Hi,

As I write this, it is pouring down rain. Seems like we can nearly always use it.

* **My Tuesday class on Genesis will meet today at 12:00 noon (a new time)** on [my personal Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle).
* Please take a few minutes and complete [our survey of the congregation](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/56LPWQ8). It will help our church leaders to make better decisions in the weeks ahead.
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* Keep sending in those movie and book recommendations.

Today, I thought we’d simply focus on Jesus, the one for whom and through whom all things were created.

***Colossians 1:15-20; 3:1-4, 12-14 (NRSV)***

**He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for 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. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He 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. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and 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.**

**So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.**

**As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.**

These passages from Paul’s letter to the Colossians address three questions: Who is Jesus? What does it mean for us? What should be our response? Let’s take a look at each.

*Who is Jesus? (1:15-20)*

The first passage is a bit like a hymn in two stanzas, v. 15-17 and v. 18-20. The first stanza emphasizes that all things were created in Christ, through Christ, and for Christ. In case we miss Paul’s point here, he gives us a list: all things visible and invisible, all thrones, dominions, rulers, and powers. Eugene Peterson paraphrases Paul this way in *The Message*:

“We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God’s original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels — *everything* got started in him and finds its purpose in him. He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment.”

For any Jew, this sort of language could be used only with respect to the Lord God. Paul was a Jew and not just any Jew, but an educated, zealous Pharisee. He knew the meaning of what he wrote. He knew that he was speaking of Jesus as one would speak of God. Yes, Paul struggles to find the right language, just as Christians have been struggling for two thousand years to make sense of the mystery. On the one hand, Paul says that Jesus is the “firstborn of all creation” which might make us think he is about to lump Jesus in with the rest of creation. But no. In the next phrase, Paul says the opposite – all things were created in, through, and for Jesus! It takes an expansive, open, and imaginative mind to hold together seemingly contradictory truths about God. Such minds are God’s desire for us.

Notice also that Paul speaks of *all* things and *all* powers. There is no person, no government, no angel, no demon . . . nothing . . . that was not created in, through, and for Jesus. Everyone, everywhere, at all times, sits under the lordship of Jesus Christ, whether or not they know it or acknowledge it.

The focus of the second stanza shifts from creation to re-creation, renewal, and restoration, the embodiment of which is the church. Christ is head of the church, yet distinct from it, just as Christ is distinct from creation. Why is Jesus Christ, though fully and completely human, unique? Because he is the one person in whom God’s fullness dwells.

And what is God’s purpose in all this? The reconciliation of the entire cosmos to God, the undoing of the tragedy of the Garden. And how is all this done? Through the crucifixion, the “blood of his cross.” This is the good in Good Friday – that, in a way we cannot fully explain, we and the entire cosmos have been put right with God through Jesus’ death on the cross. To some, such a claim is not only bizarre but offensive, but for almost 2,000 years, Christians have proclaimed that it is true.

*What does it mean for us? (3:1-4)*

It means that through Christ we have been made right with God. Here, Paul wants us to grasp the “already” aspect of this claim. Thus, as Christ has died, we have died. As Christ has been raised to new life, so have we been raised to new life. But, we might expect, Paul also works in the “not yet” – we will be revealed with Christ in glory when the truth of Christ is revealed to all of creation. As Michael Gorman puts it, we identify with both the *exalted*, *cosmic* Christ and the *humble*, *crucified* Christ. Thus, having been raised “already,” we are to set our minds on the things of God, for that is where the truth lies. And if we can train our minds to focus on God, then our hearts will flood open to God.

*What should be our response? (3:12-14)*

We have been chosen by God. We are God’s beloved, set aside and made holy for God. The appropriate response is straightforward. We are to clothe ourselves in Christ. We are to live out Christ’s compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. We are to bear one another’s burdens, as Christ has borne ours. We are to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us. We are to dress ourselves in love, for only then can we find the unity and harmony that is to characterize the body of Christ. We are to love as God has loved us.

We don’t live in this way because we have something to gain nor because others might expect it of us. We live in this way, clothed in Christ, because we have been raised with him and our lives, therefore, must reflect what is so. To the extent that our minds and hearts do not embrace the truth about Jesus, then we can never hope to embody the love of Christ.

Why we do what we do matters. Is Jesus the image of the invisible God? Were *all* things truly created in, through, and for him? If the self-styled new-atheists of our time are right – then the answer is no and we are left to our own devices, making our way through this world with only each other to depend upon. But if, as Paul claims, God truly resurrected Jesus, then our hope lies in God, not in ourselves. What *really* matters is what is true.

Christians proclaim to the world that the renewal that Paul speaks of in Colossians 3 is real. It is as concrete as Jesus’ own death and resurrection. But we also know that we still must learn to walk in the Spirit of Christ, to walk in God’s way, to walk in a manner befitting the new clothes that we wear. Paul knows that we are talking about a process, not merely a moment. It is why he speaks of the new self as being renewed in 3:10. It is in the same sense as our proclamation that God’s kingdom has come already, but not yet in all its fullness. We have been renewed and we are being renewed. We have been saved and we are being saved. Praise God!!

*Movie recommendation*

Patti and I like hard-hitting dramas that touch our souls; they are hard to find. *Broken*, starring Sean Bean, is one of them. Bean plays a Roman Catholic priest in a desperately poor Irish neighborhood. After you watch it, you will want to hug all of our pastors. Here’s the thing, so far as I can find, it is only available on BritBox, a streaming service. If you don’t get it, you could try the week-long free trial to see *Broken*, as there are six episodes. If you find it somewhere else, let me know.

*Book recommendation*

As most of you know, N. T. Wright has been enormously important in shaping my understanding of the Bible. In *Surprised by Scripture*, Wright takes on a number of current topics in light of Scripture. You may not always agree with him, but his is a voice to hear.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott