



Everything You Need **You Can Find in Christ**

Colossians Study Guide

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Series Summary

How would you describe the Christian life? Are there specific characteristics that define being a Christian? Do you find yourself comforted by intellectual commitments, motivations, behaviors? In his letter to the Colossian church, Paul the Apostle, did more than just address these questions. He set a foundation for understanding not just what it means to be a Christian, but what it means to live life in light of the supremacy of Jesus Christ. In four short chapters, which will likely take you 15-20 minutes to read, we have more than just information, instruction, and encouragement. Paul masterfully displays the sovereign nature of Jesus, the importance of new life beginning and ending with God, the awareness that this new life is demonstrated by the Christian, and finally this new life always involves other people. Some would say Paul wrote to new believers while others would say he wrote to refute doctrinal error. It's obvious both are true, and at the same time both pointed to Paul's greater purpose –seeing all of Christ in all of life.

Historical Context

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to His saints. To 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. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me. (Col. 1:24-29)

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. (Col. 2:13-14)

Colossae: The City and The People

Colossae was located in the region of Phrygia, in the Roman province of Asia (now part of Turkey), it was part of a triad of cities situated on main trade routes. It sat at the crossroads of two well-traveled highways: one running east from Ephesus and the other north to Pergamos. In its best days, Colossae was a center for the wool industry. Eventually the road to Pergamos was rerouted through Laodicea. As Laodicea and Hierapolis started to thrive, Colossae declined in importance. By the time Paul wrote this letter, it was a small, somewhat forgotten city.

The people were predominately Gentile, but there was a good-sized Jewish population. It became a place of religious and philosophical diversity with many mainstream beliefs mixing with popular beliefs. This may explain the apparent divergent non-Christian beliefs that were making their way into the church.

The Author: Paul

Paul the apostle is the author of the letter to the Colossians. Ian S. McNaughton gives a brief biography of Paul that will benefit us: Paul was a scholar who possessed an extraordinary mind. He spent his life reading, learning and teaching. He was a linguist who was fluent in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. He studied Jewish law under Gamaliel, one of the great teachers of his day (Acts 22:3). Gamaliel held the title “Rabban - our teacher”, a higher title than “Rabbi - my teacher”, and we read of him in Acts 5:33-40, where he intervened “with a resounding speech” at the trial of Peter and the other apostles. So, Paul was tutored and mentored by one of the greatest scholars and teachers of the time. Paul was also a Pharisee (Pharisee means “a separated one”). There were about 6,000 of them in the days of King Herod. They studied the law and set it out in a way intended to help the Jewish people keep it correctly. Paul studied the Old Testament in great detail and knew its teaching, prophecies, content, and the implications of it all in the context of Jewish teaching and tradition, especially regarding the Messiah (Gal. 1:17). He was a “Pharisee of the Pharisees”, which meant that he was a strict upholder of the Law and the Jewish traditions.

Paul was a historian and very familiar with the New Testament realities. He knew what Jesus taught because he had heard about the miracles of Jesus from Ananias and the disciples of Damascus after his conversion (Acts 9:19). He then talked with Peter and James, the Lord’s brother (Gal. 1:18). In that encounter he was to learn first-hand from eyewitnesses what Jesus did, said and what He was like. Paul’s friends - John Mark (who came from Jerusalem), Barnabas (“a man full of the Holy Spirit and of faith”, Acts 11:24) and Doctor Luke (who wrote the third Gospel) - no doubt told him what they personally knew of the man called the Christ. Thus, Paul was fully in touch with the teachings, parables and stories of Jesus that we find in the Gospels. Paul was inspired, being under the influence of the Holy Spirit. He was a man equipped and prepared by God through conversion to grasp the deep things of God, and under the influence of the Holy Spirit Paul brought together the Old Testament revelation about the Messiah and the first-century facts, reports and testimonies concerning Jesus of Nazareth. When he did so, he saw that they all pointed to the same One Person - the One promised and the One crucified. All these made Paul the ideal man to preach and write about Jesus Christ.

The Colossian Church and Occasion for Writing

We know from this letter that Paul never visited Colossae. He wasn’t the church planter for this congregation. This honor went to Epaphras. Epaphras was probably converted during Paul’s three-year ministry in Ephesus. He was from Colossae, so we can surmise that he took the good news back to his hometown

and established a church there. “The letter suggests that most of the Christians in Colossae were Gentiles. Paul describes the conversion of the Colossian Christians in terms that, while perhaps not altogether impossible to apply to Jews, more naturally describe those who were at one time ‘separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.’ (Eph. 2:12).”¹

It is generally understood that Epaphras traveled to where Paul was imprisoned (most likely Rome) and had apparently joined him in that imprisonment (see Philemon 23) sharing with him the news of an insidious error that was being promulgated. Unable to travel back to Colossae with the letter Paul pens, Paul sends Tychicus with the letter instead. “Epaphras’ reason for making this trip to visit Paul was almost certainly that he wanted to enlist the apostle’s help in dealing with a dangerous yet slippery variation on the Christian gospel that had arisen in the community.”²

The Colossian Heresy

If Epaphras traveled the one thousand to thirteen-hundred-mile trip to Rome, then the heresy that was growing was a serious one. Colossae had not yet been infected by it. The letter Paul wrote to them was preventative in nature. Its purpose was to provide the needed resources to shield the Colossian Christians from false teaching. “The pagan culture in which the Colossian church existed worshiped many gods. Isis, Serapis, Helios, Demeter, and Artemis were among those worshiped in Colossae during Roman times. Many of the Colossian believers no doubt found the pull of the old way of life strong. The first danger facing the church was a relapse into paganism.” Also, “the world and the flesh exerted a strong pull on the Colossians. Yet an even greater threat came from Satan, the source of all false teaching. Therefore, the main thrust of Paul’s letter is to counteract the influence of false doctrine.” The Colossian heresy contained two fundamental elements: false Greek philosophy as well as Jewish legalism and ceremonialism. The Greeks were lovers of knowledge and philosophy. To them, the gospel was just too simple, and Jesus was an inadequate Savior in and of Himself.

Salvation plus superior knowledge was the key. They claimed visions with deeper and higher insights than the average Joe. Angels were objects of worship and Jesus was relegated to just another higher emanation. They denied the humanity of Christ and his deity as well. Therefore, the heresy denied the sufficiency of Christ for salvation.

Along with Greek philosophy, the heresy being introduced at Colossae embraced Jewish ceremonialism such as circumcision, Jewish dietary laws, and holy days as needful for salvation. They also embraced asceticism - rigid self-denial and harsh treatment of the body. “The false teachers were probably people from within the Colossian Christian Community who were bragging about their ability to find ultimate spiritual ‘fulfillment’ via their own program of visions

and asceticism. This program was drawn partly from Judaism, particularly in its focus on rules about eating and observing certain days. They were preoccupied with spiritual beings, probably because they viewed them as powerful figures capable of having a significant influence on their lives... The false teachers were appealing to spiritual beings, visions, and rules to find security in this very uncertain universe. In doing so, they were questioning the sufficiency of Christ... The false teachers were so preoccupied with their own program for spiritual fullness that they were separating themselves from the only true source of spiritual power: the Lord Jesus Christ, the one in whom God in all His fullness is to be found and the one through whom God has accomplished the reconciliation of the world.”³

Week 1 LIFE: Is about the Gospel (Colossians 1:1-14)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing - as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. (Col. 1:1-8)

In one sentence (verses 3-7), Paul packs the fruit of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that fruit's expression in life and in prayer. If we start with verse 7 and go backward, we find the gospel at the center of Paul's prayer. Paul has never been to Colossae, but he has gotten word about them. Epaphras has made them known. Verse 7 tells us that Epaphras brought the gospel to the people at Colossae. They heard it and understood it – the grace of God – in truth. Since that day, the gospel bore fruit and increased. And what was this gospel? The grace of God in truth, the word of truth, the reason for the hope laid up for them in heaven. Because of this gospel heard and received, Paul heard of their faith in Christ Jesus and the love that they had for all the saints. And what is his response? Prayer and, more specifically, thanks.

The Bible defines the gospel in several different ways: the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24), the gospel of His Son (Ro. 1:9), the gospel of Christ (1 Cor. 9:12), the gospel of God (Ro. 15:16), the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4), the gospel of peace (Eph. 6:15), the eternal gospel (Rev. 14:6), the word of truth (Col. 1:5) and the message of truth (Eph. 1:13). It is defined as “good news” and was a term used to report a victory brought back from a battle. It is the news that Jesus Christ died to provide total forgiveness of sins and was raised that we who believe might live forever.

John MacArthur states that “such glorious, thrilling truth compels Christians to respond in several basic ways, all of which are noted by descriptive phrases using gospel.”⁴ They are as follows:

1. We should proclaim the good news.
2. We are to defend the gospel's veracity (Phil. 1:16).
3. We are to work hard for the advance of the gospel (Phil. 1:27).
4. We are to pursue fellowship with others who believe it (Acts 2:42).
5. We must be ready to suffer for the sake of the gospel (2 Tim. 1:8).
6. We are to make sure that our lives do not hinder the gospel (1 Cor. 9:12).
7. We must never be ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16).
8. We are to realize the gospel carries with it divine empowerment (1 Th. 1:15).

“Paul wants to remind them that they have truly – really, authentically, reliably – come to understand the gospel of grace. It is worth noting that Paul in this verse seeks to ground the Colossians spiritually by appealing both to the truth of the gospel and to its life-changing power.

The gospel is authenticated not by its truth only, nor by its power in people’s lives only but by both working in tandem.”⁵ “Paul’s words in verses 3:1-8 suggest seven aspects of the gospel: it is received by faith, results in love, rests in hope, reaches the world, reproduces fruit, is rooted in grace, and is reported by people.”⁶ This fruit is the catalyst for Paul’s prayers. “Just like a harvest of ripe apples or a rich cluster of grapes is evidence of life in the seeds from which they sprang, so the seed of the gospel bears fruit – a cluster of virtues – that proves there is spiritual life... Paul lists these virtues in verses 4-5. He points out three fundamental traits of Christian character that ought to be evident in the life of those in whom the gospel seed has taken root: faith, love, and hope. These virtues should be increasingly evident in our lives if the seed is doing what it is designed to do. Faith begins the process.”⁷ Love for other believers is a natural birth of faith. And “hope provided the basis for Christian growth”.

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Maybe you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:9-14)

Paul lovingly invites the members of the church at Colossi to worship Jesus, grow into mature Christians, and to live life serving God and each other. The Father “has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” God has to make us (the unqualified) sufficient to share in an inheritance far too great for us. The Greek literally reads that we are qualified “for the portion of the lot”. This inheritance is eternal life in Christ. It is all the promises of God in Christ. This inheritance IS Christ and the Holy Spirit is our guarantee (Eph. 1:13-14).

God has also “delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” God rescued us out of Satan’s kingdom and drew us into His own. This redemption, our forgiveness, fits us for Christ’s kingdom. Christ’s death for us paid the redemption price. God forgave us, gave us an inheritance, rescued us from the power of darkness, and made us subjects of the King, Christ Jesus. “God has provided an inheritance through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the birthright of the Children of God (Ro. 8:17). It is ‘incorruptible and

undefiled' and reserved for us in heaven (1 Peter 1:4). To be 'partakers of the inheritance' means that believers have an eternal portion of the riches of salvation. The verb used here means that 'God has enabled man to have a sufficient, acceptable position in Christ'. In Christ believers are granted to live with God, who is light, forever... Before the Colossians became believers, they were under the powerful rule of the devil; but now this power is broken by the Savior Himself (2:15). Christ has rescued them, and they are safe and protected from Satanic tyranny (Eph. 6:12) ... We are to praise the Father because believers have been rescued personally and positionally in Christ from the domain of darkness and from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of Christ. Thus, believers have passed from death to life; from alienation to acceptance; from despair to hope; from danger to safety; from uncertainty to peace... Christians are transferred from the domain of darkness at a price...the precious blood of Christ. Verse 20 tells us that Christ 'made peace through the blood of His cross', while the apostle Peter boasts that it is 'the precious blood of Christ' that redeems (1 Peter 1:18-19)."

Study Questions

1. What was your first exposure to prayer?
2. Why do you think people are hesitant to pray personally? publicly?
3. When do you find yourself praying most regularly?
4. What's the most significant prayer you've seen answered in your life?
5. What does Paul pray for the Colossian Christians?

Week 2: LIFE: Is about Christ (Colossians 1:15-23)

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Col. 1:15-17)

It's very possible that these verses reflect an early church hymn or creed. As you read through it, notice the term "all" is used often. Paul wants us to understand the scope of Jesus' Lordship – it is over every single thing. He is supreme overall.

Jesus Is Supreme Over Creation

"The hymn to Christ has two uneven stanzas, but their themes are consistent. The first relates Jesus to creation; the second, to redemption. The first considers the created world, including the material creation and supernatural beings. The second considers the reconciliation of these various created elements which have gone astray. Therefore, Paul contributed to the two main themes of the Bible: creation and redemption. Together, the two stanzas make a strong case for the supremacy of Christ. He is Lord over creation, and He is the Lord of the new creation. The hymn expresses another significant theological theme of Scripture. Every area of life touched by sin also must be touched by grace. To leave an aspect of creation in the grasp of sin would allow sin to triumph over grace. Such a thought is unthinkable. Although sin dominated over the created world, bringing eternal repercussions, sin does not rule totally, forever, over any aspect of creation. That is the burden of this section. Jesus' lordship is seen by virtue of both His position in creation and His position in redemption."¹⁰

Image of the Invisible God: Jesus, in His incarnation, bore the earthly image of Adam and the heavenly image of God. He was the manifestation of both God and man, "always embodying the best of both wherever He was. In choosing the word 'image,' Paul stressed that God was present wherever Jesus was. He was the personal manifestation of deity."¹¹ Hebrews 1:3 states that Jesus is the exact representation of God. "Christ the invisible God became visible.

He shared the same substance as God and made God's character known in this earthly sphere of existence. The revelation of God in Christ is such that we can actually see Him, even with all of our limitations."¹²

Firstborn of All Creation: "This was an OT metaphor for Jesus' unique and exalted position: (1) The rabbis said it meant preeminence (cf. Ex. 4:22); (2) in the OT it was used for the eldest son as heir and manager of the family; (3) in Ps. 89:27 it was used in a Messianic sense... In context options #1 and #2 combined seem best."¹³ Jesus has primacy over all creation and His creation attests to Jesus' wisdom, power, and intelligence. When the universe began, He already existed. Your next glance out the window or next look in the eyes of a loved one

proves the architectural magnificence of Jesus as Creator. And not only did He create all things – He sustains all things. He maintains the fragile balance of all life and holds all things together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. (Col. 1:17-18)

Jesus Is Supreme Over The Church

He is the head of the body. “Christ is head over the church, ‘the head of the body’, and he exercises authority and rule over it by His Word and His Spirit. He is the only head of the church... There is nothing that can be added to Jesus Christ to make him a ‘better’ or a ‘greater’ Savior: ‘in Him all the fullness should dwell’. The Greek word translated here ‘fullness’ (pleroma) is one of the words which the ‘spoilers’ in Colossae used. Paul used it to remind the Colossians that there is nothing lacking in Christ because the fullness of deity, power and grace are His (2:9). He is able to save to the uttermost all who come to God by Him, and it is out of His fullness that believers receive constant grace (Heb. 4:16; John 1:16)”¹⁴ Jesus is preeminent in all things. He reigns supreme over the visible world, the unseen world, and the church. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Col. 1:19-23)

Jesus Is Supreme Over Salvation

Jesus is our reconciler. He alone is our salvation. “In justification, the sinner stands before God guilty and condemned, but is declared righteous (Ro. 8:33). In redemption, the sinner stands before God as a slave, but is granted his freedom (Ro. 6:18-22). In forgiveness, the sinner stands before God as a debtor, but the debt is paid and forgotten (Eph. 1:7). In reconciliation, the sinner stands before God as an enemy, but becomes His friend (2 Cor. 5:18- 20). In adoption, the sinner stands before God as a stranger, but is made a son (Eph. 1:5)...When people change from being at enmity with each other to being at peace, they are said to be reconciled. When the Bible speaks of reconciliation then, it refers to the restoration of a right relationship between God and man.”¹⁵

“It is God’s intention to bring ‘peace’ to His fallen and fractured universe, to bring all things again into subjection to His sovereignty, to bring all His enemies into subjection. This intention will be finally accomplished only when Christ returns in glory to establish the kingdom in its final form (cf. 1:22b; 3:4). But God invites human beings in the present time both to participate in this reconciliation and to become agents through whom God’s work of reconciliation can begin to be carried out. Because they have responded to this invitation, the Colossians have

been turned from God's enemies into His 'friends' and anticipate the day when they will stand before God fully transformed into His image – if, that is, they continue to maintain their commitment to the gospel (v. 23)... In the words of Morna Hooker, "Those who were at one time alienated (v. 21) are those who have now been given a share in the inheritance of God's holy ones (v. 12); those who were hostile in mind and evil deeds (v. 21) are those who have been rescued from the power of darkness (v. 13) and whose calling is the knowledge of God and every good deed (v. 9-10); those who are reconciled through the death of Christ (v. 22) are those who have been transferred into His kingdom (v. 13); those whom He now presents as holy, blameless, and irreproachable (v. 22) are those who in Him have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (v. 14)." Ian S. McNaughton gives a wonderful summary of verses 20-23:

The Cost of Reconciliation (v. 20)

Redemption and reconciliation are linked by the atoning blood of Christ: 'having made peace through the blood of His cross' (v. 20). This is frequently emphasized in the New Testament because our forgiveness has a cost; it is not free (see Acts 20:28; Ro. 3:25; 5:9; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Heb. 9:12, 14; 10:19; 1 John 1:7; Rev. 1:5). Redemption (v. 14) means 'to buy at a price' and Jesus paid for salvation with His own blood. Why was it necessary to atone with the 'blood of His cross'? Reconciliation is achieved by atoning sacrifice: 'when I see the blood, I will pass over you' (Ex. 12:13). New Testament teaching is in harmony with Old Testament teaching on sacrifices and offerings and it copies the Old Testament's language and ideas (1 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 5:2). It is the deity of Christ that gives power to the blood sacrificed for sinners at Calvary.

The Need for Reconciliation (vv. 21-22)

Verses 21-22 speak of man's depravity, deliverance and destiny in Christ. When Paul talks of being reconciled to God, he is preaching the gospel. Reconciliation speaks of a resolution of problems and a restoration of friendship between those who are out of fellowship. Paul describes our depravity, firstly calling men 'aliens' – strangers and outsiders who are out of fellowship with God. Secondly, he calls them 'enemies'; this speaks of hostile opposition dwelling in their fallen hearts and minds. Thirdly, he talks of 'wicked works'. Here we see the fruit of sin and alienation; by hostile deeds sinners reveal their wicked hearts. The gospel proclaims that men are sinners by nature as well as by deeds.

The Fruit of Reconciliation (vv. 22-23)

Reconciliation is rooted in Christ's death. It was the Father who sent Him to Calvary, and there He was judged, sentenced, and punished on account of sin to establish peace between God and believing sinners. This resulted in:

The Removal of Wrath (v. 22)

Believers are now presented as 'holy, and blameless, and above reproach in his sight' (see Rom. 3:23-25; 1 John 2:1-2). It is what God thinks of His Son's atoning sacrifice that really matters. Man's true destiny and dignity are found only

through union with the crucified Christ. Count Nicolaus L. von Zinzendorf (1700-60) wrote about it thus: "Jesus, thy blood and righteousness / My beauty are, my glorious dress; / Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, / With joy shall I lift up my head.¹⁶

Study Questions

1. Why did all things need to be reconciled to God?
2. Read verses 15-20. Do you really believe those words? Move beyond immediate reaction and allow the words to sink in. How do those truths impact your daily life? How do those truths influence your relationship with God and others?
3. How much do you identify with verse 21, even now? Do you still sense evil in your mind? In the world How do verses 22-23 make you feel.
4. Are there areas of you that are trying to reign supreme? If so, what are they?
5. Why is it important for Jesus to be the "head" of the church? How do we get this wrong?

Week 3: LIFE: Has Purpose (Colossians 1:24 – 2:5)

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to His saints. To 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. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all His energy that He powerfully works within me. (Col. 1:24-29)

What is ministry?

Paul lets us know that he did not volunteer for ministry. He was appointed by Jesus. It was a stewardship chosen for him and given to him. Romans 15:15-16 tells us that he was a minister to the Gentiles because of God's gracious choice of him. As Christians, we are all called to some form of service. The term stewardship should help us to see service as a position of great trust and responsibility. God sovereignly brings us to salvation, and it follows that God also sovereignly calls us to ministry. Our responsibility is simple obedience – faithfulness to that call.

Paul also teaches that ministry involves suffering. "In his effort to keep believers from falling prey to the seductive sounds of false teaching, Paul tells us the truth about authentic ministry. It involves suffering. Its aim is maturity. It's hard work. It is not surprising to find Paul talking about suffering for the sake of the gospel since he knew suffering 'up close and personal.' He wrote the letter to the Colossians from prison... Paul had encountered suffering. Yet Paul was able to rejoice in what he suffered. Why? Because he suffered on behalf of others and because his suffering allowed him to identify with Jesus Christ. When Paul says he is filling up what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, he isn't saying that Jesus' suffering on the cross was insufficient. Paul was enduring suffering on behalf of Christ. The world hated Jesus Christ; and now that he is not around to persecute, they persecute his followers (see John 15:18-21). Paul's attitude is Jesus took the blows meant for me; I'll take the blows meant for Him. Suffering brings about an identification with the Savior that nothing else can (see Phil. 3:10). Paul endured his sufferings for the sake of the body. Paul was willing to suffer on behalf of the church because he saw himself as the church's servant. God gave him a commission to proclaim the gospel, and suffering was included with the commission."¹⁷

And ministry is also hard work. Paul uses the words "toil" and "struggling". To toil is to work to the point of exhaustion. To struggle means literally to agonize. Thanks be to God that all of our "hard work" is enabled by God's energy, which so powerfully works in us. It is Christ in us that empowers us to work/serve for His glory.

How are we to minister?

In looking at Paul's example, ministry is Christocentric. It is Word-based work. His call was to "make the word of God fully known", to announce that the "mystery" is now revealed to the saints. Jesus is the mystery. "He opens the door to everyone. The unprecedented secret is that all are included. The unprecedented truth is that Jesus Christ lives in all who trust Him. Not only does He live in us; He is our hope of glory."¹⁸ Though Paul has an apostolic call to proclaim the word of God in its fullness, this does not excuse the average believer. We all have a call to some degree to make Christ fully known.

We do this in our lives daily as we live out the gospel of Christ in front of the unbelieving world and before our brothers and sisters in the faith. But we love the church. No one can truly serve God in the church without that motivation... Paul's love for the church caused him to write this letter to the churches of the Lycus Valley (cf. 4:15-16). He wanted them to know of the great struggle he had on their behalf (and their sister church). Though some have specific calls to proclaim the word of God from a pulpit, the rest of us still have a responsibility to speak. Paul addresses this in Col. 4:6: "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." Using the gifts, He has given us, we can by His grace proclaim, warn and teach like Paul because of Christ in us, our hope of glory. To proclaim simply means to publicly share or declare a truth. It's not restricted to preachers and teachers. Col. 3:16 tells us to "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom..." The proclamation includes admonition (warning) and teaching. Warning speaks of "encouraging counsel in view of sin and coming punishment." "Admonishing in Scripture has the connotation of confronting with the intent of changing one's attitudes and actions. Here the term speaks to the task of calling to mind a correct course of action. It encourages people to get on with what they know to do." If there is sin in the life of a Christian, other believers have an obligation to gently and compassionately admonish them to repent of their sin and turn to God. Teaching is also the responsibility of every believer. It compliments admonishing. It is even part of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:20). "Teaching is the orderly presentation of Christian truth for converts so that they may know how to grow." This means that we, at the least, need to know Jesus and His word well enough to share what He says in regard to everyday life, which means admonishing and teaching truly does need to be done with all wisdom. Wisdom refers to understanding Biblical principles well enough to apply them to everyday situations as we live holy lives.

Sam Storms comments on this passage of Scripture: "If one were to look closely at many churches today and assess the shape and form of ministry, v. 28 would likely need to be rewritten as follows – 'Him we mention only in passing, lest we offend seekers or sound excessively religious. [Rather than warning and teaching...] We seek to please and entertain everyone so that they might feel good about themselves and be reassured that all is well in the world.' As cynical

as that might sound, it is all too tragically true. We have abandoned admonishment and warning for it would require that we speak of 'sin,' a forbidden word in many congregations. To instruct or teach would require both that pastors' study and prepare and that Christians listen and learn. But we live in an age where people refuse to 'endure sound teaching' but with 'itching ears' they 'accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions' and they 'turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths' (2 Timothy 4:3-4)." 19 The goal of ministry is the maturity of the saints. To be complete (or mature) is to be like Christ. "The growth and maturity in Christ of every believer is, in a certain sense, the responsibility of every other believer in Christ. We must look not only to ourselves but to one another, passionately admonishing and wisely teaching so that we all might stand complete in Christ on that day.

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. (Col. 2:1-5)

Study Questions

1. Why do you engage in ministry? What is the greatest end to the ministry you do?
2. What area of service and stewardship are you able to utilize for the good of others?

Within the church? Outside of the church?

3. What do you make of verse 24 – Paul rejoicing at his sufferings for the sake of the church? How does that mindset sit with our current culture? Take a deeper look at Paul's sufferings in Acts 28:16, 30.
4. What was the goal of Paul's work? (see 1:28 and 2:2-3)
5. In 2:1-5 Paul revealed a window into his motivations and hopes. What drove him? Why was he so willing to struggle in ministry to the Colossians?

Week 4: LIFE: Is Found in Christ (Colossians 2:6-15)

Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (Col. 2:6-7)

Finding Christ...

Is your LIFE found in Christ? The answer to this question will determine how you "walk" your walk in Christ. How we found Him is how we should continue to find Him. This passage implies there are ways NOT to walk. We are not to walk in our own flesh since we did not receive Christ that way. We are not to walk thinking that we can earn anything from our good deeds and thoughts since we did not receive Christ that way. We are not to walk in fear, worrying over rules and regulations, for we did not receive Christ that way. Instead, we are to walk in grace by faith for this IS how we receive Him.

So walk in Him...

Just as we have received Christ Jesus our Lord, we are to walk in Him. Life is one long walk of faith. Paul seems to mix his metaphors a little here. We first have the image of a step by- step walk of faith. Then we are told we need to be rooted or grounded. "Christians are not to be tumbleweeds with no roots, blown about by every wind of doctrine. We avoid this when we are firmly rooted in Jesus Christ. Roots don't exist for themselves: they exist to give the plant strength and help the plant grow. We are to be rooted and then built up and strengthened.

We are to grow. How are we to grow? We are to grow in the faith [we] were taught. We have no need to seek secret or 'higher' knowledge. We are to grow in knowledge of the truth already revealed in Christ.²⁵

Walking implies actions. (Gal 5:16) Our religion is not to be confined to our closet; we must carry out into practical effect that which we believe. If a man walks in Christ, then he so acts as Christ would act; for Christ being in him his hope, his love, his joy, his life, he is the reflex of the image of Jesus; and men say of that man, 'He is like his Master; he lives like Jesus Christ.' Walking signifies progress. 'So walk ye in Him'; proceed from grace to grace, run forward until you reach the uttermost degree of knowledge that a man can attain concerning our Beloved.

Walking implies continuance. There must be a perpetual abiding in Christ. How many Christians think that in the morning and evening they ought to come into the company of Jesus and may then give their hearts to the world all day: but this is poor living; we should always be with Him, treading in His steps (1 John 2:6, 1 Pet. 2:21) and doing His will. Walking also implies habit. When we speak of a man's walk and conversation, we mean his habits, the constant tenor of his life. Now, if we sometimes enjoy Christ, and then forget Him; sometimes call Him ours, and anon lose our hold, that is not a habit; we do not walk in Him. We must

keep to Him, cling to Him, never let Him go, but live and have our being in Him. 'As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him'; persevere in the same way in which ye have begun, and, as at the first Christ Jesus was the trust of your faith, the Source of your life, the principle of your action, and the joy of your spirit, so let Him be the same till life's end; the same when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, and enter into the joy and the rest which remain for the people of God. O Holy Spirit enable us to obey this heavenly precept. 26

Finally, Paul wants us to be ever abounding in thankfulness. When we understand that we have everything we need for life and godliness in Christ Jesus and that He is the source of our growth, our hearts are full of gratitude. And a thankful believer is not easily led astray from Christ into false doctrines.

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. (Col. 2:8)

See to it that no one takes you captive...

Galatians 5:1 reminds us, "it is for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." As unbelievers, we were enslaved to Satan, to the world, and to our own desires. Paul now cautions us that it's possible to be taken captive by those who teach falsely. To be taken "captive" literally means "to kidnap," or "to carry off as booty, or spoil of war." There is a war going on for our minds. "To Paul, it was unthinkable that those who had been ransomed and redeemed should be vulnerable by ignorance and thus in the spiritual war become prisoners of some spiritual predator with false doctrine."²⁷ The philosophy that they could be tempted to embrace was divorced from the work of Christ on the cross. Perhaps "the most serious error of the false teachers at Colossae was that they went about their spiritual lives with only natural insight. They did not go to God to learn about Him, nor did they learn from the revelation of Christ that was available to them."

For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority. (Col. 2:9-10)

For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily...

All the fullness of "deity" dwells in Christ. This is to say that the divine nature, the essence and attributes and infinite qualities that make God God, dwells fully in Jesus. Jesus is not partially God. Jesus is wholly God. All you and I need or want to know about God is explained or expressed in the person of Jesus Christ. It is "for" or "because" Jesus is wholly God that He is Lord over creation and Head of the Church. "Since we are to be filled BY GOD, up to the fullness OF GOD... it is WITH GOD Himself that we are to be filled, not in the sense that we become God but that we are energized and empowered as His radiant presence permeates our being. Whereas the church as Christ's body 'already' shares in, embodies,

and expresses His fullness (Eph. 1:23), we have 'not yet' experienced the plenitude of God in a way that is available for us."28 Octavius Winslow has a precious comment on Colossians 2:9-10. It follows: What a glorious declaration is this! How should our hearts leap for joy and our souls thrill with gladness at its very sound! All the 'fullness of the Godhead bodily,' all the fullness of the Church graciously, all the fullness of the sinner savingly, all the fullness of the Christian sanctifyingly – in a word, all that a poor, fallen, tried son of Adam needs, until he reaches heaven itself, where this fullness has come, is, by God's eternal love and wisdom, treasured up in the 'second Adam, the Lord from heaven.' God, the 'Fountain of life,' light, and grace, has ordained that the Lord Jesus Christ, His own beloved Son, should be the one source of supply from where all the salvation of the sinner, all the sanctity of the saint, and all the grace and truth of the Church, collectively and individually, should be derived – 'of whose fullness all we have received, and grace for grace. 29

In Him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him. (Col. 2:11-15)

Circumcised, baptized, and forgiven...

Jesus Christ is fully God, and we are full in Him. But what does spiritual fullness mean? How is it ours? In verses 11-15, Paul completes the argument of verses 9-10. Paul begins his explanation of fullness with complete salvation. The metaphors Paul chooses to explain our full salvation are circumcision and baptism. The point of these metaphors is that we are saved totally and exclusively through the work of God, not through any human activity...

The circumcision that Paul is talking about in Col. 2:11 is the spiritual operation of putting away or cutting away – not of a piece of flesh – but the putting off of the 'sinful nature' or the 'old man' as it is referred to in Romans 6. What we were in Adam – sinful, fallen, corrupt – Christ destroyed. This happened at the moment of salvation when we were spiritually baptized into Jesus Christ. The baptism Paul is talking about (v. 12) is the spiritual baptism where we are united and identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-7).

The second reality of spiritual fullness is total forgiveness – the cancellation of a debt we could never pay... In verse 14, Paul speaks of a written code with regulations, which stands against us and is opposed to us. The word Paul used here refers to a certificate of indebtedness or a signed confession of guilt which

stood as a perpetual witness against the debtor. It was an ancient IOU.

Two things comprise this certificate of indebtedness: the regulations of the law and our offenses. Both of these stands against us and highlight our debt. What does God do with this signed confession of guilt? He cancels the debt. The word canceled also means 'to wipe out, wash over, or erase.' God erases the document and cancels the debt... Spiritual fullness means complete salvation, full forgiveness, and absolute victory. We have spiritual fullness because of our participation in the conquest of the cross... On the cross, Jesus won a decisive victory, making clear to the universe that Satan is a vanquished foe. This does not mean that we will not have conflict. The devil has been defeated, but he has not yet conceded defeat. He has been overthrown, but he has not yet been fully eliminated. Satan continues to harass us. When we understand our identity in Christ, we can live above Satan's control."³⁰

Study Questions

1. What are some ways you're tempted to "work" your way to heaven?
2. Grab a smart phone and look up the word "Syncretism". What does it mean? How might it apply to our discussion of this text?
3. Summarize Paul's teaching about worldly philosophies from 2:8.
4. According to Paul how is Christ greater than all worldly philosophies?
5. If you're a Christian, what did you bring to your salvation? (see 2:13)

Week 5: LIFE: Is Freedom (Colossians 2:16-23)

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations - "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things that all perish as they are used) - according to human precepts and teachings? (Col. 2:16-23)

"Legalism – measuring your own or someone else's spirituality by the ability to keep man-made rules – is a rigid, confining, and lifeless way to live. It is easy because all it requires is a list of rules coupled with dutiful compliance. Just comply. Legalism is not only rigid and lifeless, but it also fosters hypocritical pride. The Pharisees (ancient and modern) prove that. A focus on conformity to a code can cause one to forget things like arrogant pride, smug judgmentalism, anger, and a host of other dark sins that never seem to make the list."³¹

Another lie being tossed to the Colossians was that mystical visions and deeper experiences were necessary for spiritual maturity. "Paul says this kind of spiritual quest is in fact a dangerous distraction. The person loses connection with the Head, from whom the whole body grows. The vision becomes the focus; Jesus becomes secondary.

As a result, growth is stunted, and believers are disqualified... for the prize. This phrase is actually one Greek term meaning 'act as umpire against you'... Believers may have spiritual experiences of varying kinds. Experiences themselves are not evil. When we try to make our experience the standard for all believers or when we measure our own or someone else's spirituality on the basis of that experience, we're being arrogant and unspiritual."

Asceticism is also futile. It is all appearance and no value. "Paul says this kind of behavior has no value in restraining sensual indulgence. In other words, all this external performance has no effect on internal urges. Alexander Maclaren said, 'There is only one thing that will put the collar on the neck of the animal within us, and that is the power of the indwelling Christ.'"³²

But Christ is the substance. Christ is central. Not rules. Not experiences. Christ. We are encouraged to hold fast to Him. Because of the Holy Spirit on the inside, we don't need rules for the outside. We simply need to yield to Jesus.

Study Questions

1. Have you ever felt judged? Have you ever judged someone else? Why is this such a difficult subject to discuss? Read Colossians 2:16-19 and Matthew 7:1-5 to inform your answers.
2. Based on verses 16-19 what erroneous teachings were making the rounds in the church at Colossae?
3. What were the consequences of those who let themselves be duped by false teachers?
4. According to verse 19 what causes the “growth that is from God”?
5. Read verse 23 and share it in your own words. What does the verse mean? What are some attempts you’ve made (or heard of) to stop the “indulgence of the flesh”?

Week 6 LIFE: Is New with Christ (Colossians 3:1-17)

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind 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, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Col. 3:1-4)

Raised with Christ

We are “co-resurrected” with Jesus. This is a fact to be believed. We, as believers, entered into His death and resurrection at the point of our salvation. As a result, “we possess divine and eternal life, which is not merely endless existence, but a heavenly quality of life brought to them by the indwelling Lord. They are thus alive in Christ to the realities of the divine realm.”

Because of this, we have a responsibility to live consistently with those realities. Resurrection with Christ “is the path to holiness, not self-denial, angelic experience, or ceremony. They are no longer living the old life they lived before their salvation but possess the eternal life of Christ and have been raised to live on another plane. They must not be ignorant or forgetful of who they are and how they are to live. All sinful passion is controlled and conquered by the power of the indwelling Christ and our union with Him.”

“Preoccupation with the eternal realities that are ours in Christ is to be the pattern of the believer’s life. Jesus put it this way: ‘Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you’ (Mt. 6:33) ... To be preoccupied with heaven is to be preoccupied with the One who reigns there and His purposes, plans, provisions, and power. It is also to view the things, people, and events of this world through His eyes and with an eternal perspective.”

To “set your mind” is to “think.” The position of our heart should be oriented toward heaven, where Christ is. And Scripture should be our thought compass. The doctrine and promises of Scripture direct our hearts to the heaven lies – to the person of Jesus Christ.

Because we have died, our lives are now hidden with Christ in God. “The reference to ‘hidden’ can refer to ‘safety or secrecy.’ In fact, both are probably in view. Our life is doubly secure since it is with Christ in God. This is a comforting reminder of the truth found in John 10:28-29: no one can snatch the believer out of Jesus’ hand or the Father’s hand. The believer is secure. The term hidden can also mean ‘concealed, unseen.’ This means that the believer’s life is unknown or not understood by the watching world (compare 1 John 3:1-2). The unseen realities will be revealed...Paul has taken a glance back and a glimpse at the present; his focus now shifts to a gaze ahead. The believer’s identification with Christ brings not only a past break with sin and a present security, it also means a glorious future. The believer awaits the time when Christ...appears...Paul takes the idea of identification a step further. Not only is life shared by

identification with Christ; Christ is life itself (Phil. 1:21; Gal. 2:20). For the believer, life isn't merely activity, details; life isn't acquisition or accomplishment. Life is Christ. He is the focus of our aspirations, the reason for our existence." (Quotes not noted are from the John MacArthur Commentary on Colossians)

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. (Col 3:5-15)

Killing Your Sin

Adam, and his sin and death, no longer rule us (Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9-10). On the other hand, this real and decisive separation from Adam's 'lordship' does not mean that we cannot yet be influenced by Adam's pattern of behavior. For while transferred into Christ's realm, we are still prone to think and live as people who still belong to Adam's realm. Hence, with the celebration of a decisive change, there arises also the constant need for appropriation of that change (Eph. 4:22-24)."³³

There is no taming the flesh, no regulating it, no bridling it. Paul calls for radical measures. Exterminate. Destroy. Crucify. Kill. Put to death. In the words of John Owen: "Be killing sin or it will be killing you."

Jesus Christ died out of a commitment to our holiness. Paul urges us to quit coddling the sin in our lives and put it to death. Sin is an insult to Christ for by it we are putting something in His place, saying that something is more important than He is. Nothing is worth more than what Jesus offers in Himself. What are we to put away (literally put to death)? Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness (idolatry), anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk. As for lying, this "command seems to speak to more than verbal lying. It recalls all falsehood, whether by actions or words. Perhaps the church had a hypocritical or deceptive element in it.

Perhaps the false teachers employed a tactic of deception regarding Paul and the gospel of grace. Perhaps the command is always appropriate for Christians

without regard for specific situations which prompt it. In the command, two matters are clear.

First, this command is of singular importance in the way it is expressed. Second, the Christian community is to be characterized by truth and truthfulness. All lying belongs with the old self who is gone. The old self is the old bundle of attitudes and emotions and practices that we used to be. The new person is the new bundle of attitudes and emotions and practices that Jesus has called us to become. We must take off the old person and put on the new person. "... For Paul, the 'old self,' or 'old man,' is first of all Adam and the 'new self,' or 'new man,' is Christ. Note, in this regard, that Paul can speak of 'putting on Christ' as apparently parallel to 'putting on the new self' (Gal. 3:27; Ro. 13:14). It is therefore our 'Adamic' identification, with its servitude to sin, that we have 'put off' in coming to Christ; and it is our 'Christic' identification, with its power over sin, that we have 'put on.' We have been brought into a new realm of existence, a realm in which the 'old self,' Adam and all that he represents, no longer dictates our thinking or our behavior.

Having put on "the new self," which is identified with Christ Himself, it's necessary at the same time to put on those virtues that characterize Christ. These virtues are: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, love, peace, and gratitude. (See the glossary for definitions)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Col. 2:16-17)

Let the Word of Christ Dwell in You Richly

Paul calls upon believers to let the Word take up residence and be at home in their lives. *Plousiōs* (richly) could also be translated 'abundantly or extravagantly rich.' The truths of Scripture should permeate every aspect of the believer's life and govern every thought, word, and deed. The Word dwells in us when we hear it (Mt. 13:9), handle it (2 Tim. 2:15), hide it (Ps.119:11), and hold it fast (Php. 2:16). To those things, the Christian must read, study, and live the Word. To let the word of Christ richly dwell is identical to being filled with the Spirit (cf. Eph. 5:18). The Word in the heart and mind is the handle by which the Spirit turns the will. It is clear that these two concepts are identical because the passages that follow each are so similar. Colossians 3:18-4:1 is a briefer parallel to Ephesians 5:19-6:9. The result of being filled with the Holy Spirit is the same as the result of letting the Word dwell in one's life richly. Therefore, the two are the same spiritual reality viewed from two sides. To be filled with the Spirit is to be controlled by His Word. To have the Word dwelling richly is to be controlled by His Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit is the author and the power of the Word, the expressions are

interchangeable.”³⁴

Do All in the Name of the Lord Jesus

The simplest, most basic rule of thumb for living the Christian life is to do everything, whether word or deed, in the name of the Lord Jesus. To do everything in the name of Jesus is to act consistently with who He is and what He wants... It is always to be done without reluctance or despair or legalistic duty, but with giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Study Questions

1. Do you know someone who demonstrates the idea of “setting your minds on things that are above”? What makes you come to that conclusion?
2. What are the specific behaviors that are forbidden? (see vs. 5-11)
3. Why do you think Paul uses such harsh language in 3:5, “put to death...”?
4. What are the positive, God-honoring traits and practices encouraged? (vs.12-17)
5. Summarize the meaning of 3:17.

Week 7 LIFE: Is about Relationships

(Colossians 3:18 – 4:1)

Relationships are an essential part of life. Understanding relationships has eluded the greatest of counselors, psychologists, armchair theologians, spouses, parents, kids, and just about everyone. Paul's instruction regarding relationships is not only countercultural it is transcendent. Without the work of Christ relationships, even the best of them, are hanging by a thread and in need of transformation.

Submission is not grounded in any supposed superiority of the husband or inferiority of the wife (this is clear from Gal. 3:28 and 1 Pet. 3:7). The husband, even before the fall into sin, was incomplete without his wife. The husband will never reach his full potential apart from the input and support of his wife. Submission does not mean a wife is obligated to follow should her husband lead her into sin. The biblical principle that we owe obedience to God first and foremost applies to Christian wives as well. The wife's submission to her husband is qualified by God's commands, not her own preferences, opinions, or even expertise.

Submission does not mean the wife must suppress her creative energy or adopt a passive approach to life in general. One need only read Proverbs 31 to put this myth to rest.

Neither does submission entail silence. Many mistakenly think a wife is unsubmitive if she ever (1) criticizes her husband (constructive criticism that is lovingly motivated and corrective in nature is not inconsistent with godly submission); or (2) makes requests of him (in particular, that her husband and family act responsibly in private and public; submission of the wife is not an excuse for sin or sloth or sloppiness in the husband); or (3) teaches her husband (it is not inconsistent with godly submission that a wife be more intelligent or more articulate than her husband.)

Finally, submission does not mean that everything a wife does must be directly dependent upon or connected to her husband. Submission does not mean the wife can never do anything for her own benefit or for the benefit of others or that she should never become involved in activities or ministries outside the home. It simply means that nothing she does should bring harm to her husband or undermine her primary responsibility to her family.

Submission is a commitment to support one's husband in such a way that he may reach his full potential as a man of God.

Husbands love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Husbands are never commanded to rule their wives, but to love them. The Bible never says, "Husbands, take steps to insure that wives submit to you. Nor does it say, "Husbands, exercise headship and authority over your wives. Rather, the

principle of male headship is either asserted or assumed and men are commanded to love their wives as Christ loves the church.

- Headship is never portrayed in Scripture as a means for self-satisfaction or self-exaltation. Headship is always other-oriented.
- Headship is never to be identified with the issuing of commands, nor does it mean that the husband must make every decision in the home.
- Headship is more a responsibility than a right.
- Headship is the authority to serve.
- Headship is the opportunity to lead.
- Headship entails gentleness and sensitivity - no harshness or embitter
- Headship means “honoring” one’s wife
- Headship means loving and caring for one’s wife as much as we love and care for ourselves.³⁷

Children obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. To the children, Paul says: “obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord”. Given the fact that Paul addresses these “children” directly indicates that they are old enough to understand and respond to his exhortation. And one can only assume that they are young enough to still be living at home and are under the authority and oversight of their parents. Paul appears to have the Christian family in view, for he says that such obedience is well pleasing “in” the Lord; i.e., in that sphere in which the Christian now lives, that is, in the new fellowship of those who own Christ as Lord. When Paul says their responsibility extends to “all things” he’s reminding us that children are not the judges of what they should or should not obey in terms of parental precepts.”³⁸

Fathers do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. The obedience your children must render to you in no way excuses or justifies insensitivity, brutality, or an overbearing authoritarianism that crushes their spirit. To provoke or exasperate refers to the result of undue severity in the exercise of discipline. Firmness is necessary but should always be tempered with purity of motive and a loving spirit.³⁹

Bondservants obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a master in heaven. (Col. 3:22 - 4:1)

Slaves and Masters:

Let’s begin by observing how Paul envisions the service slaves are to render to their masters. They are to obey them in “everything” (language similar to what we

saw in v. 20 with regard to children and their parents). It goes without saying, of course, that this assumes the master does not require his servant to sin or to deny Jesus. His work is not to be done “by way of eye-service” (v. 22b), an interesting phrase that translates one word in the Greek text. Paul has in mind an approach to one’s work designed either to attract attention or to avoid punishment (or both). Perhaps he has in mind work discharged only when one’s master (employer?) is present and observant, together with the tendency to trifle and piddle when he’s absent, hoping that one’s sloth won’t be detected.

The point is this: Christians are to fulfill their responsibilities (whatever they may be and to whomever they are obligated) based on principle, not pragmatism. We work regardless of who may be present, conscious that another eye is upon us. Or as Paul says, “you are serving the Lord Christ” (v. 24b). He is always watching. And whatever wages you may or may not receive from another human, remember that “from the Lord” you “will receive the inheritance as your reward” (v. 24a; it’s important to remember that under Roman law a slave could never inherit anything). We labor and serve and discharge our obligations ultimately to please Christ, not people (v.22b). We must avoid a merely perfunctory and mechanical performance and do all things “with sincerity of heart.” Reverence (or, fear) for the Lord, says Paul, must govern our actions. Yes, even work is worship! As difficult as it may be, we must labor in God’s grace to look beyond mere earthly payment or praise as the motivation for our efforts. There is something inherently spiritual in all that a Christian does, whether that be the digging of a ditch, the preaching of a sermon, or the changing of a diaper. It is for Christ that we work. It is from Christ that the reward will come.

Finally, Paul is quick to point out that if slaves have duties, so also have masters: they must treat their servants “justly and fairly” (Col. 4:1). They may have the upper hand in this life, but Christ is their Master too! Therefore, let them treat their servants with the same consideration and equity they themselves hope to receive from the Lord Jesus.

Study Questions

1. What was Paul’s inspired instruction to wives? husbands? children?
2. What attitudes should fill the hearts and minds of Christian workers?
3. What eternal realities should motivate employers?
4. Submission (vs. 18) and Harshness (vs. 19)...go ahead, have the discussion.

Week 9: LIFE: Is Living for Others (Colossians 4:2-18)

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

At the same time pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison – that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. (Col. 4:2-4)

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders.

If believers are to be effective in sharing the message, they must be wise in the way [they] act toward outsiders. Wisdom enables us to combine boldness with tact. Wisdom enables us to employ the proper approach in specific situations and with particular individuals. If believers are to be effective in sharing the message, they must also make the most of every opportunity.

The literal translation of this phrase is redeem [buy back] the time. It refers to “snapping up every opportunity that comes.” Believers can look to the example of the man who penned the words for encouragement. Paul, the prisoner, exploited every opportunity to share the message.

For the sharing of the message of Christ to be effective, the wise walk must be accompanied with flavorful talk. The believer’s talk is to be gracious, rather than gruff, and charming, rather than coarse. The believer’s talk is to be seasoned with salt. Salt was used for two purposes in Paul’s time. It was used as a preservative to keep food from spoiling. This would mean the believer’s speech is to be free from corruption, wholesome. Salt was also used as an additive to give flavor to food. If this meaning lies behind the figure, then the believer’s speech is to be interesting, witty, tactful, and appealing. Perhaps the best understanding of the reference to salvation is that the believer’s wholesome and appealing. Paul wants believers to know how to answer everyone. He tells them to answer with speech, which is gracious, wholesome, and appealing.”⁴²

Life by Example⁴³

Tychicus

Paul next lists three credentials Tychicus possessed that qualified him to act as Paul’s personal envoy. First, he was a beloved brother in the Lord. That Paul calls him a brother shows he was one of the family of believers. His personal character had earned him the designation beloved from no less than the apostle Paul himself. Second, Paul describes him as a faithful servant. He never achieved prominence, but he served in an important capacity as Paul’s liaison to the churches. He was a faithful steward of his ministry – the highest commendation Paul could give (cf. 1 Cor. 4:2). Finally, Paul calls him a fellow bondservant in the Lord. He was a diakonos (servant) in relationship to Paul, but a sundoulos (fellow bondservant) with Paul in relationship to the Lord.”

Onesimus

Onesimus, the man with the sinful past, is the runaway slave whose return to his master was the occasion for the book of Philemon. Philemon was one of the leaders of the Colossian church, and it is likely that the church met in his home. Paul described Onesimus as our faithful and beloved brother. When a person comes to faith in Christ, the past is no longer an issue... Onesimus was a testimony to the power of God to transform a life. Paul tells the Colossians that the man who left Colossae as a runaway slave now returns as one of your number. He was to be treated as a member of the church, because in Christ there was neither slave nor freeman (Gal. 3:28). Paul shows his regard for him by having him, along with Tychicus, inform the Colossians about Paul's whole situation."

Aristarchus

He was a Jewish believer (4:11) with a Greek name and a native of Thessalonica. "Aristarchus first appeared during Paul's three-year ministry at Ephesus. He was seized by the rioting mob, who recognized him as one of Paul's companions (Acts 19:29) ... Fellow prisoner is from aichmalōtos, which literally means 'one caught with a spear.' It refers to war captives, or prisoners. It is unlikely that Aristarchus was actually a prisoner; Paul refers to him as such because he shared Paul's prison existence. That he chose to make Paul's lifestyle his own speaks of his sympathetic, caring heart. He gave up his own freedom to minister to Paul's needs. Any leader would be enriched to have a faithful Aristarchus at his side through all his trials. The Lord's work would not be done if it were not for people like Aristarchus, who humbly bear hardships without the fame of those they serve."

Mark

John Mark was a companion of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:5), he deserted them when the going got tough... Mark's desertion was later to become a source of friction between Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas wanted to take his cousin along on the second missionary journey, but Paul, not trusting Mark to be loyal, refused. That led to such a sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas that they separated from each other (Acts 15:37-39).

Fortunately, the story does not end there. By the time Paul wrote Colossians, Mark had become a changed man. He had been restored to usefulness, probably through the ministry of Peter (himself no stranger to failure) in his life (cf. 1 Pet. 5:13). In Philemon 24, Paul names him among his fellow workers. The man whom Paul once rejected became one of his greatest helpers. In 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul tells Timothy to 'pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service.' Paul told the Colossians that if Mark came to them, they were to obey their instructions... and welcome him. They were not to shun him because of his previous failure. We might also call Mark the man with a second chance. His life was a testimony to God's ability to use failures. In fact, he later received a privilege shared by only three other men in history: writing one of the gospels."

Jesus (Justus)

One of the three who proved to be an encouragement to Paul, he was willing to leave his people to identify with Paul (one of the circumcision – a Jew) and thus demonstrated a deep commitment to him.

Epaphras

Epaphras was the founder of the Colossian church, and he most likely was its current pastor. He had journeyed to Rome bringing Paul news of the dangerous heresy threatening the churches of the Lycus Valley. Like Tychicus, and Paul himself, Epaphras is designated a *doulos* (bondslave) of Jesus Christ. Because he was one of their number, he sends along his greetings. Although separated from them, Epaphras still ministered to the Lycus Valley churches. He did so by always laboring earnestly for them in his prayers... Epaphras was a living example of Paul's command to the Colossians in 4:2 to 'devote yourselves to prayer.'

The goal of Epaphras's prayers was that the Colossians stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God... Epaphras, like Paul wanted the Colossians to be mature and satisfied in all the will of God. Only those who live in obedience to God's will can grow to the fullness of Christ and be content (Eph 4:13-14). Having observed Epaphras firsthand, Paul could bear witness to his deep concern for the Colossians, and those at nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis. His fervent, agonizing prayers and his single-minded passion for his people's maturity, must have greatly encouraged Paul and his other co-workers.

Luke

Luke was Paul's personal physician, as well as his close friend. He was a Gentile believer (cf. 4:11) who traveled frequently with Paul on his missionary voyages... Like Paul, he was an educated, cultured man, as evidenced by the literary quality of his Greek in his gospel and the book of Acts. Luke was the prototype of the medical missionary. Not everyone in the Lord's service has to have a seminary degree. God's work needs specialists too. Luke surrendered his special talent to God, giving up what might have been a lucrative private practice.

Demas

Demas "had made a substantial commitment to the Lord's work and was with Paul in both his imprisonments. Unlike Paul's other companions, however, his future was sad. Paul records the tragedy of Demas' desertion in 2 Timothy 4:9-10. The pull of the world system eventually became irresistible to Demas, and he abandoned both Paul and the ministry. Jesus had His Judas, and Paul had his Demas. Anyone who has been in the ministry long enough has shared in that heartbreaking experience. That is not necessarily a reflection on one's own ministry, however. It is comforting to note that even the two greatest leaders the world has ever known had those who failed them.

Archippus

He appears only here and in Philemon 2. He is commanded to take heed to his ministry that he might fulfill it. The examples of Paul's co-workers in the preceding verses would be a powerful incentive for him to do that. To fulfill our ministry is what the Lord expects of all of us."

Study Questions

1. Paul took time to honor and acknowledge the people who worked with him. What three people have been most encouraging and helpful in your own spiritual walk?
2. What specific instructions does Paul give about prayer in verses 2-4? What is the difference in praying and being devoted to prayer?
3. What kind of speech did Paul regard as duty (vs. 3-4)?
4. According to verse 6 what are the standards for Christians when it comes to general conversation?
5. Read 4:17. Paul states that Archippus received a ministry in the Lord. What ministry have you received in the Lord?
6. Why is it significant that Paul closes the letter with, "Grace be with you?"