

June 23

Lesson 4 (NIV)

HEARTS UNITED IN LOVE

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Corinthians

3:10-17

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Colossians

2:1-15

COLOSSIANS 2:1-15

¹I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ²My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

⁶So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with

thankfulness.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the

elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

⁹For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

¹³When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

KEY VERSES

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.—**Colossians 2:6, 7**

COVENANT IN GOD

Unit 1: A Fulfilled Covenant

LESSONS 1–4

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List three things that believers have in Christ.
2. Compare and contrast the meaning and significance of circumcision and baptism.
3. Identify one area to grow or mature in his or her walk with Christ and make a plan to do so.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Pursuit of Completeness
 - B. Lesson Context
- I. Love's Concern (COLOSSIANS 2:1–5)
 - A. Paul's Intensity (v. 1)
 - B. Paul's Purpose (vv. 2, 3)
Buried Treasure
 - C. Paul's Presence (vv. 4, 5)

- II. Love's Growth (COLOSSIANS 2:6, 7)
 - A. Walking in Christ (v. 6)
 - B. Strengthened in Christ (v. 7)
- III. Love's Object (COLOSSIANS 2:8–12)
 - A. Reject Thoughts (v. 8)
Power of Truth
 - B. Embrace Fullness (vv. 9, 10)
 - C. Accept Cleansing (v. 11)
 - D. Rise to Full Life (v. 12)
- IV. Love's Triumph (COLOSSIANS 2:13–15)
 - A. Christ Conquers Sin (v. 13)
 - B. Christ Fulfills the Law (v. 14)
 - C. Christ Gives the Victory (v. 15)

Conclusion

- A. Possession of Completeness
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

Apphia	<i>Af-ee-uh-or Ap-fee-uh.</i>
Archippus	<i>Ar-kip-us.</i>
Colossae	<i>Ko-lahss-ee.</i>
Epaphras	<i>Ep-uh-frass.</i>
Ephesians	<i>Ee-fee-zhunz.</i>
Ezekiel	<i>Ee-zeek-ee-ul or Ee-zeek-yul.</i>
Laodicea	<i>Lay-odd-uh-see-uh.</i>
Messiah	<i>Meh-sigh-uh.</i>
Philemon	<i>Fih-lee-mun or Fye-lee-mun.</i>

Introduction

A. Pursuit of Completeness

For many today, the promise of everlasting romantic love is the height of personal wellness. Tom Cruise's oft-parodied line "You complete me" from the film *Jerry Maguire* points to humanity's constant pursuit of completeness and our sense that we do not possess it on our own. Others do not seek wholeness through romance but instead through other relationships, through work, or even through hobbies. Where can we look to find true completeness?

B. Lesson Context

Members of the Colossian church came from backgrounds featuring a myriad of religious and philosophical options. On this buffet were Judaism and pagan religions from across the Roman Empire. There were mystery religions that promised spiritual enlightenment through secret knowledge. There were sophisticated systems of philosophical thought and groups that practiced black magic. Each group made its own claims about truth. Some believers at Colossae attempted to augment the gospel with a mixture of elements from this religious-philosophical buffet. The temptation to trust in humanity's knowledge rather than in faith through Christ and knowledge of him was irresistible to some.

I. Love's Concern ([COLOSSIANS 2:1-5](#))

A. Paul's Intensity (v. 1)

1. I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.

Paul desires that his readers know of his ministry of prayer on their behalf (see [Colossians 1:9-12](#)). The word translated *contending* is a form of the same word translated "strenuously contend" in [1:29](#) (speaking of Paul's own labor) and "wrestling" in [4:12](#) (speaking of Epaphras's laboring for them in prayer).

Paul greets Archippus by name in [Colossians 4:17](#) and knows other Christians in Colossae (Philemon and Apphia; compare [Philemon 1, 2](#) with [Colossians 4:10-17](#)). Even so, the phrase *for all who have not met me personally* is widely accepted to mean that Paul has not actually been to Colossae. *Laodicea* is another city in the Lycus River valley, approximately 10 miles from Colossae. Although many within this letter's audience are strangers to Paul, they are still objects of Paul's concern that arises from the unity believers have in Christ ([Ephesians 4:4; 1 Corinthians 1:2](#)).

What Do You Think?

What plan can you create for express-

ing concerns for people in ways they will receive and appreciate?

Digging Deeper

Consider nonverbal expressions of concern in addition to verbal, and when it might be best to use one type over the other.

In what ways can your church promote a stronger sense of unity and common purpose?

Digging Deeper

Consider how this might be done corporately (through the church's formal communication and programming channels) as well as by individual believers.

B. Paul's Purpose (vv. 2, 3)

2a. My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart

Scripture often uses the term *heart* to designate the person, especially one's center of moral and ethical deliberation, will, and attitudes ([Genesis 6:5](#); [Exodus 4:21](#); [Matthew 9:4](#); [12:34](#); etc.). The phrase translated *encouraged in heart* communicates more than offering solace; one is both comforted and strengthened.

2b. and united in love,

This suggests a unity of purpose and thought. The same term appears in [Ephesians 4:15, 16](#) and [Colossians 2:19](#) to speak of a unity derived from the church's attachment to its head, Christ. The love that unites believers has its source in their devotion to Christ, who empowers them to love each other ([Ephesians 3:19; 4:1, 2](#); [1 John 4:11](#)). Only a love built on the knowledge of what Christ has done and a desire to serve others can unite the church ([John 13:34, 35](#)).

What Do You Think?

2c. so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,

Paul desires the saints to have the confidence and power that comes from an ability to distinguish between true and false teaching (see [Acts 9:22](#)). The focus of this understanding is to be in knowing *the mystery of God*. Paul uses *mystery*, a term found earlier in [Colossians 1:26, 27](#), to refer to formerly hidden things now revealed by God to his people through apostolic preaching and writing concerning the gospel (see [Romans 11:25](#)). The identification of the mystery as being of God, both *of God* and *Christ*, exalts Christ by pointing to the unity and equality of the Father and Son in the Trinity together with the Spirit.

3. in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

The false teachers in Colossae claim they possess hidden truth to which only the spiritual elite have access. In contrast

the spiritual elite have access. In contrast with them, the verse before us identifies Christ as the one *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. Though related, wisdom and knowledge are not the same. Knowledge is the mental apprehension of truth; wisdom is the ability to use knowledge appropriately. Believers can access the hidden wisdom and knowledge revealed now in Christ and can possess full understanding through the mystery of God.

BURIED TREASURE

In 1934, Theodore Jones and Henry Grob made a discovery most children only dream about. Jones and Grob had started a secret club and were burying the box that would hold the club's treasury and secrets. Digging in the dirt floor of Jones's cellar, the teens discovered the Holy Grail of childhood fantasy—real buried treasure! They first came across a shiny \$20 gold coin. When their excavation was complete, the boys had unearthed 3,558 century-old gold coins, a fortune that would be worth more than \$10 million today.

After months of legal proceedings, the coins were sold at auction. The money was then placed in two trusts that the boys could access after they turned 21.

For the most part, finding hidden treasure is a childhood fantasy. But for Jesus'

followers, it is a spiritual reality. What treasures have you discovered through your friendship with Jesus?

—J. E.

C. Paul's Presence (vv. 4, 5)

4. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.

Paul knows Christ is the full repository of wisdom and knowledge ([Colossians 1:9, 10; 2:2](#)). False teachers could dazzle and impress an audience, especially if they were not already convinced of the truth they found in Christ.

5. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Though Paul is in prison in Rome ([Acts 28:16–31; Colossians 4:10, 18](#)), through his letter he expresses intimate knowledge of the church in Colossae and great love for them (see also [1 Corinthians 5:3](#)). He expresses the delight he has known from hearing positive reports about the Colossian believers from Ephras ([Colossians 1:7, 8; 4:12, 13](#)). Order and steadfastness result from *faith in Christ*. Biblical faith is more than intellectual assent to truth claims; it is a commitment to action resulting from one's trust in Jesus Christ ([1 Thessalonians 1:3](#);

James 2:14–22). A fundamental defense against deceptive and crippling doctrine is a deepened commitment to Christ.

What Do You Think?

In what situations could you provide encouragement by expressing your pride in someone else's accomplishments?

Digging Deeper

Think especially of situations and people where encouragement would not normally be expected.

II. Love's Growth (COLOSSIANS 2:6, 7)

A. Walking in Christ (v. 6)

6. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,

Paul calls his audience back to what was originally preached and taught among them in contrast to the error that has arisen in their midst. He also summons them back to the exalted Savior he describes earlier in [Colossians 1:15–20](#). By using the full title *Christ Jesus ... Lord*, Paul reminds readers that Jesus, the one who walked humbly among humanity as a man, is also the Messiah (Greek “Christ” = Hebrew “Messiah”), the anointed king, and the Lord God in flesh. He is the exalted one who is above all ([Philippians](#)

[2:9–11](#); [Colossians 1:15–20](#); [2:3, 9, 10](#)).

Continue to live your lives in him essentially summarizes the specific commands and warnings that follow: believers are to act out the lordship of Jesus Christ in thought and deeds ([James 2:14–26](#)). Believers are to live *in* him, not simply *with* him ([Colossians 1:28](#); [2:20](#); [3:1–3](#)). Elsewhere, the verb translated *continue to live* is rendered “walk” in describing the nature of the relationship we are to have with Jesus (see [1 John 1:6, 7](#); [2:11](#); [2 John 4, 6](#)). He is not a travel companion we call alongside us as we travel where we have already determined we want to go. As our Lord, Jesus determines our path and empowers us to walk the path to which we are called ([Matthew 11:28–30](#); [Luke 9:23](#)).

B. Strengthened in Christ (v. 7)

7. rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

Paul uses a horticultural metaphor (see [Colossians 1:10–12](#)) and a reference to thanksgiving to expound on a command to live in Christ. Having been *rooted ... in him*, believers are to grow as a plant grows out of the soil in which it is planted (compare [1 Corinthians 3:10–14](#); [Ephesians 2:20](#)).

Strengthened has the notion of confirmation or establishing ([Romans 15:8](#); [1](#)

Corinthians 1:6, 8). By sticking to their roots and being built up, the saints in Colossae will be established in faith. The passive verbs *rooted*, *built up*, and *strengthened* reveal that it is God who grounds them in faith. *Overflowing with thankfulness* is the believers' main task throughout this process (Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2). Thanksgiving will abound in the saints' lives as they (we) are attentive to what God has done in Christ and to what he is currently doing.

III. Love's Object (COLOSSIANS 2:8-12)

A. Reject Thoughts (v. 8)

8. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

Hollow and deceptive philosophy refers to systems of thought characterized by human origin. The phrase *elemental spiritual forces* translates a Greek word that has two meanings. Though the word can refer to astrological concepts, in this verse it refers to an organized series of things, such as the letters of the alphabet. The word came to connote the basic elements necessary for a rudimentary knowledge of a subject (compare

Hebrews 5:12).

World refers to the transitory systems of humanity that can and/or do stand between a person and God. *World* in this sense combined with the phrase *elemental spiritual forces* thus refers to human ideas considered necessary to supplement or even to replace the work of Christ (Galatians 4:3, 9).

To understand more clearly the significance of philosophy and the elemental spiritual forces, one must observe their contrast with things of *Christ*. In his address to the men of Athens, Paul himself repeatedly alludes to ideas discussed among Greek philosophers (Acts 17:22-31). Such thought, which depends on human tradition, is deceptive in comparison with the fullness of understanding and life available in Christ (Colossians 1:9; 2:2, 3).

Then and now, the elemental forces of the world are ultimately powerless. They are the “-isms” of human tradition, culture, and pagan religion that seek or profess understanding through natural human insight alone. They do not seek to understand Christ in the light of Scripture nor do they exalt God and Christ to their proper place.

POWER OF TRUTH

In the novel 1984, George Orwell envisioned a society in which truth was

determined by the government for its own ends. In Oceania, the populace knew that “war is peace,” “freedom is slavery,” and “ignorance is strength.” This knowledge was made possible through “double-think,” the ability to accept two mutually exclusive concepts as true. The government ruled in paradox: The Ministry of Love inflicted torture. The Ministry of Peace waged perpetual war. The Ministry of Plenty rationed resources.

Orwell understood that saying something is true does not make it so. In this, he would have found agreement with the apostle Paul. Paul did not see truth as relative or infinitely flexible. In fact, Paul believed truth has an author who offers us a firm foundation when we trust him. What “truths” do you need to reevaluate in light of the truth that Christ reveals?

—J. E.

B. Embrace Fullness (vv. 9, 10)

9, 10. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

Paul emphasizes the magnitude of the incarnation of Jesus Christ by speaking of *all the fullness*. His use of the present tense verb *lives* highlights that the incarnation is not simply a historical event but also a present reality with contemporary

significance. The power and completeness of Christ exhibited in his incarnation is available to all believers.



Visual for Lesson 4. Have this visual on display as you pose the discussion question that is associated with [Colossians 2:2](#).

[Colossians 1:16](#) earlier asserts that Christ created all things, including *every power and authority*, and that they exist for his purposes. This tandem often refers to evil powers, whether terrestrial or celestial, real or imagined. Christ thus is preeminent above them all ([Philippians 2:9–11](#)).

Sandwiched between this section’s two central claims about Christ is the affirmation that believers are *brought to fullness* in him. The repetition of the concepts filling, fullness, and completeness in this letter ([Colossians 1:9, 19, 24; 2:2, 9; 4:12](#)) suggests that false teachers in the Colossian church asserted that Christians need something in addition to Christ to be complete. Paul, however, affirms that

because Christ supersedes the powers, believers need not fear them as a barrier to all that is available in Christ. Neither do they possess any power to provide the fullness God offers in Christ. To seek fullness in any other person or power than Jesus Christ is futile and foolhardy.

C. Accept Cleansing (v. 11)

11. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ,

Paul evokes the imagery of *circumcision* to describe the believer's incorporation into God's new covenant community (see [Genesis 17](#)). The Old Testament Scriptures also intimated that physical circumcision alone did not validate one's covenant relationship with God ([Deuteronomy 10:16](#); [30:6](#); [Jeremiah 4:4](#)). A greater circumcision, one of the heart, was needed ([Romans 2:28, 29](#)).

Christ followers of both genders from among all people groups have now received this greater circumcision, here described as being *circumcised by Christ*. Old covenant circumcision was a physical act, but Christ performs the new circumcision in the spiritual realm; it is *not performed by human hands*. Old covenant circumcision was performed on male Israelite infants. Christ's circumcision is

performed on men and women who exercise faith. Circumcision under the law involved the removal of a piece of skin; new covenant circumcision involves the removal of an entire way of life, *the whole self ruled by the flesh*.

D. Rise to Full Life (v. 12)

12. having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

As in [Romans 6:1–14](#), *baptism* is linked with burial, and that burial imagery illustrates the completeness of death to sin. The rising out of water then pantomimes our resurrection. Paul describes the believer's resurrection life as having already begun. Believers can now access a full life through the transforming power God manifested in raising Jesus *from the dead*.

No power to destroy the old life and to raise the Christ follower to new life resides in the water itself. Rather, baptism is made effective by its connection with *faith in the working of God* (see also [Acts 2:38](#); [Titus 3:5](#); and [1 Peter 3:21](#)).

What Do You Think?

Which Scripture passages or biblical themes have you personally found helpful in connecting faith,

baptism, and daily Christian experience?

Digging Deeper

In what ways can you help others make the same connection?

believers overcome the burden of guilt associated with past sins?

Digging Deeper

How might your answer differ depending on the specific type of sin with which a person feels burdened?

IV. Love's Triumph (COLOSSIANS 2:13-15)

A. Christ Conquers Sin (v. 13)

13. When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

The Colossians had been *dead in [their] sins* (see [Ephesians 2:1](#)). The Greek word translated twice as *sins* emphasizes deliberate disobedience and unfaithfulness to God. The phrase *uncircumcision of your flesh* then points to the hearers' identity as Gentiles outside the old covenant ([Ephesians 2:11-13](#)) and describes a continuing state of spiritual rebellion ([Ezekiel 44:7, 9](#)).

They are now *alive with Christ* ([Colossians 2:12](#); [Ephesians 2:5](#)). All their *sins* have been forgiven. God's act of pardoning sins demonstrates the grace of God's forgiveness. God's forgiving *all our sins* shows the extent of God's grace that completely removes sin.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to help fellow

B. Christ Fulfills the Law (v. 14)

14. having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

In [Matthew 5:17](#), Jesus said that he had come to fulfill the law, not eliminate it. The text before us provides a vital clue regarding how that has now happened. The phrase *charge of our legal indebtedness* portrays the Old Testament law as an invoice or IOU indicating we owed something to God. Elsewhere, Paul affirms that the law is "holy" and "good" ([Romans 7:12](#)). It was a righteous standard that accused the ancient Israelites and against which they could not argue.

However, Christ has canceled this debt. By sending his own Son to suffer the penalty for our sin, God both upheld the holiness of his own law and rescued us from its accusation. Just as Pilate literally nailed words of accusation ("The King of the Jews") to the cross ([John 19:19](#)), God figuratively nailed the law and its penalty there as well.

C. Christ Gives the Victory (v. 15)

15. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Victorious imperial armies displayed their captives and their spoils of war as they marched through the streets of Rome. Christ is the conquering king who has triumphed over Satan, demonic forces, and all the powers of evil. In his death, Jesus stripped them of their power, atoned for our sins, and won a decisive victory over evil, a victory that his resurrection confirms. The *public spectacle* made of them harkens back to the language of mystery ([Colossians 2:2](#)) and reminds the audience that no additional knowledge or wisdom is needed because God has accomplished his plan fully in Jesus Christ (see [2 Corinthians 2:2-5](#)).

We are freed to live a resurrection kind of life now in Christ ([Colossians 2:13](#)). Christ's death canceled and made irrelevant all the old things that once cluttered life and opposed us ([2:14](#)). Believers are united with him and with each other.

Conclusion

A. Possession of Completeness

Because Christ is supreme above all and we are complete in him, we have all we need. Rather than being led astray by

other teachings, we trustingly keep our feet on the path Jesus sets for us to walk.

B. Prayer

Our Father, grant that we may be rooted and built up in Christ and strengthened in our faith. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Mine the treasures hidden in Christ; look nowhere else.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible](#)
Student

Into the Lesson

Before class, prepare a time line of the history of your congregation on a large sheet of chart or butcher paper. Include milestones such as the founding date, building completions, dates for each minister, etc.

Display the time line at the front of the room, and have colored markers available for learners to use to place themselves on the time line according to when they began to attend. When everyone has done so, say, “Today we will be reading a portion of the letter Paul sent to the church at Colossae. Let’s see what Paul had to say to the Colossians about their spiritual community.”

Option. Place in chairs copies of the “Christian Perks” puzzle from the reproducible page, which you can download, for students to work on as they arrive.

Into the Word

Use the Lesson Context to prepare a brief summary of the religious and philosophical influences at work in the Colossian church or assign this task to a student. After the talk ask, “What were the

Colossian Christians doing wrong in their presentation of the gospel?” (*Expected response:* they used false teaching to make the gospel more “acceptable” to the people in their community.)

Divide learners into four groups (or multiples of four for larger classes). Ask each group to search the lesson text of [Colossians 2:1-15](#) to find answers to their assigned question. Ask them to include a verse reference for each answer.

- *False Teachers Group:* How did the false teachers communicate their message?
- *Gospel Defense Group:* What defense did Paul give in support of the supremacy of the gospel message?
- *Evidence Group:* What evidence did Paul give to support his defense of the gospel?
- *Results Group:* What result can Christians expect if they accept Paul’s message?

Write the four group headings at the top of four columns on the board. As each group reads its question and shares its answers, write those under the appropriate heading. *Expected responses:*

False Teachers—would deceive by using “fine-sounding arguments” (v. 4); they would use “deceptive philosophy,” relying on “human tradition and the

elemental spiritual forces of this world” (v. 8).

Gospel Defense—by staying “firm” in their “faith in Christ” (v. 5), they will live in him (v. 6) and become “rooted and built up” and “strengthened” in him (v. 7); they will teach the superiority of Christ, in whom “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (v. 9); they will emphasize that Christ is the “head over every power and authority” (v. 10).

Evidence—Christians experience being “circumcised by Christ” (v. 11) when they are “buried with him in baptism,” and they know the power of Christ’s resurrection since they are “raised with him through” faith (v. 12).

Results—Christians experience new life and the forgiveness of sins (v. 13); sins have been nailed to the cross (v. 14); because of this believers can triumph over the “powers and authorities” of darkness. (v. 15).

Allow leeway for other verses to be used.

Into Life

Say, “Paul instructed the Colossians that their faith was rooted, built up, and established in Christ. This is also a call for us to have the same kind of faith. Let’s brainstorm some ways that we can develop steadfast faith.” Write learners’ suggestions on the board (*possibilities:*

starting daily devotions, pursuing a deeper prayer life, participating in Bible study within a small group, etc.). Challenge learners to create a plan for the coming month.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Growth Symbols” activity from the reproducible page as a take-home.