

How This Study Supports the Discipleship Plan (see page 129).

SHARE CHRIST. We are called to be witnesses for Christ, even in a culture that is disinterested in or even antagonistic toward the truth. This study underscores why and how we can share Christ in such an environment.

SHARING JESUS IN A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD

Session 1 Truth Matters • Proverbs 16:20–25; 30:1–6

Session 2 Jesus Matters • Colossians 1:15–22

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Session 5 Jesus Shared • Acts 17:16–18, 22–23, 30–31

INTRODUCTION

SHARING JESUS IN A POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD

“What is truth?” Pilate asked Jesus, and it’s a question that multitudes are asking today. Even though many deny the existence of truth and others question its relevance in our post-Christian world, the Bible teaches that truth is both relevant and essential to every area of life. Truth can’t be denied or ignored; it must be acknowledged and accepted for meaning and purpose.

We wouldn’t know that absolute truth exists if God hadn’t revealed it through His Word. In the pages of the Bible, He clearly communicates why truth matters—because He is the God of truth—and we can know the truth through His Son, Jesus. As followers of Jesus, our responsibility is to be faithful in sharing the truth about who Jesus is and what He’s done with those we know and love. That’s true of those who are

different from us too, because Jesus saves all those who trust in Him.

I’m excited for us to go on this journey together, looking into the Bible for practical examples and learning life-changing lessons on how to share Jesus effectively and compassionately in a post-Christian world. I believe that when we know the truth and share the truth with others, they can know the truth, and the truth will set them free!

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Session 7



Truth Matters

THE POINT

Truth does not reside in our own opinions and reasoning.

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

On December 26, 2004, one of the largest and most powerful earthquakes ever recorded occurred off the coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. This powerful earthquake generated the largest and most deadly tsunami in modern times. The tsunami killed nearly 230,000 people, displaced 1.7 million, and caused more than 13 billion dollars in damage. The earthquake and the tsunami it created devastated entire coastal areas, completely changing the landscape and economies of many Indonesian communities.¹

In recent decades, we've experienced a massive social earthquake of relativism and now face a rising and deadly tsunami of popular opinions, personal beliefs, and ever-changing philosophies. It's easy to forget there is such a thing as absolute, unchanging truth in all this chaos. In our passages today, the biblical writers remind us that truth isn't found in human reasoning or opinion polls but in God's eternal and unchanging Word.

As we study these verses together, we'll see the striking contrast between human understanding and true wisdom. Join me in discovering why truth matters and is necessary to navigate life's challenges and to live a meaningful life.

QUESTION 1:

When have you changed your opinion on something?

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

PROVERBS 16:20–25

²⁰ The one who understands a matter finds success, and the one who trusts in the Lord will be happy. ²¹ Anyone with a wise heart is called discerning, and pleasant speech increases learning. ²² Insight is a fountain of life for its possessor, but the discipline of fools is folly. ²³ The heart of a wise person instructs his mouth; it adds learning to his speech. ²⁴ Pleasant words are a honeycomb: sweet to the taste and health to the body. ²⁵ There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death.

Have you ever been wrong? Have you ever seen something differently once you had more information or experience? One of the marks of our humanity is that our understanding is naturally limited. It's limited by our knowledge, experience, and inability to see our blind spots or even know what we don't know. In short, we're limited because we're human.

When I started teaching my oldest child how to drive, I had to make sure she understood that even though her car has mirrors and a camera, there are natural "blind spots" that, if she's not careful, will cause her to have a wreck. The same is true in our lives. We all have blind spots. That's why we need someone who has perfect understanding to help us through this life. Unlike our human understanding, which fluctuates—ebbing and flowing with social trends and scientific advancements—God's truth remains stable, constant, and unchanging because God is all those things. What a relief that is amid all the change we're experiencing today. There's something and Someone we can count on who won't change.

The world my kids are growing up in is far different from the one I experienced when I was their age. Time moves forward, and things change. We have more knowledge than we've ever had in the history of the world. We can do things that were only ideas in comic strips a couple of decades ago and never even crossed our ancestors' minds in the centuries before that. However, even though we have more knowledge, wisdom is in very short supply.

Solomon explains what comes from living according to God's wisdom. He says in verses 20–21:

- When we understand a matter, we will find success.
- When we trust the Lord, we will experience happiness.
- When we take His wisdom to heart, we will have discernment.

This wisdom will be seen in how we think (*insight*, v. 22) and talk (*words*, v. 24). Why is getting God's wisdom so important? Verse 25 tells

us. Even though our way of thinking may seem right, if we're not following God's wisdom and living according to His truth, it leads to death.

When I was a boy, I decided I was Superman and could fly. So, one day, I put on my cape, climbed on top of my parents' shed in the backyard, and jumped. I didn't fly. I fell—like a rock. I didn't defy gravity. I demonstrated it. Likewise, just because a person says there is no such thing as truth doesn't mean there's not. We see the effects of denying the reality of truth today in our world's chaos, pain, and death.

We hear it often. "I have my truth, and you have yours." The problem with that way of thinking is that two opposing things can't both be true about the same thing at the same time. And like me thinking I could fly when I couldn't, this kind of thinking is causing great harm to many people today. Understanding why truth

matters and where it comes from is essential in a world where relativism reigns. Trusting God and His unchanging Word provides stability and clarity. As followers of Christ, we're called to live out the truth in every aspect and area of our lives. This means making decisions based on biblical principles, even when they contradict popular opinions. It means standing firm in our faith, even when challenged. Living according to God's truth not only benefits us, but it's a powerful testimony to others.

QUESTION 2:

How can we guard against deceiving ourselves?

PROVERBS 30:1–4

The words of Agur son of Jakeh. The pronouncement. The man's oration to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal: ² I am more stupid than any other person, and I lack a human's ability to understand. ³ I have not gained wisdom, and I have no knowledge of the Holy One. ⁴ Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in his hands? Who has bound up the waters in a cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is the name of his son—if you know?

What do we call someone who thinks they know everything? We call them a "know-it-all." When someone is called a "know-it-all," it doesn't mean they know it all. It means quite the opposite. It's not a compliment when someone is called a "know-it-all;" it's an accusation of ignorance and arrogance.

To gain God's wisdom, we must first humble ourselves and admit that we don't know every-

thing. This characteristic was the genius of a man named Agur. We only read about him and his father, Jakeh, in this one chapter.

Proverbs 30 is sometimes called "The Book of Agur." He appears to have been a desert sage or wise man. He would have had to be for the wisest man who ever lived, Solomon, to have included some of his sayings in the book of Proverbs. His name means "collector"

or “gatherer,” and he gives us a collection of wise sayings that have been gathered and placed into God’s Word at the direction of the Holy Spirit.

What was the secret to Agur’s wisdom? Humility. He humbly admitted he didn’t know everything there was to know, so he needed the One who was all-wise and the source of all truth to come down from heaven and reveal it to him. In verse one, he declared his oration to Ithiel and Ucal, whose names mean “weary” and “worn out.” He was tired and worn out from trying to understand things that were beyond his ability to understand. He claimed to be more stupid than any other person. He confessed his lack of knowledge of the Holy One. How could he? He hadn’t gone up to heaven and come back down. He hadn’t gathered the wind in his hands. He hadn’t bound up the earth’s waters in his cloak or established the ends of the earth. There were many things he hadn’t done and didn’t know.

The questions Agur asked in verse 4 remind us of the questions God asked Job. “Where were you when I established the earth? . . . Who enclosed the sea behind doors? . . . Where is the road to the home of light? . . . Who put wisdom in the heart or gave the mind understanding?” (Job 38).

What God wanted to impress upon Job, and what Agur got, was that he didn’t know everything. There are many things that are

beyond our ability to understand. That’s why the first thing we must do to receive the truth is to humble ourselves and acknowledge our ignorance.

Humility doesn’t mean thinking less of yourself. As Warren Wiersbe said, “Humility means not thinking of yourself at all.”² Humility is odd; the moment you think you have it, you lose it. It’s like the story of the boy who won a ribbon for being the humblest student in class, but they took the award away when he wore the ribbon on his shirt.

When you come to where Agur was, you can then accept God’s wisdom and truth. As R.C. Sproul said, “You don’t have to give up your intellect to trust the Bible; you have to give up your pride.”³ I think that’s the one thing that differentiates those who accept God’s truth from those who don’t—the first has let go of their pride while the latter refuses to do so.

QUESTION 3:

How does accepting that we don’t understand everything help us in life?

PROVERBS 30:5–6

⁵ Every word of God is pure; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. ⁶ Don’t add to his words, or he will rebuke you, and you will be proved a liar.

Engage

CONSIDERING TRUTH

Rate the influence God's Word has on your views of the subjects listed, with 0 = no influence and 10 = total influence. Then write a prayer asking God to help strengthen each area.

Finances:

0 —— 1 —— 2 —— 3 —— 4 —— 5 —— 6 —— 7 —— 8 —— 9 —— 10

Sexuality:

0 —— 1 —— 2 —— 3 —— 4 —— 5 —— 6 —— 7 —— 8 —— 9 —— 10

Honesty:

0 —— 1 —— 2 —— 3 —— 4 —— 5 —— 6 —— 7 —— 8 —— 9 —— 10

Relationships:

0 —— 1 —— 2 —— 3 —— 4 —— 5 —— 6 —— 7 —— 8 —— 9 —— 10

Faith:

0 —— 1 —— 2 —— 3 —— 4 —— 5 —— 6 —— 7 —— 8 —— 9 —— 10

My Prayer:

QUESTION 4:

Why do you think some people are distrustful of God's Word?

What happens when we acknowledge and accept God's truth? Agur indicates that He purifies and protects us. I enjoy camping and spending time outdoors. One of the things that's necessary if you're going to spend more than a night or two in the wilderness is you must have a way to purify water. If you don't have clean water, you'll quickly become sick. Today, there are various ways to purify water: straining and boiling the water, purification tablets or drops, water filters, and so forth. But there's only one way to purify our hearts and minds—by the pure Word of God. Without it, we become spiritually sick very quickly.

I shared this verse during my first devotional as a young pastor at a school board meeting. It was a timely word because I could remind them of the truth that God's Word is pure. Nothing in it will dirty young hearts or destroy young lives. What a contrast with so much that we see in culture today. Everywhere we look, there is sin and depravity. There is so much wickedness and sin readily available—nearly unavoidable—that the enemy would use it to defile young and not-so-young hearts and minds. God's Word doesn't do that. It is pure, and it purifies.

In that devotional before the school board, I also noted that this shield was called a "buckler." It wasn't the large, heavy shield that soldiers would carry into battle that would cover their entire body. The buckler was a small, often

round shield attached to the forearm and used to protect the vital areas of the soldier's chest—his heart and lungs. Similarly, God's Word is a reliable shield, always ready to protect our hearts from the enemy's attacks.

This image of God's Word being a buckler for His people is powerful and practical. When we trust God's Word, we find refuge and safety. God's Word provides clarity, direction, purity, and purpose in a world filled with conflicting messages and deceptive philosophies. It shields us from the confusion and chaos that comes from relying on human wisdom alone.

In the New Testament, Jesus—who declared Himself to be "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6)—connects abiding in His Word with knowing the truth and experiencing the freedom it brings. He said, "If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31–32). We must see the connection between God's Word, His Son, and the freedom proclaimed. And the connection is truth. God's Word is truth because He's the God of truth. Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life." So, when we trust the truth of God's Word and accept the truth of God's Son, we experience the freedom Jesus promises.

QUESTION 5:

When has relying on God's Word as truth helped you overcome something in life?

LIVE IT OUT

Truth doesn't reside in our own opinions and reasoning. Choose one of the following applications:

- **Accept and embrace the truth as the foundation for your life.** If you've not yet accepted Christ, this is the first step to discovering truth and experiencing freedom. You'll find help on the inside cover of this book.
- **Apply the truth to every area of your life.** Commit to bringing every thought and decision in line with God's truth, letting it guide your interactions, relationships, and personal choices. Make a list of truths you can apply this week.
- **Affirm the truth with confidence and courage.** Live it out boldly and confidently, trusting in God's promises and protection. Find someone in your neighborhood or at work with whom you can share this message of truth.



1. "JetStream Max: 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, accessed August 23, 2024, https://www.noaa.gov/jetstream/2004tsu_max.
2. Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary*, John 13:1-5. Logos.

3. R.C. Sproul, "The Just Shall Live by Faith," *Renewing Your Mind* by Ligonier Ministries, accessed August 23, 2004, https://renewingyourmind.org/2020/03/16/the-just-shall-live-by-faith/?utm_content=bufferf2576&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=buffer&fbclid=IwY2xjaww1oodeHRuA2FbQ1xMQA8HaQ0Sy4DfGfDQigt6JDCh5lsfCj2tupimhD60eSaEJOpF3gFEdH5bEQ_aem_r_yskMz0d-QHTpKKpzDqZw.



COLOSSIANS AND PAUL'S CHRISTOLOGY

David S. Dockery

Ruins at Laodicea. In Colossians 4:16, Paul mentioned another letter—one that went to the church at Laodicea. Located about 10 miles from Colossae, Laodicea became the dominant city and even served as the capital of the region.

The apostle Paul's major teaching in the book of Colossians centered on the question, "Who is Jesus Christ?" The apostle insisted that no chasm existed between the transcendent God and His material creation. Christ is both the Creator and Reconciler (Col. 1:15–23). He is the exact expression of God and brings together heaven and earth. A need for a hierarchy of angelic powers is nonexistent since Christ is fully divine and fully human. Indeed "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (2:9–10, NIV).

THE PROBLEM AT COLOSSAE

Why did Paul need to focus on this issue at Colossae? Colossae was a pluralistic city with Greek, Jewish, and native Phrygian residents as well as members of the Roman army. Many believe that the doctrinal issues Paul needed to address reflected the philosophical backgrounds associated with this pluralistic population. While Paul does not define the false teaching in a specific way, readers can discern several matters from the apostle's writings.

The first matter involved an exaltation of elemental spirits or angels whom people perceived to be necessary intermediaries between God and humanity. Depending on how persons framed this matter, it seemed to rob Jesus of His deity or to question the authenticity of His humanity. The cosmic Christology of Colossians 1 seeks to speak to these issues.

The second issue had to do with spiritual and liturgical practices. Paul focused instead on a spirituality grounded in Jesus Christ rather than such practices. A third issue was closely related to the previous two. Some in Colossae believed that a special knowledge of some kind, perhaps a type of pre-gnosticism, could lead to ultimate spirituality, rather than the genuine spirituality available in Christ, in whom the fullness of Godhead bodily dwells. Knowing these issues can help readers

better understand the distinctive Christology in Paul's Letter to the Colossians.¹

COLOSSIANS 1:15–20

The story of God as Creator and Reconciler provides the framework for the message of Christ in Colossians 1. The early hymn or confessional statement proclaims that Jesus Christ, the Son, was the Agent for the creation of all things, including humankind (vv. 15–20). Thus the role of Christ as Redeemer is the key and central aspect of God's plan of reconciliation. This cosmic Christology, shaped by the true nature and deity of Jesus Christ, challenged the false teachers. As mentioned above, this Christology insists that no angelic intermediary is needed between the material creation and the creator God, for Jesus Christ Himself is the exact expression and "image of the invisible God" (1:15). The term "image" conveys the idea of representation, symbolizing the object under consideration. Paul was emphasizing the idea that Jesus came as the full and exact revelation and manifestation of the Father (John 14:9). Paul was communicating that Jesus Christ fully manifested God, bringing God into the sphere of human understanding as the visible expression of God. In Christ, the invisible God was made visible (see John 1:18; Heb. 1:3).²

Paul also claimed that Jesus Christ is the "first-born over all creation" (Col. 1:15). At times, some—including Arius in the fourth century—have misinterpreted this phrase. Their approach suggests that Jesus was the first part of God's creation, greater than all the rest of creation but not God Himself. The Council of Nicea condemned the teaching of Arius in A.D. 325.³ Though condemned, this position has continued to find expression through the centuries in various cults and sectarian groups.

The term "firstborn" is not a reference to time—its meaning has to do with priority.



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (11/30/18)

To declare that Jesus is the “firstborn” means He has ultimate priority in all of God’s creation. As the New Testament scholar Curtis Vaughan has observed, “Christ is His Father’s representative and heir and has the management of the divine household (all creation) committed to Him.”⁴ The term “firstborn” does not subsume Jesus under the creation. Instead it separates and distances Him from the creation. As New Testament professor Richard Melick has explained, “the point is that Jesus is the firstborn (preeminent) with reference to the creation.”⁵ In Christ’s role as Revealer, He manifests God to us. In His relation to creation, He is preeminent over it.

This picture in Colossians 1 is one of the great portraits of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Not only is Christ preeminent in relation to creation (1:15–17) and in relation to humanity and the church because of His resurrection from the dead (vv. 18–20), but this beautiful passage celebrates Christ as the sovereign Creator and Redeemer of all things.⁶

View from Tel Colossae near the modern town of Honaz, Turkey. Although once one of the larger and more important cities in the region, earthquakes and changes in roads and travel routes caused Colossae to decline.

Christ is the means
through which God
will ultimately return
His creation to the
glory it lost when sin
entered the world
(Gen. 3).

Christ has priority in both time and rank within God's plan to reconcile all creation to Himself. Christ, Himself, is the authoritative Head and Lord over the church, which is His body (v. 18). As Lord, He was the first to experience the resurrection from the dead. Those who follow Him as Lord—that is, those who are part of His body—shall also participate in His resurrection. This forthcoming resurrection event “will ultimately include all God's people and signal the completion of God's purposes to reconcile all creation to himself (1:20).”⁷

Paul developed a physiological metaphor to establish the relationship of Head over body. The church responds in humble adoration, acknowledging that Christ is Head over all. God was pleased for His fullness to dwell in Christ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself (vv. 19–20). The purpose of Christ's reconciliation is to bring about a new creation in which estranged people may know God and approach Him in adoration and worship.

Christ is the means through which God will ultimately return His creation to the glory it lost when sin entered the world (Gen. 3). Thus, “God was pleased . . . to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col. 1:19–20, NIV).

COLOSSIANS 2:6–15

Paul's Christological exposition continues in this key passage. He wanted to ensure that the Colossians did not entertain the ideas that Christ was merely an important visionary or religious leader. Colossians 2:6–9 stresses Christ's distinctive preeminence, affirming His uniqueness and His deity. This affirmation serves as the foundation for true spirituality.⁸

In writing to the Colossian believers, Paul surrounded his exhortation to live in Christ with themes that were clearly a response to the false

teaching taking place in their midst (vv. 6–7). The context emphasizes the two phrases “as you received Christ Jesus” and “as you were taught” (NIV).

The right antidote for false teaching (see the warning in v. 8) is the right teaching about Christ, in whom “all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (v. 9, NASB). In Christ, believers have received all they need—for Jesus Christ alone is sufficient for our every spiritual need. All of God's fullness is made known in Christ. The life (vv. 12–13), freedom (vv. 14–15), and covenant relation (v. 11) for the believer are grounded in Jesus Christ. The power and authority present in Christ are superior to that of the principalities and powers (v. 10) and are effective in the life of the church. Believers, thus, are victorious over the “domain of darkness” and its power (1:13).

CONCLUSION

Today, in our own contexts, wrong-headed teachings about Christ parallel the pluralistic philosophies that were present in Colossae in the first century. These contemporary movements also confront the church's spirituality as well as its theology about Christ. The church must readily affirm that “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (2:9, NIV). Any effort to approach God through other intermediaries is not only misguided, but is an outright denial of the preeminence of Christ and the historic Christian faith.

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1. Peter T. O'Brien, “Colossians, Letter to the,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 147–53.

2. Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 214–15.

3. Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 3rd. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 106–110.

4. Curtis Vaughan, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 39.

5. Melick, 217.

6. See C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 102–104.

7. See Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 378–81.

8. See L. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 375–76.