

Week One

The Urgent Need for Our Culture to Be Replaced by the All-inclusive, Extensive Christ

Scripture Reading: Col. 1:12-13, 15-18, 27; 2:8, 14-15; 3:4, 10-11

Day 1

- I. **The book of Colossians was written because the church in Colossae had been pervaded with culture, and the saints had been distracted from Christ by culture—2:8, 16-17; 3:10-11:**
 - A. **In Colossae culture had flooded the church, replaced Christ, and carried off the saints as spoil—2:8.**
 - B. **The enemy of God uses culture to replace Christ; he will try to use the good aspects of culture to replace Christ—cf. Phil. 3:4-8.**
 - C. **According to the book of Colossians, Christ is replaced by culture; Colossians indicates that the ultimate replacement for Christ is our culture.**

Day 2

- D. **In Colossians the authority of darkness refers especially to the good aspects of culture and of our natural being—1:12-13:**
 - 1. **The saints in Colossae came under the authority of darkness by allowing the highest aspects of culture to invade the church—2:8.**
 - 2. **The highest products of culture are nonetheless aspects of the authority of darkness by which Satan controls people—1:13.**
 - 3. **Anything that is a substitute for Christ becomes the authority of darkness to control us—v. 13.**

Day 3

- II. **Human culture arose after the fall of man—Gen. 4:16-22:**

A. After leaving God's presence, Cain constructed a city for his protection and self-existence—vv. 16-17:

1. Within this city he produced a culture without God, a godless culture.
2. In the garden God was everything to man—his protection, maintenance, supply, and amusement; when man lost God, he lost everything.
3. Man's loss of God forced man to invent human culture, the main elements of which were cities for existence, cattle-raising for making a living, music for enjoyment, and weapons for defense—vv. 20-22.

Day 4

B. Apparently, a culture without God was invented by the man who refused to go God's way and thereby lost God; actually, the intrinsic factor of culture was the instigation and incitement of Satan, God's enemy, within the man who departed from God—vv. 7, 16-17; Matt. 12:26:

1. Such a culture, which was without God and was united with Satan, became a model representing all human cultures throughout the ages and signifying that these cultures are without God and have followed Satan and are united with Satan—cf. Luke 4:6, footnote 1.
2. The godless culture began as a seed in Genesis 4, and it will develop throughout the history of the human race until it consummates in Babylon the Great in Revelation 18.
3. The Lord's word in Matthew 24:37-39 indicates that the godless culture at the time of Noah will develop to its uttermost in the period of the Lord's coming.

Day 5

III. Culture is a frustration to God's purpose concerning Christ and the church—Eph. 3:10-11; 5:32:

- A. Something very subtle stands in the way of Christ and the church; this subtle opposing element is culture—Col. 3:10-11; Eph. 2:14-15; Col. 2:14-15.**

- B. **Culture is a great frustration to experiencing Christ; unconsciously and subconsciously, we are frustrated by culture from the experience and enjoyment of Christ—Phil. 3:7-8.**
- C. **Our growing up into Christ in all things and arriving at a full-grown man is hindered by our subtle, hidden culture—Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:13, 15-16.**

IV. Human culture stands in opposition to the kingdom of God—Matt. 10:16-25, 34-39; 12:29, 46-50:

- A. **Sinful things do not oppose the kingdom of God as much as human culture does.**
- B. **Human culture has become a basic part and a great portion of the kingdom of Satan—v. 26.**
- C. **Culture has become a stronghold of Satan; in a subtle way he maintains a hold on culture and utilizes it to oppose God's kingdom—Acts 26:18; Col. 1:12-13.**

Day 6

V. Christ as the all-inclusive, extensive One is versus culture and should replace our culture with Himself—v. 18; 3:4, 10-11:

- A. **The purpose of the extensive revelation of Christ in the book of Colossians is to deal with culture—2:8; 3:10-11.**
- B. **In this book Paul presents a vision of the all-inclusive, extensive Christ to impress us with the fact that this Christ should replace our culture—1:27.**

VI. The kind of Christ who replaces culture is the all-inclusive, extensive Christ, the preeminent One, the centrality and universality of God's economy—vv. 15-18; 2:16-17; 3:4, 10-11:

- A. **The Christ who can replace our culture and become everything to us is the all-inclusive, extensive Christ—1:15, 18.**
- B. **The book of Colossians was written in order to reveal the**

all-inclusive, extensive Christ who deals with our culture and replaces our culture with Himself—3:4, 10-11.

- C. In His salvation God not only saves us from sin, judgment, the lake of fire, the world, and the self; He also saves us from everything that replaces Christ, including our culture—Heb. 7:25.**
- D. The all-inclusive, extensive Christ is in us, and we need to allow Him to fill our entire being and replace our culture with Himself—Eph. 3:17a; Col. 1:27; 3:11.**

WEEK 1 — DAY 1

Morning Nourishment

Col. 2:8 Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the elements of the world, and not according to Christ.

Phil. 3:8 ...I also count all things to be loss on account of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord;...I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse that I may gain Christ.

The culture in the region of Colossae included Hebrew religion, Greek philosophy, asceticism, mysticism, and Gnosticism.... In Colossians 3:11 Paul says that in the new man there is no Greek or Jew, no circumcision or uncircumcision, no barbarian or Scythian. These terms indicate both religious and cultural distinctions. Circumcision and uncircumcision refer to religion, whereas barbarian and Scythian refer to culture. Thus, the book of Colossians indicates that the ultimate replacement for Christ is our culture. (Life-study of Colossians, p. 437)

Today's Reading

The church should be a house filled with Christ and constituted with Him. Instead, the church in Colossae had been invaded by culture. To a large extent, Christ as the unique element in the church life was being replaced by various aspects of this mixed culture. The constituent of the church should be Christ and Christ alone, for the church is the Body of Christ. Therefore, the content of the church should be nothing other than Christ Himself. Nevertheless, the good elements of culture, especially philosophy and religion, had invaded the church and saturated it.

The main point in the Epistle of Colossians is the fact that in the eyes of God nothing counts except Christ. This fact excludes both good things and bad things, both sinful things and cultured things. In particular, it eliminates all the good aspects of culture. We have pointed out again and again that the enemy of God utilizes culture to replace Christ. This is

offensive to God. If Satan cannot corrupt us with evil things, God knows that he will try to use the good aspects of culture to replace Christ. Among today's Christians, where can you find a group of believers with whom you can sense nothing but Christ? Among the various Christian groups we see many good points. However, these good things are not the person of Christ Himself, but something that has replaced Him in a subtle way. For this reason, in many groups of Christians it is difficult to meet Christ. Some may preach Christ or teach the doctrines regarding Christ, but even this preaching and teaching becomes a substitute for Christ Himself. If we have a clear view of the situation among Christians today, we shall realize that the background of the book of Colossians exactly corresponds to today's situation. This book was written for us, not only for the saints at Colossae.

If we have a clear understanding of the background of this Epistle, we shall realize that the only way for us to take is the way of the cross. The cross is both a narrow way and a highway. For those not willing to take the cross, the cross is a narrow way. But for those who are willing to take this way, the cross becomes a highway. In the church we all should be nothing and nobody. This was Paul's attitude when he said that we have died and have been buried. To lay hold of this, we need revelation. Whatever we are, whatever we have, and whatever we do can become a substitute for Christ. The better we are or the more capable we are of doing things, the more Christ may be replaced in our experience. Through the cross, we need to become nothing, to have nothing, and to be able to do nothing. Otherwise, what we are, what we have, or what we can do will become a substitute for Christ. Then in our Christian life Christ will not be all in all. The book of Colossians teaches us that in the church life Christ must be all and in all. Everything that is not Christ must go. (Life-study of Colossians, pp. 2-3, 6-7)

Further Reading: Life-study of Colossians, msgs. 1, 4-6, 32-34, 36, 45, 50, 55

WEEK 1 — DAY 2

Morning Nourishment

Col. 1:12-13 Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you for a share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light; who delivered us out of the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

In Colossians the authority of darkness refers to the good aspects of culture and of our character, disposition, and natural being. The authority of darkness includes our virtues, religion, philosophy, observances, ordinances, principles, and ethical standards. God has delivered us out of all this and has transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, where we live under a heavenly rule and restriction. In this kingdom we are not under a harsh rule, but under the loving rule of the Son. Here we do not sense that we are under righteousness, power, or authority, but under the loving and lovable Lord Jesus. The more we tell the Lord Jesus that we love Him, the more we are freed on the one hand, and the more we are restricted and ruled on the other hand. Because we love Him, we desire to take Him as our person and as our life. This is the proper Christian life for the church life. (Life-study of Colossians, p. 35)

Today's Reading

Although the saints in Colossae did not fall into evil things, they did come under the authority of darkness by allowing the highest products of culture to invade the church. Any part of our being or of our daily life that is without Christ is in darkness.... For example, we may still be under the authority of darkness in our married life. When a brother is exchanging words with his wife, both he and his wife are in darkness. Because they are in darkness, they accuse and blame each other.... Our experience testifies that whenever we live, walk, and behave in the self, we are in darkness. There is no need to commit some gross sin in order to be in darkness. Simply living according to the self puts us in darkness, for it causes us to be

separated from Christ.

Whenever we are in the natural man, not taking Christ as our person and living by Him, we are in darkness. We must remember that He alone is light. He must saturate and prevail in every aspect of our daily living. Otherwise, at least certain parts of our daily walk will not be filled with Christ, and those parts of our life will be in darkness.

Our homes have many rooms. Some rooms may be in the light, whereas others may be dark. The same may be true of our inner being and of our daily living. In certain respects, our life and our walk may be bright, full of light, because Christ occupies the prevailing position there. However, in other parts of our being or in other aspects of our living, we may be closed to the Lord and not allow Him to touch us. Those parts of our life and living that are closed off from Christ are spontaneously in darkness because Christ, the One who is the very light, has no place. Only when Christ occupies every part of us and every aspect of our daily walk can we be wholly in the light and altogether be delivered from the control of the authority of darkness.

The mistake the Colossians were making was that of receiving and following something other than Christ. To accept something in place of Christ is not only to be in darkness, but also to be under the controlling authority of darkness. Anything that is a substitute for Christ—philosophy, religion, character, virtues, concepts, opinions—becomes the authority of darkness to control us. At Colossae, the authority of darkness was Jewish religious observances, pagan ordinances, philosophy, mysticism, and asceticism. Although these things seemed to be good, they were actually the authority of darkness because they replaced Christ. They caused Christ, the light, to be set aside. Therefore, darkness became prevailing once again and controlled the saints in the church. This was the situation in Colossae, and may also be the situation today. (Life-study of Colossians, pp. 38, 40-41)

Further Reading: CWWL, 1983, vol. 2, "Christ in His Excellency," ch. 2

WEEK 1 — DAY 3

Morning Nourishment

Gen. 4:16-17 And Cain went forth from the presence of Jehovah and dwelt in the land of Nod, east of Eden. And...he built a city...

20-21 ...Jabal...was the father of those who dwell in tents and raise cattle. And his brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe.

Cain left the presence of God and went his own way. The first thing he did was to build a city. He produced a culture without God (Gen. 4:16-24). We must realize the source of human culture and the reason for its development. Human culture developed because humanity had lost God. Originally, God, the Creator of man, was everything to man. God was man's protection, maintenance, supply, joy, amusement, and defense. God was everything. In the garden, man had no need to do anything except to till the ground to cooperate with God. God was everything to man in the garden. However, when man lost God, he lost everything. He lost protection, safeguard, maintenance, supply, and amusement. This loss of God forced him to invent human culture. Because man had lost everything, he had to invent something. (Life-study of Genesis, pp. 323-324)

Today's Reading

Jubal invented music (Gen. 4:21). He invented harps and pipes. In fact, the very name Jubal means "jubilee" or "a joyful sound" or "music." What is music? Music is a type of amusement which makes people joyful. Why does man need such amusement? Because he has lost God as his joy. God is man's true enjoyment. A number of times in the past when my friends invited me to attend the movies with them, I said to them, "I don't need that. I have something much better than your movie." I do not even need to watch television, for I have a heavenly television. Everything in the New Jerusalem has been televised to me. I can never forget an experience I had when visiting the city of Houston. A friend was taking me on a tour of the

city. However, I told him, "As long as I have seen the New Jerusalem, I don't need to see any earthly city."

One day, in the year 1937, I was preaching the gospel in the capital city of Nanking. It was a good time of preaching, and the gospel was prevailing. After one of the meetings, a smart young lady, dressed in a very worldly and fashionable way, came to me and said, "Mr. Lee, I have been convinced by your preaching. I would even decide to believe in your Jesus. But this decision depends upon one thing. I am a lover of the theater. Tell me, after becoming a Christian, will I still be allowed to attend the theater?"... As I was considering the way to answer her, I looked to the Lord for a wise reply, and He gave me one. I said to this young lady, "You have your young son with you. Suppose that one day he plays with a sharp knife, and you feel that it is dangerous for him to do this. How would you deal with him? Would you force him to drop the knife, or would you grab the knife out of his hand?" She said, "No, I would simply throw some candies or apples on the floor. I'm sure that he would drop the knife and pick up the candies and apples. The knife would be gone because his hands would be filled with better things." Then I said, "It is exactly the same with you in attending the theater. If you will take Jesus, He will fill you up, and you will have no capacity for anything else." She said, "Marvelous, I will believe." Then I told her, "You must do it now." She replied, "Yes, I will do it now. I believe in the Lord Jesus." She was saved.

The reason I do not attend the movies is not because the church has a regulation against it. The church does not have a list of commandments against such things. However, although there is no such prohibition, I would not attend a movie even if you paid me thousands of dollars to do it. I have something better. I am filled with Christ and I have no capacity for anything else. (Life-study of Genesis, pp. 325-327)

Further Reading: Life-study of Genesis, msg. 24

WEEK 1 — DAY 4

Morning Nourishment

Matt. 24:37-39 For just as the days of Noah were, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as they were in those days before the flood, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day in which Noah entered into the ark, and they did not know that judgment was coming until the flood came and took all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Because Cain refused to take God's way of redemption and chose to go the way of death, he lost God and all the blessings that come from God. Consequently, he must have been filled with a sense of insecurity. He became a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, a person who had no goal, no satisfaction, no rest, and no protection. Hence, among the human race, he was the first one to build a city for self-preservation (Gen. 4:17). He named the city Enoch, after the name of his son. The fact that he did not name the city after the name of God was a declaration that man had become independent of God. His descendants invented cattle-raising for making a living, music for amusing themselves, and weapons for self-defense (vv. 20-22). This was a godless culture that was for self-preservation, self-support, self-amusement, and self-defense. It was invented apart from God by the man who lost God and all God's blessings. (Truth Lessons—Level Two, vol. 2, p. 34)

Today's Reading

When man lost God and all that God was to him, he had to invent something for his own protection so that he might exist on the earth. This is the reason that human culture was formed. In such a godless culture man indulged in lusts and took many wives. Moreover, man became lawless, godless, murderous, and violent (Gen. 4:23-24). Among Cain's descendants, there was one named Lamech, who married two wives (v. 19), thus practicing polygamy. In order to fulfill the lusts of his flesh, Lamech was the

first to break the principle of marriage ordained by God for human propagation, that is, the principle of one wife for one husband (2:24). He also boasted that he had slain a man and had killed a young man. Thus, he was truly lawless and arrogant.... Consequently, such a culture caused the whole human race to be corrupted. Because every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart was only evil continually, and because the earth was filled with man's violence, God repented that He had made man and was grieved in His heart. Thus, He had to destroy the human race completely (6:5-7, 11-13), preserving only Noah's family of eight.

Apparently, such a culture without God was invented by the man who refused to go God's way and thereby lost God. Actually, its intrinsic factor was the instigation and incitement of Satan, God's enemy, within the man who departed from God. At the time of man's fall, Satan, the evil one, injected himself into man and embodied himself in sin to dwell in man's flesh. This was like an evil seed that was sown into man. This seed developed first into jealousy, then into anger, hatred, murder, and lies (4:5-9), and then into lusts and violence (vv. 19, 23). Eventually, it destroyed the entire human race.

Such a culture, which was without God and was united with Satan, became a model representing all human cultures throughout the ages and signifying that these cultures have departed from God and are without God, and that they have followed Satan and are united with Satan. The godless culture began as a seed in Genesis 4, and it will develop throughout the history of the entire human race until it consummates in Babylon the Great in Revelation 18, which also will be cleared away by God's judgment. This clearing away by God's judgment is Christ's judgment of the world at His coming back. Therefore, in Matthew 24:37-39 the Lord Jesus considered the judgment of the flood as a prefigure of His coming.... When the Lord comes back, He will again clear up and put in order the world and the entire human race. (Truth Lessons—Level Two, vol. 2, pp. 34-36)

Further Reading: Truth Lessons—Level Two, vol. 2, lsn. 16

WEEK 1 — DAY 5

Morning Nourishment

Matt. 10:37-39 He who loves father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me; and he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his soul-life shall lose it, and he who loses his soul-life for My sake shall find it.

The primary elements of human culture are religion, politics, and the family life. Human culture is the best invention of mankind. However, we have to realize that Satan in a subtle way utilizes human culture to oppose God's kingdom.... [Culture] has become the stronghold of Satan. Satan maintains a hold on human culture, utilizing it as his kingdom. Human culture has become a basic part and a great portion of the kingdom of Satan. We need a revelation of this fact. (CWWL, 1972, vol. 2, "The Kingdom," p. 189)

Today's Reading

In Matthew 10:16-22 the Lord said that He was sending the kingdom people forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. He went on to say that they will be delivered up to sanhedrins and scourged in the synagogues. The Lord also said that they will be brought before governors and kings, a clear reference to the political people. These verses tell us that both religion and politics are against the kingdom of God. Why are they opposed to God's kingdom? It is because they have their own kingdoms; religion is a kingdom for religious people, and politics is a kingdom for political people.... The situation is the same today.... If we go along with human culture and religion, we will be welcomed and not persecuted. But if we are for the Lord's kingdom, religion will oppose us.

After the Lord spoke about religion and politics, He referred to the family (v. 21). The Lord spoke about fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, and other family relations (vv. 35-37). Not all of your relatives

will be in favor of the kingdom. The situation is the same today as then. Do not think that people are nicer today than then. The cultured people may be even tougher and more severe than the uncultured people. I am not encouraging you to damage your family life, to be an enemy toward your father, or to persecute your wife. If you read the Lord's word carefully, you will see that the kingdom people should be the persecuted ones, not the persecuting ones. We should not be the enemies, and we should not be the persecutors. We have to be the persecuted ones. We should flee if we can, but if we cannot, we must suffer. According to other portions of the Bible, we must pray for the opposers and the persecutors (5:44). We must love them and pray that they will become the same as we are. Mainly, we need to realize this principle: the whole of human culture opposes the kingdom of God.

We should not be disturbed by this, because the opposition of human culture can become our "gasoline station" where we can purchase the extra portion of oil for our vessel (25:9). This means that we take the opportunity to pay the price of losing our soul-life (10:38-39). The price we must pay is our soul-life. Sometimes a husband is caught for the kingdom, but his wife remains a part of human culture. In such a case the husband must lose his soul-life. The Lord Jesus spoke clearly about these matters. He has never cheated us. He said that He did not come to bring peace, but a sword (v. 34).

The Lord Jesus really troubled Judaism, including all the priests. And He created many "troublemakers"—first twelve, then seventy—and sent out these "troublemakers" to create even more trouble. If we in the local churches mean business with the Lord about His kingdom, and if we are faithful to the kingdom, we will cause more trouble to today's Christianity, because today's Christianity has become a constituent of human culture. Since Christianity is a strong factor of contemporary culture, it becomes the strongest opposition to the kingdom of God. (CWWL, 1972, vol. 2, "The Kingdom," pp. 189-191)

Further Reading: CWWL, 1972, vol. 2, "The Kingdom," ch. 22

WEEK 1 — DAY 6

Morning Nourishment

Col. 1:27 To whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Heb. 7:25 Hence also He is able to save to the uttermost those who come forward to God through Him, since He lives always to intercede for them.

In His salvation God saves us not only from sin, judgment, the lake of fire, the world, and the self; He also saves us from everything which replaces Christ, including our culture. Because culture replaces Christ in a practical way in our daily living, it is hateful in the eyes of God. What kind of Christ can replace our culture? The Christ who replaces culture is the extensive Christ, not the limited Christ known by most Christians.... The Christ who can replace our culture and become everything to us is the all-inclusive, extensive Christ. (Life-study of Colossians, p. 391)

Today's Reading

Although we had lost God, Christ has brought us back, reconciled us, to Him. Now we once again have God as the factor which gives meaning and purpose to our existence.... The book of Colossians was written in order to reveal the extensive, all-inclusive Christ who deals with our culture and even replaces our culture. There is no need for us to observe ordinances about eating—we are eating Christ. We do not need to keep certain days, feasts, or new moons—Christ is our new moon, feast, and Sabbath. Since Christ is ever the same and since He is the reality of every day of the week to us, every day is the same. But if we insist on having ordinances concerning food and days, others will judge us with respect to these things. If we care only for the all-inclusive Christ and live according to Him instead of according to culture, no one will have ground to judge us. Christ is the meaning and purpose of life. We all need to see an extensive revelation of such an all-inclusive Christ.

Now that we have received Christ, He, the all-inclusive, extensive One, must replace every aspect of our culture with Himself. We have seen that fallen man uses culture as a substitute for God. First, such a culture is a substitute for God. Then Christ comes in to replace this substitute with Himself... We should love Christ. If we are filled to the brim with Christ, there will not be any room in our being for anything else. Every part of us will be occupied by Christ and with Christ. Then in our experience we shall have the fullness of Christ. We shall be filled with Christ to the extent of our capacity. The Christ who fills our being will replace our culture with Himself. This is the revelation in the book of Colossians.

Because Christ is extensive and all-inclusive, with Him there is no scarcity. If we have such a Christ in our experience, we shall not need anything else. There is no need that He cannot meet, and no capacity to receive Him that He cannot fill. Since we have the all-inclusive Christ, we do not need Judaism, Gnosticism, or asceticism. We have the all-inclusive and extensive Christ with His fullness. He could fill the whole universe, and still He would not be exhausted. We do not need anything, ancient or modern, in place of Christ. We do not even need our self-made and self-imposed culture. I am concerned that many among us still live according to their self-imposed culture. These saints are always imposing restrictions on themselves and living according to them. There is no need for us to remain in the custody of our self-made culture. Instead, we should stay in Christ and in the freedom we have in Christ. We need to be filled to the brim with Christ.... Christ, the extensive One, must replace every element of our natural human life.... Let us allow the pure Christ to fill our being and replace every aspect of our natural human life with Himself. (Life-study of Colossians, pp. 391-392, 426-427)

Further Reading: CWWL, 1964, vol. 2, "A General Sketch of the New Testament in the Light of Christ and the Church, Part 2—Romans through Philemon," chs. 19-20

<< **WEEK 1 — HYMN** >>

Hymns, #538 It is God's intent and pleasure

Experience of Christ — As the Indwelling One

1 It is God's intent and pleasure

To have Christ revealed in me,
Nothing outward as religion,
But His Christ within to be.

Chorus

*It is God's intent and pleasure
That His Christ be wrought in me;
Nothing outwardly performing,
But His Christ my all to be.*

2 It is God's intent and pleasure

That His Christ may live in me;
Nothing as an outward practise,
But Christ working inwardly.

3 It is God's intent and pleasure

That His Christ be formed in me;
Not the outward forms to follow,
But Christ growing inwardly.

4 It is God's intent and pleasure

That His Christ make home in me;
Not just outwardly to serve Him,
But Christ dwelling inwardly.

5 It is God's intent and pleasure

That His Christ my hope may be;

**It is not objective glory,
But 'tis Christ subjectively.
6 It is God's intent and pleasure
That His Christ be all in me;
Nothing outwardly possessing,
But His Christ eternally.**