

# Seventh Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

**Right-Headed**

**Colossians 1:15-28**

**Seventh Sunday after Pentecost**

**Analysis by Timothy Hoyer**

Colossians 1:15He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. 17He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

21And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him – 23provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

24I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. 25I became its

servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, 26the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. 27To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Wrongheaded**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Who's the Head of This Operation?*

You can find all kinds of books about angels in bookstores. There were even more on the shelves of the Colossae bookstores. Angels were in charge of mediating the entire activity of God in the world. (We know the stories of the angels bringing messages to Mary and Zechariah and Joseph.) The angels also brought the law to God's people (see Acts 7.38, 53). These angels set restrictions and requirements on people's lives, and were looked to as moral guides.

The Christians in Colossae were surrounded by that angel phenomenon, even before Epaphras brought them the Good News about Christ reconciling them to God by his cross and rising. The Jewish people in Colossae, who received the news of Christ, had other teachers insist that the law remained binding. They still had to observe regulations on meat and drink, festivals, new moons and Sabbaths. It was hard to figure out how to live when God was invisible not only to the eye but unknowable to the mind. People did not know what God wanted. So they looked to angels as the ones who brought them the messages of God. They looked to rules and regulations as their way of living right

with God. We too insist on living according to the teachings of the Bible and according to the Word of God. If we think an angel has touched our lives, we feel assured of God's grace. We become fond of that angel and want to learn about angels and become focused solely on angels as God's best messengers.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Estranged from the Head***

The false teachers in Colossae, in their eagerness to keep things right with God, even attributed to angels the reconciliation of mortals with God. Yes, Jesus had died and was risen, but the angels were the ones who made it happen. Therefore, the angels were more important than Jesus was. Jesus was not enough to give them peace with God. He had to be supplemented with the work of angels and with the law. With the Colossians, we base our standing before God on these other ways, forces, powers, and principalities, the greatest of which is the law. We say that we have to love Jesus and keep the teachings of the Bible in order to be right before God. Being right before God by Jesus alone is not enough. In other words, we believe faith in Christ is insufficient for salvation.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Hostile in Mind***

The concrete nature of regulations can make us feel secure in our relationship with God. But it is a false sense of security, as the cross of Christ shows us. It is a false sense of security as our uneasiness about death is exposed. Our consciences are fooled into seeing only how we do follow the rules. When we don't follow the rules, we excuse our actions, make light of them, and pretend rule keeping is not that important. We get into disagreements with one another about which regulations are necessary and which aren't, which Bible teachings are to be followed and which aren't. We become confused and troubled, angry, and unsure of God's love for us. We uphold one rule while disregarding another of equal importance—a sure sign of how

twisted we are, how estranged and hostile in mind we are towards God (v. 21). All we are left with is evil deeds, no matter how nice we may think they are. When we are hostile to God, we lose God as a loving God and instead have a judging God, and that is no comfort at all. Angels cannot give the comfort needed to solve God judging us.

## **PROGNOSIS: Right-Headed**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** – *Reconciled through the Blood of His Cross*

Jesus is better than angels are. He is the image of the invisible God (we know God by knowing Jesus); the first born of all creation (v. 15). All things, including thrones or dominions or rulers or powers, have been created through him and for him (v. 16). He is even the first born from the dead (v. 18). Jesus had all the fullness of God in him (v. 19). Through Jesus God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things—including those hostile to him—by making peace through the blood of Jesus' cross (v. 20). Jesus has reconciled us to God in his fleshly body through death, in order to present us holy and blameless before God (v. 22). By death Jesus has abolished the law. And, since the law had been given through angels, God had triumphed over the angelic powers by Jesus' death.

Christ has died to the law, and therefore to the angels of the law, and all those elemental spirits, to which the Colossians and we had been in subjection. All that we hoped to win through worship of these powers we have already in Christ. To love angels, to look for angels, to serve angels or the law is to fall back into bondage to unmeaning ordinances. They have no meaning because they do not and cannot reconcile us to God.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** – *Established and Steadfast in Faith*

God had reconciled all things to himself in Christ. The

resurrection of Christ makes this so complete that there is no need for angels. Christ gives us peace with God. Christ gives us the power of God to forgive and the power of God to have mercy. All that Christ has is ours by faith. As Christ is the firstborn of all creation and the firstborn from the dead, we have all things through him. No longer do we need Jesus and angels. No longer do we need Jesus and doing what the Bible says we have to do. Jesus is the full gift of God in whom we hope. Since he is the fullness of God there is no room to add other things to Jesus with the word 'and.'

#### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Fastened to the Head***

Jesus gives us all things. In him we are fully right with God (v. 20). What God wants in our behavior is fully found in Jesus. The confusion and demands of angels on our lives are gone. Christ unbinds us from questions about what to eat or not to eat, how to keep the Sabbath, festivals, and new moons. To be mature in Christ is to behave in the wisdom of Christ, the wisdom of mercy and forgiveness, the wisdom of grace and reconciliation, and the wisdom of love, bearing one another's burdens (see Col. 3.12-17). We do not belong to angels (elemental spirits) and their ways of 'Do not touch; do not handle,' which are only the appearance of wisdom and do not check self-indulgence (Col. 2.23). We are fastened to the head, who is Christ, crucified and risen, so that we may grow with a growth that is from God.