

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1 Cor. 2:8; Acts 5:31; 10:42; Rev. 1:5; 19:16; Matt. 28:18). Rather than subjecting ourselves to various ordinances or abasing ourselves through asceticism and the worship of angels (Col. 2:18-23), we need to hold Christ as the Head, that is, to take the lead to worship and exalt Him alone and to acknowledge Him as our unique authority, submitting to Him in every aspect of our daily life and our Christian work so that we may grow up into Him as the Head in all things (v. 19; Eph. 4:15).

Although Christ being the Head certainly denotes the supreme position and authority of the resurrected and exalted God-man over all things as the center of God's universal administration, Paul uses precise language to indicate that the headship of Christ with regard to the church is a matter not only of authority but also of life. Ephesians 1:22 states that while Christ is Head *over* all things, He is given to be such *to* the church. Just as the exceedingly great power that God caused to operate in the God-man is toward the believers (v. 19), implying a transmission that unites the believers with Christ in His experience of resurrection and ascension, so also the preposition *to* in verse 22 suggests that the headship that Christ enjoys over all things is to be shared with the church. Such an astonishing revelation of the loftiness of the church in God's economy is confirmed and explained by the following verse, which states the stunning truth that the church is "His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all." Colossians 2 likewise transitions from the use of *Head* in its authoritative sense, *the Head of all rule and authority* (v. 10), to its organic meaning in verse 19, where the believers are exhorted to hold Him as the Head in order to grow with the growth of God. Here the significance of the Head extends beyond His authority over the church; more intrinsically, it portrays His organic relationship with the church in which He is the divine supply for her growth and building up. According to verse 10, the believers "have been made full in Him, who is the Head of all rule and authority," revealing that in an organic union with the incarnated, crucified, resurrected, and ascended Christ, they share with Him all the riches of His person and processes, including His all-inclusive fullness and His all-transcending accomplishments, attainments, and obtainments. Christ the Head is therefore not only to be exalted, worshipped, and obeyed by the church but also to be enjoyed as her unlimited portion for her supply, growth, and building up.

While Christ as the Head is distinct from the believers as the Body, the two are nonetheless inseparable, bound together in a mystical union. So intimate and real is this union that Paul elsewhere refers to the Body and the Head as one entity: "Even as the body is one and has many members, yet all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is *the Christ*" (1 Cor. 12:12, emphasis added). The reality of the identification of Christ as the Head with the church as the Body was first revealed in what the Lord Jesus spoke to Saul of Tarsus during his conversion: "Why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4). Saul was no doubt amazed and inconceivably grieved to realize that he had violently persecuted the Lord Himself by ravaging the church of God (Gal. 1:13; Acts 8:3; 26:11). In the Lord's simple question to Saul lies an astonishing revelation that became the governing vision of Paul's ministry: the Lord as the Head is joined in life and nature to His saints, the members of His mystical Body, through their faith in Him (1 Cor. 6:15, 17; Eph. 5:30; 1:22-23; Acts 26:18). Through the revelation of the mystery to him, Paul was converted from one who had persecuted the corporate Christ to one who now filled up in his flesh that which was lacking of the afflictions of Christ for His Body. He who once breathed murder against the saints now rejoiced to have a part in ministering the divine life to them through the operation of the death of Christ in him (9:1; 2 Cor. 3:6; 4:10-12; Col. 1:23-25), building up what he had once been determined to destroy (Acts 22:4).

If we, like Paul, see the mystery of Christ and participate in the ministry to build up the Body of Christ, we will live in the reality of Colossians 2:19: "Holding the Head, out from whom all the Body, being richly supplied and knit together by means of the joints and sinews, grows with the growth of God." For us to hold Christ as the Head means not

only that we submit to Him as the supreme authority but also that we remain in our organic, spiritual union with Him, not allowing ourselves to be severed from Him but, rather, abiding in Him as branches in the true vine (Gal. 5:2-4; John 15:1, 4-5). Seeing the mystery of Christ will cause us to realize that we are not merely Christians or believers but “one Body in Christ,” a living organism maintained by our union in life with Him (Rom. 12:4-5). It is only by holding Christ as the Head, that is, by abiding in Him as the life-giving Spirit joined to our spirit, that we can receive the rich supply of life for us to grow in the divine life (John 15:4-5).

In experience, the rich supply that flows from Christ the Head to the Body is what Paul calls “the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:19), “the Spirit” whom God “bountifully supplies” to the believers under the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:2, 5). This indicates that the growth of the Body, which is the organic building up of the Body (Eph. 4:12-13, 16; cf. 2:21-22), is contingent upon the believers’ receiving the abundant supply of the Spirit as the reality of the unsearchably rich Christ, who is the Head, by walking in Him (Col. 2:6), which is to walk according to their spirit mingled with the Lord Spirit (Rom. 8:4; 1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Cor. 3:18). This suggests that Christ as the life-giving Spirit is not only the sole source but also the constituting essence of the Body—a crucial indicator that the pneumatic Christ is truly everything in the Body.

The universality of Christ in His Body is further evidenced by Paul’s declaration in Colossians 2:19 that the Body of Christ grows with the growth of God. Because God is embodied in Christ (John 5:26; Col. 2:9) and Christ is the unique element of the Body (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12), for the Body to grow with the growth of God is for it to grow with the growth of Christ, the embodiment of God, in the believers. Thus, the growth and building up of the Body hinges upon the pneumatic Christ penetrating and pervading the believers’ inward parts until He becomes all in all to them (3:17). In this way Christ not only has the preeminence as the Head but also is everything in His Body as the unique life and intrinsic element of the Body (Col. 3:4; Eph. 4:4), and the Body is nothing less than the organic enlargement and expression of Christ (Col. 3:4; Acts 9:4; Eph. 5:28-32).

The New Man

After unveiling in Colossians 2 that the reality of the Body of Christ is the issue of the believers’ enjoyment of Christ as the body of all the shadows and the Head of the Body, Paul goes on to reveal in 3:4-17 that through the believers’ experience of Christ as their life, they may become the reality of the new man, to whom Christ is the centrality and universality. In verse 4 Paul speaks of “Christ our life.” The phrase *Christ our life* refers to the Christ in the believers’ spirit as the indwelling Spirit of life joined to them by faith in order to be their life (John 14:6; Col. 1:27; Rom. 8:2, 9-11; 1 Cor. 6:17). Because Christ is not only our objective Savior enthroned in heaven but also our subjective life, instead of living according to culture, we can and should live by Christ as our life, living because of Christ (John 6:57), living through Him (1 John 4:9), living with Him (2 Cor. 13:4), living to Him (5:15), and living Him in our daily life (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20).

In Colossians 3:10-11 Paul proceeds to reveal that Christ, who is the life of the church, is the unique constituent of the church as the new man: “Have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all.” Although the new man is a corporate entity composed of many believers from many different racial, religious, cultural, and social backgrounds (Eph. 2:15-16; 1 Cor. 12:13), Christ is the unique person of the new man. According to Colossians 3:10, the believers “have put on the new man,” whereas, according to Galatians 3:27, they “have put on Christ” through faith in Christ Jesus and baptism into Christ. This implies that Christ is the element of the new man.

Because God is embodied in Christ and Christ is the unique element of the Body, for the Body to grow with the growth of God is for it to grow with the growth of Christ, the embodiment of God, in the believers.

In the
believers'
experience,
the renewing
of the new man
involves the
spreading of
the indwelling
Christ as the
renewing Spirit
from their
mingled spirit
into their mind,
the principal
part of
the soul.

In Colossians 3:10 Paul speaks of the creation and the renewing of the new man, both of which require the dispensing of Christ as the constituent of the new man into the believers: "The new man...is being renewed unto full knowledge according to the image of Him who created him." According to Ephesians 2:15, in His crucifixion Christ created the Jews and the Gentiles "in Himself" into one new man. In this verse the Greek word rendered "in" (ἐν) can also be translated "with," indicating that Christ was the element with which the new man was created. Christ created the one new man with Himself as the divine life, releasing the eternal life from within Himself through His death in order to impart this life into the believers in resurrection (John 12:24; 19:34; 1 Pet. 1:3).

Colossians 3:10 also reveals that the corporate new man created in Christ needs to be renewed because the constituent believers are still experientially in the old creation. At the time of their regeneration, Christ as the Spirit of life came into the believers' human spirit with the ever-new life of God (Rom. 6:4; 7:6), thereby making their regenerated spirit part of the new creation and of the new man (John 3:6). Nevertheless, their soul with its faculties as well as their body remain in the old creation. Thus, in the believers' experience, the renewing of the new man involves the spreading of the indwelling Christ as the renewing Spirit from their mingled spirit into their mind, the principal part of the soul, so that their mingled spirit may saturate their mind, becoming the spirit of their mind (Titus 3:5; Rom. 7:6; Eph. 4:23-24). Paul's statement in Colossians 3:10 that the new man "is being renewed unto full knowledge" emphasizes that in order for the believers in Colossae to become the new man in reality, their mind, which was predominantly filled with and occupied by human culture, needed to be renewed unto the full knowledge of the all-inclusive Christ so that it would become "the mind of Christ," a mind permeated with and possessed by Christ (Phil. 2:5; 3:8; Eph. 4:13; 1 Cor. 2:16; 2 Cor. 10:5). Through the continual operation of Christ as the Spirit of life to transmit the life of God into their inward parts, the believers can be daily renewed and eventually transformed and conformed to the image of Christ, the Creator of the new man, until they "arrive...at a full-grown man" (Rom. 8:2, 29; 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16; 3:18; Eph. 4:13), the corporate new man in full maturity composed of the believers who are full-grown in Christ (Col. 1:28).

As the believers are renewed, the new man—in whom "there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all and in all" (3:11)—is practically realized. The removal of racial, religious, cultural, or social distinctions in the new man is correctly emphasized by most expositors. Nevertheless, few pay adequate attention to the rich implications of a much more crucial revelation presented in this verse: in the new man there is no place for any natural person or thing to exist, because in the new man there is place only for Christ, who is the unique constituent of the new man. This great revelation is summed up in one of the most well-known yet poorly understood Pauline expressions: *Christ is all and in all*. Here *all* refers to all the believers who compose the new man. Christ being in all the members of the new man refers to His dwelling in the believers in an organic union with them as the Spirit in their spirit (1:27; 2 Cor. 3:17; 13:5; 1 Cor. 6:17). This clearly indicates that in the new man the believers do not cease to exist but rather live in a life union with Christ through faith—a thought echoed by Paul's statement in Galatians 2:20 that it was no longer he who lived, but it was *Christ* who lived in him, yet *he* still lived in the faith of the Son of God.

Christ not only is "in all" the members of the new man but also "is all" of them. Since the believers still exist in the new man as its members and Christ is all the members, the practical existence and manifestation of the new man requires nothing less than the "Christification" of the believers—a process by which they are filled with Christ to become His expansion, reproduction, and expression (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29). This is because the all-inclusive Christ "is everything in the new man," and "He is the new man," just as Christ is His Body (1 Cor. 12:12) (Lee, *Recovery Version*, Col. 3:11, note 9). The

church as the new man is not a diverse society composed of believers, from all races, religious backgrounds, cultures, and social classes, continuing in and promoting these distinctions. Rather, “the new man is Christ in all the saints permeating us and replacing us until all natural distinctions have been eliminated, and everyone is constituted with Christ” (Lee, *Conclusion* 3621). The new man is the corporate Christ—a great universal man composed of Christ, the firstborn Son of God, as the Head, in a life union with the believers, the many sons of God, as the Body. The new man is the very preeminent, all-inclusive Christ wrought into and lived out of the believers. Therefore, in order for us to be the new man in reality, we need to be constituted with Christ and become the same as Christ in life, nature, constitution, and expression but not in the Godhead. We should allow the indwelling Christ to make His home in our heart and be formed in us (Eph. 3:17; Gal. 4:19), and we should live Christ for His magnification by walking according to our mingled spirit (Phil. 1:21; Rom. 8:4) until He becomes the unique content and expression of our inner being and daily living. Then Christ will be not only the centrality in the new man as the Head but also the universality as all the members of the new man.

For us to be the new man in practicality, where Christ is all and in all, we need to be saturated with Christ as the reality of all the virtues in our inner being. Immediately after speaking of the believers’ putting on the new man, Paul instructs them to put on virtues for the living of the new man:

Put on therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, inward parts of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering; bearing one another and forgiving one another, if anyone should have a complaint against anyone; even as the Lord forgave you, so also should you forgive. And over all these things put on love, which is the uniting bond of perfectness. (Col. 3:12-14)

In verses 12 through 14 Paul is not urging the believers to develop natural human virtues in the realm of human ethics or morality; instead, he is beseeching them to cultivate spiritual virtues by living in a vital union with Christ as the life-giving Spirit. F. F. Bruce points out in *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* that Paul’s imperative for us to “put on...inward parts of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering” corresponds to the apostle’s imperative for us to put on Christ Himself (Rom. 13:14) (152), who not only is the reality of these wonderful virtues but who also lived them out in His human living (Matt. 5:5; 9:36; 11:29; 20:34; Luke 6:35-36; 18:7; cf. 1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Pet. 3:9). This indicates that to put on these virtues of the new man is to be one with Christ in His tender inward parts by abiding in Him as the life-giving Spirit and by allowing Christ to make His home in our heart so that our inward parts become a duplication of His inward parts (Phil. 1:8; John 15:5). Love, joy, and long-suffering are items of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). By walking, living, and being led by the Spirit, we can spontaneously bear these aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, which are nothing less than characteristics of Christ (vv. 16, 18, 24-25). Only by holding the pneumatic Christ as our Head and living by the indwelling Christ as our life may we participate in the virtues of His life in order to live the proper Christian life for the new man (2 Cor. 10:1; Eph. 4:2-3, 32; 1 Thes. 5:14).

Immediately after encouraging the believers to put on the inward parts of the endearing virtues of the new man in Colossians 3:12-14, Paul unveils another important aspect of living Christ as the constituent of the new man in verse 15: “Let the peace of Christ arbitrate in your hearts, to which also you were called in one Body; and be thankful.” The peace of Christ to which the believers were called in one Body is the peace that Christ made by abolishing in His flesh the law of the commandments in ordinances and creating in Himself both the Jewish and the Gentile believers into one new man, one Body (Eph. 2:15-16). The peace of Christ in Colossians 3:15 refers not only to the peaceful oneness of the new man, the Body, but also to Christ “Himself,” who as “our peace” is

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new man
in practicality,
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and in all,
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saturated
with Christ
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of all
the virtues
in our
inner being.*

Regardless of
social status,
all believers
as fellow slaves
of Christ Jesus
must serve
and honor the
Lord Christ as
their sole Master.
This is for
the believers
as the Body
of the new man
to submit to Christ
as the Head
of the new man.

the very bond that unites the believers into oneness and harmony (Eph. 2:14; 4:3). To let the peace of Christ arbitrate in our hearts is to allow Christ to “act as an umpire,” that is, as the presiding peace within our heart to dissolve all complaints and settle all disputes for the preservation of the oneness of the new man (Lenski 175). Since we were called in one Body to the peace of Christ, we need to let the preeminent Christ be “enthroned” as the ruler and “decider of every thing” in our heart in our relationships with the members of His one Body, the one new man (Alford 1306), so that He as the Head and constituent of the church may truly have the first place in and be everything to the church as the Body of Christ and the new man.

In underscoring the preeminence of Christ in the new man, Paul goes on to unveil Christ as the believers’ unique Lord and Master. The apostle first entreats the believers who are slaves to “serve the Lord Christ,” to “work from the soul as to the Lord,” and to obey their earthly masters “in singleness of heart fearing the Lord” (Col. 3:22-24). To the believers who own slaves, Paul gives a sober reminder that they “also have a Master in heaven” (4:1). This indicates that, regardless of their social status, all believers as fellow slaves of Christ Jesus (v. 12) must serve and honor the Lord Christ as their sole Master. This is for the believers as the Body of the new man to submit to Christ as the Head of the new man—the Christ who must have the unchallenged preeminence in the church and in the living of the saints for the reality of the new man.

Living Christ as the constituent of the new man requires us to be not only ruled by the peace of Christ but also inhabited by the word of Christ. After enjoining the believers to let the peace of Christ arbitrate in their hearts, Paul exhorts the believers to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (3:16), that is, to let the word of Christ inhabit the believers without restriction. In verse 16 *the word of Christ* refers not only to the word spoken by Christ but also to Christ Himself, who is the Word (John 1:1, 14; Rev. 19:13). If the word of Christ were not a person, Paul would not have used the word *dwell* (ἐνοικεῖω) in Colossians 3:16, as no inanimate object or lifeless doctrine could ever be said to inhabit or make home. By such personification—which is spiritual, not metaphorical—Paul indicates that the word of Christ is nothing less than Christ Himself as the living Word of God, who in resurrection became the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45b). For this reason, Paul explicitly identifies the Spirit with the word of God, proclaiming that the “Spirit is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17).

The word of Christ being the pneumatic Christ opens up another parallel between Colossians and Ephesians: the word of Christ dwelling (ἐνοικέω) in us richly (Col. 3:16) is equivalent to the unsearchably rich Christ making His home (κατοικέω) in our heart (Eph. 3:8, 17). That the word of Christ indwelling the believers is just Christ Himself can also be seen in Colossians 3:17: “Whatever you do in word or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” And conjoins verses 16 and 17, implying that it is by allowing the word of Christ to reside in us fully that we may do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus. Since the Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:17), doing all things in the name of the Lord Jesus is equivalent to living Christ in all the details of our daily life for His magnification by the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:19-21). In order for us to be the reality of the one new man and the one Body of Christ, we need to allow the word of Christ to dwell in us abundantly, thereby letting Christ as the Spirit make His home in our heart thoroughly so that Christ as the unique content of the new man and His Body may be fully wrought into us to be the centrality and universality of our being for the producing of His glorious corporate increase and expression (John 3:29-30). Since Christ is not only the Creator, the Head, the arbitrating peace, and the Master but also the life, the constituent, the virtues, and every member of the new man, He is both the centrality and universality of the one new man. Through the believers’ enjoyment of Christ as their life and through their living in union with Him, the church is built up as the Body and renewed to be the one new man in reality.

Conclusion

Christ is the intrinsic focus and the entire content of God's eternal economy, which is to head up all things in Christ through His Body, the church, making Christ the center of all things (Eph. 1:10), and to dispense the unsearchable riches of Christ into the believers in order to make them the church, the corporate expression of Christ as the multifarious wisdom of God (3:9-11; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30). God's great will is to impart Christ, who is the center and circumference of God and of His economy, into our entire being so that He may be our centrality and universality, thereby bringing forth the reality of the Body of Christ and the new man. However, in the church in Colossae, human culture threatened to displace Christ from the center of the church life and to overtake the living of the saints, thereby precluding Christ from being all and in all to that church. In response, having labored much for them in prayer, the apostle Paul wrote to the saints in Colossae the Epistle that more than any other unveils Christ as the center and everything in the Godhead, the created universe, and the new creation. Christ is the centrality and universality of the Triune God, for He is the image, the expression, of the invisible God, the Son of God's love—the unique object of God's delight—and the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead. Christ is the centrality of all creation because He is the Firstborn of all creation and the One in whom all things cohere; and He is the universality of all creation because He is the One in whom, through whom, and unto whom all things were created. Christ is the centrality of God's new creation in resurrection because He is the Firstborn from the dead, the Head of the Body, and the firstborn Son among many brothers; and He is the universality of, and everything to, the new creation because He is the allotted portion of the saints and the reality of all positive things for the saints' enjoyment. Truly, Christ is the mystery of God, the unique One in whom God with His economy of salvation is embodied and made known. As the mystery of God, Christ Himself has a mystery. The mystery of Christ, the corporate embodiment and manifestation of Christ, is the church, which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills all in all. The church as the mystery of Christ is also the new man, in which He is all and in all. Thus, only by Christ being the church's centrality and universality can she come into being, grow, and reach maturity to become the universal manifestation of God's multifaceted wisdom in His mysterious economy. As the Head, the King, and the Master, Christ is the centrality of the church as the Body and the new man; and as the unique constituent of the church, the believers' life, and the reality of every positive thing to them, He is their universality. Such a Christ, who is preeminent in and everything to God and His economy, should have the preeminence in us and become everything to us, replacing every element of culture in us and making us the church as the Body and the new man in reality.

If the Father opens the eyes of our heart to see Christ as the preeminent and all-inclusive One, the centrality and universality of God and His economy, this vision will revolutionize our Christian life and church life in profound ways. We will love Christ with our first love, our best love, giving Him the uncontested preeminence in our tripartite being and in every aspect of our life and work (Rev. 2:4). We will partake of the bountiful, extensive Christ as our God-allotted portion, the reality of the good and spacious land of Canaan. We will realize that we have been rooted in Christ, the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, who contains all the divine riches of the processed and consummated Triune God, as our soil, and we will be encouraged to walk in Him as our land to assimilate His riches (Col. 2:6-7). We will allow the indwelling Christ as the hope of glory, the seed of glory, to grow in us unto maturity until we are manifested with Him in glory at His second coming (1:27; 3:4). As stewards of God and ministers of Christ (1:7), we will announce Christ as the hidden mystery of God's economy to the saints in order to present them full-grown in Christ (vv. 24-29), and we will struggle to comfort the hearts of the saints so that they may participate in all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, gaining the full knowledge of Christ as the mystery of God (2:1-2). We will enjoy Christ as the body of all the shadows and hold Him as our Head in order to grow with the increase of God, thus becoming the reality of the Body of Christ (vv. 16-19),

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and we will live by Christ as our life, let His peace arbitrate in our hearts, and let His word dwell in us richly in order to live in union with Him to be the practicality of the new man (3:4-16). May the Father grant us such a vision and empower us with all power, according to the might of His glory, unto all endurance and long-suffering with joy (1:11), that we would not be moved away from the hope of the gospel by the empty deceit of manmade culture (v. 23) but would, rather, live Christ, our center and our circumference, to become the Body and the new man, thus matching Him, expressing Him, and manifesting in this universe the twofold mystery of God's will: the glorious Christ with His glorious church. **AC**

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The Scene at the Cross

According to Colossians 2:15, God stripped off the rulers and authorities... While Christ was on the cross, God was working. At that time, the cross was the center of the universe. The Savior, sin, Satan, we, and God all were there. God was judging sin and nailing the law to the cross... The rulers and authorities... swarmed around Christ as He was being crucified. Both God and Christ were working. Christ's work was His crucifixion, whereas God's work was to judge sin and all the negative things and to nail the law with its ordinances to the cross. The rulers and authorities... gathered around God and Christ were also working. If they had not pressed in closely, how could God have stripped them off? The words *stripping off* indicate that they were... as close as our garments are to our body. By stripping off the rulers and authorities, God made a display of them openly. He openly put them to shame and triumphed over them.

From *Life-study of Colossians* by Witness Lee, pp. 190-191