



THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

A STUDY THROUGH COLOSSIANS

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snowbird
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Printed in the United States of America

Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters
75 Mae Johnson Way
Andrews, NC 28901
www.swoutfitters.com

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Content: Zach Mabry
Prepared for Publishing by: Flannelgraph Creative

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INTRODUCTION

There are many different types of Bible studies out there, so what makes this one different? Some Bible studies act more like commentaries, which have their place but can often get so academic that you get lost and forget what you are supposed to be studying. Some are basically sermon outlines, complete with alliterated points and relevant stories. Again, these can be very beneficial and have their place, but can often bend the meaning of a text to make it more “preachable.” Others are so reader-response oriented that they just ask the question, “What does this mean to you?” as if you are the one that gets to determine the meaning of a text.

We are choosing to call this a “guided Bible study.” The goal of this is to point us to the actual text of the Bible. Each section will start with the text, summarize the section, and then go phrase by phrase through the text trying to figure out what the original author meant to the original audience. This is of utmost importance, especially when we consider the fact that the ultimate Author is God, Himself. We try as much as possible to stay within the book of Colossians, but there are times when the author alludes to other passages, and we need to bring in cross-references.

You will notice that there are a couple rabbit trails that we will go on together. This has all been

done intentionally to help the reader better understand God's Word. Our ultimate goal in this study is to make individual, personal, Bible study more realistic for Christians. All too often, you can feel intimidated thinking about studying the Bible. After all, wasn't it written in some ancient language? Yes, but the good news is that it has been translated into English.

I'm sure some of you have sat under the teaching of the Bible and liked what the preacher said, but you just couldn't figure out how he got it from the text. In an ideal world, we should all be able to study the same passage of Scripture and come away learning the same thing. This study has been written in such a way to help you walk through the text together. Think of it as an exercise in "showing your work."

We hope that this is a helpful tool for you individually or in a small group environment. We are so glad that we can make it available for you. May God bless you as you grow in your understanding of His Word so that you may "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord."

OUR MISSION

Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters exists to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the exposition of Scripture and personal relationships in order to equip the Church to impact this generation.

1 - Colossians 1:1-2

Greetings and Introduction

Colossians 1:1-2

SUMMARY

Colossians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul (along with Timothy) to the church of Colossae. The members of the church are both Jews and Gentiles, with the majority being Gentiles. There is a little bit of ambiguity as to when and where Paul was when he wrote this letter, but we are going to say that it was probably around the year AD 60 and that Paul was writing from Rome during his first imprisonment.

Why would this make any difference as to how we interpret the letter?

Well, think about it. This guy is in jail because of his testimony for the Gospel. It's not like he's writing from a beach house somewhere. The context in which Paul is writing will affect the way that we interpret what he is saying.

The next thing that we need to keep in mind is that there is a good chance that Paul did not know most of these people personally.

Interesting...so why is he writing to them? He has heard of their faith and their Christian conduct, and he wants to encourage them and aid in their discipleship.

This is really cool because they have a reputation that has made it all the way to Paul in Rome. They are faithfully living out the Gospel in such a way that the world is hearing.

Is that true of us? Would our Christian conduct be the first thing people think of when they hear about us?

Not only does Paul want to encourage them, but he wants to warn them. We don't know exactly what kind of false teaching is coming their way, but it looks like there is some sort of heresy threatening the church of Colossae, and they need to be on their guard. We can figure out a little bit about the specifics like it might be some kind of Jewish legalism mixed with a dash of pagan mysticism (more on all that later). Still, the remedy is the same: focus on Jesus and the Gospel. This is timely for us, as well. The best thing to counteract false teaching is good, solid, biblical teaching.

WHAT IS THE TEXT SAYING?

APOSTLE

Paul describes himself as an apostle. As you may have heard before, "apostle" comes from a Greek word that means, "to send out," and surely Paul is claiming to have been sent out by Jesus. However, this is being used in a more technical sense in this verse. Paul is not just saying that Jesus sent him out (which he has). He is claiming to have authority as

one who holds the office of an apostle. Paul has a special role to be able to speak into the lives of believers because He was personally selected by Jesus Christ to be his representative here on the earth (for more on this look at Acts 9 and Galatians 1).

So Paul is actually claiming that you should listen to what he has to say because the message that he is bringing is from Jesus.

WILL OF GOD

In addition to this, his apostleship is according to the will of God. God set Paul apart before he was born for the role that he is now playing in the church. This is another strong argument for the authority of what Paul has to say. If you are going to go against the council that Paul is giving to you in this letter, you are setting yourself up in opposition to the will of God.

SAINTS

Paul is not just talking about himself in his introduction. He uses very powerful words to describe his readers in Colossae (and by extension us) by referring to them as “saints.” Now, for many of us, we do not have a healthy, biblical understanding of the word “saints.” When I hear this, my first thought is of the Catholic Church with their huge list of saints for this or that occupation (did you know that Saint Agatha is the Patron Saint of Bakers?).

But if you were to directly translate this word, it would actually be “holy ones.” Wow! Paul is saying that the Colossians are holy! Why would he

say that? Because they have been made holy in Christ! This means that you and I need to have a shift in the way that we think about our identity too. If you are in Christ, then by this same teaching, you need to understand that you are holy as well. That is a big deal. This is Paul's favorite word to use in describing Christians and uses it 15 times in his New Testament writings for that purpose.

FAITHFUL BROTHERS

Not only does he call them “holy,” but he calls them “faithful brothers in Christ.” For Paul, the most important connection that we can have to one another is to be a part of God's family. God is our Father, and we are brothers and sisters. Our unity together is found in our union with Christ. We are co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

What is striking about this is that it doesn't just affect our vertical relationship with God (we are His sons and daughters), but our horizontal relationship with each other (we are brothers and sisters in Christ). How different would our lives look if we actually lived out what it means to treat each other as if we are part of the same family? The irony is that we will be brothers and sisters in the same family for eternity!

GRACE AND PEACE

This is the crux of Paul's introduction and serves as a setup for the rest of the letter.

In the time period that Paul is writing, it was common for people to write letters and start them off with, “greetings.” Here Paul has changed that to “grace and peace,” but it is more than just a

standard greeting. He wants grace and peace to form everything he is saying in the letter.

In fact, he uses “grace,” five times, including ending the letter with, “grace be with you.” This whole letter can be seen as a way of extending grace and peace to the Christians who were living in Colossae, but not only to them but to us as well.

What Does This Mean for Me?

1. How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as holy? Is your identity in Christ? If so, what does that mean? How does that affect the way you live your life?
2. See how Paul had a good understanding of his calling, what about you? What is it that God has called you to? How do you need to use that calling to minister to others?
3. How do I view other Christians? Do I see them as holy? Do I see them as my brothers and sisters? Am I treating them as God’s son or daughter and my brother or sister?
4. How can I be a conduit of grace and peace to others?

Thanksgiving and Prayer

Colossians 1:3-14

SUMMARY

Here we get to see into the prayer life of the apostle Paul, specifically in his prayer for the believers in Colossae. Now, remember, he has not met these brothers and sisters, but that doesn't stop him from praying for them and praying for them often. Two times in this little prayer, we see where he mentions that he is constantly praying for them (always, not ceased). Not only this, but we get to see why he is praying for them and the content of his prayer for them.

The most challenging aspect of this prayer comes when we look at the spiritual realities that Paul articulates regarding the Colossian believers, simply because they are in Christ. It is important that we see ourselves in this same light and learn from his prayer for the Colossian church and apply these truths to our lives.

WHAT IS THE TEXT SAYING?

WHEN DO THEY PRAY?

Paul (and Timothy) are always praying for their brothers and sisters at Colossae. Because of Paul's role in the church, he knows that the church in Colossae will listen to what he has to say to them. However, he isn't just writing them a letter telling them to "get with the program." He genuinely loves them and constantly takes his concern for them before our Father in Heaven. Here he even takes the time to say that God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is identifying himself as a brother to them and a servant of Jesus. Ever since they heard that there was a church in Colossae, they have been praying for them.

Why do they pray?

News of their devotion to God made its way to a Roman prison. Let's look at the specificity of what Paul has heard about them.

FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS

This is another way of saying that they have become Christians. They have confessed, repented, and put their faith in Jesus as their savior. This has to do with the vertical dimension of their relationship with God.

LOVE FOR THE SAINTS

They have a genuine love for other Christians. Because their lives have been changed by the Gospel, they have a love for others in the household

of faith. This has to do with the horizontal dimension of their relationships with others.

BECAUSE OF THEIR HOPE

Notice that faith and love are grounded in their hope. They have faith in God and love for others because of the hope they have in Christ. You have probably heard this before, but Paul is not using the word “hope” like we commonly use it. We say “hope” when we don’t really think something is going to happen. “Man, I hope this is over soon.” But when the Bible uses the word “hope,” it involves a confident belief in what is going to happen in the future, based on our unshakeable confidence in God. This is awesome. We have an eternal, secured hope in heaven. It’s there for us, already (1 Peter 1:3-5).

They have this hope because they have responded appropriately to the Gospel, which he refers to as “the word of truth.” It is striking the way that Paul refers to their conversion. He uses the words “heard, understood, and learned.” This is integral to his letter since he is trying to clarify the Gospel message in light of this immanent heresy.

This Gospel has gone over the entire world and is “bearing fruit and increasing.” This phrase is fascinating for two reasons. First, because he comes right back to it in verse 10, regarding how the Colossians are progressing in their faith. Second, because it appears to be a reference to Genesis 1:28, where God commands our first parents to “be fruitful and multiply” (in the Septuagint – the Greek version of the Old Testament – these are the same two verbs). This is a cool

thought because the Gospel is doing spiritually, what Adam and Eve were commanded to do physically.

In their context, it was Epaphras that was doing the work of the Gospel as he is the one who shared it with them. Because of this, Paul commends him for his faithful work to Jesus on their behalf. And, it is because of Epaphras that Paul and Timothy even heard about the faith of the Colossians. Paul calls him a “fellow slave” and “faithful servant.”

WHAT DO THEY PRAY?

This is the most exciting part of this passage because it helps us understand Paul’s (and the Lord’s) desire for the Colossian believers, and by extension, to us as God’s children. We get insight into what the work of sanctification should look like in our lives as we submit to the work of the Lord in us. It should also lead us to how we pray for our growth in Christ and the continued discipleship of our brothers and sisters.

FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL

This is the main point of their prayer; everything else comes off of this. And this is no simple request. By extension, we need to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will, which is characterized by “all wisdom” and “spiritual understanding.” Let’s look deeper into this.

Since Paul is praying for this to happen, and since the verb “to be filled” is in the passive voice, we realize that it is God who fills us with this knowledge. However, that doesn’t mean that we are

inactive in our sanctification, right? Where are we to find this knowledge? In God's revealed Word! God has given us the key to understanding His will in the Bible (John 17:17).

TO WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD

Wow. What does that even mean? This word "worthy" is only used six times in the New Testament, five of those are by Paul.

- Romans 16:2 - "Worthy of the saints."
- Ephesians 4:1 - "Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called"
- Philippians 1:27 - "Let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel."
- 1 Thessalonians 2:12 - "Walk worthy of God."

Our understanding of God's will should lead us to live lives like Jesus. What a heavy thought. This is a byproduct of the Spirit's work inside us. It is insight that the Spirit of God gives us that enables us to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to God.

BEARING FRUIT

This is another way of saying that as we grow in our relationship with God, we will bear fruit that accompanies our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture uses the term "fruit" both for actions and attitudes, and a disciple of Jesus should be bearing both. Our actions should represent that we are following the Lord. These should be coming from

attitudes that represent the Holy Spirit of God at work in our lives (Galatians 5:22-24).

INCREASING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

A logical corollary to this would be the increase of our knowledge of God. Again, he is highlighting the “intellectual” aspect of the Christian life. And, of course, it makes perfect sense that if our knowledge of God through His Word is what sets us on the course of Christlikeness, then we will continue to know both more of Him and to know Him more.

STRENGTHENED

(God's Strength = Endurance and Patience)

But is the Christian life difficult? Assuredly so. And let's not forget that we are getting this letter from a man in prison for the Gospel. We need to have strength of will to continue, but thanks be to God that He will fill us with His strength. Our God has an unending storehouse of strength with which to fill us. Paul prays that the Colossians will be strengthened with all strength, according to God's glorious might (or the might of His glory). What an encouragement!

This will lead us to have increased endurance and patience. Our process of sanctification requires us to set a course and continue. We need strength and fortitude, and God has it to give to us.

GIVING THANKS WITH JOY

There is a slight debate on where the “with joy” should go in this passage. I have decided to put it in a different place than the ESV (choosing to agree

with the NASB and CSV). The giving of thanks provides a bridge for us in this section because it is coming off of what it means to walk worthy of God, and it explains the following section as reasons for which we should be giving God thanks.

First, as we continue to grow in our Christian discipleship, our lives should be characterized by joyfully giving thanks to God. This flows naturally from the fact that we recognize that our maturity as believers comes directly from His hands. He is the one who is sanctifying us.

Second, we should constantly be giving thanks for our salvation. Paul uses some awesome word pictures to talk about our new status as believers. In extending salvation to us, God has made us qualified to have a portion of His eternal inheritance, along with all the other saints of God.

We, who were once blind and ignorant, have become receptors of His light. We, who were once lost, have been rescued from the authority and domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the beloved Son of God. We, who were once slaves to sin, have been purchased by the blood of Jesus. We have redemption, that is to say, the forgiveness from all our sins.

What Does This Mean for Me?

1. Christians are thankful people. Paul is giving thanks for the Colossians and praying that they will grow in the faith. And, one aspect of this is being joyfully thankful. How do I characterize myself? Am I a thankful person? Am I growing

- in gratitude? How grateful am I to God for my salvation?
2. Prayer: What can I learn about the way Paul is praying for these Christians?
 - A. Do I pray for others like this? If I was seriously praying for the spiritual growth of others like this, I would love them more and treat them better. So why don't I?
 - B. Am I praying well for myself? Am I focused on prayer in my personal growth in Christ?
 - C. Am I praying for the Holy Spirit to give me wisdom and understanding? How can I pray more intentionally for my sanctification?
 3. Do I have this kind of hope? Have I internalized the fact that I have an eternal hope reserved in Heaven for me? Is this leading me to deepen my faith in Jesus and increase my love for others?
 4. Am I studying God's Word as I should? I should be praying that God will give me a knowledge of His will, but if I'm not disciplining myself to seek Him through His Word, this is just a hollow prayer.
 5. Am I walking/living in a way that is worthy of God and pleasing to Him? That is such a heavy thought. Take a minute and seriously think through this. Ask God to reveal areas of sin and hypocrisy to you.
 6. Where's my identity? Do I see myself as rescued? Do I see myself as an heir of God's inheritance? Do I see myself as purchased by God? Do I see myself as forgiven?

The Preeminence of Christ

Colossians 1:15-23

SUMMARY

This is absolutely awesome! It is slamma jamma full of deep theological truths. This little section is packed with the knowledge of how we need to view Jesus more accurately and, in turn, how we should respond. It has been characterized as an early “Christ hymn” and is definitely written in a way to make it more easily memorized. (You should also listen to Andrew Peterson’s song “All Things Together” so you can memorize it easily as well.)

This section follows the last section as a deeper explanation of the “in Him” in whom we have redemption and will focus on the exaltation of Jesus. We will see Him exalted both in creation and in redemption. Simply put, He is exalted in the created order, because He, Himself, brought it all into existence and is actively sustaining it. He is exalted in redemption rising from the dead and providing the only means of reconciliation with God the Father. His sacrificial death and

resurrection are presented as the only means of attaining genuine, eternal peace.

For us to really get to what God is saying to us through this passage, we are going to have to do a couple little word studies.

Word of Caution: You can get yourself into dangerous waters by doing word studies – just because someone uses the same word as someone else doesn't mean that they mean it in the same way. Every word (regardless of language) will have a certain “semantic range.” That is just a fancy way of saying that it can mean different things or ideas. So what is the determining factor? And they all said...” context.” That's right, context. We need to work hard to see how the biblical writers are using these specific words in context to understand what they mean by them. Now, with those words of caution, we will proceed.

WHAT IS THE TEXT SAYING?

IMAGE OF GOD

When you see “image of God,” it should bring several different ideas into your thoughts. First, we remember that Adam was created “in the image of God.” And Paul, very well, could be referencing this passage from Genesis 1:27. We saw in the last section that he could have alluded to Genesis 1:28, so it would make sense if that is in his conscious thoughts as he writes this. Not only that but this beginning section of the “Christ hymn” is focusing on the supremacy of Jesus in creation. Plus, Paul will often make comparisons in his writings between Adam and Jesus. We know that Jesus was

the perfect Adam. He was the only human being to ever be 100% faithful to God in all things.

Next, we turn to the idea that Jesus, Himself, is the image of God. What does he mean when he says that Jesus is the “image of the invisible God?” He is saying that Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God. This doesn’t mean that Jesus is less than God. In fact, it means that He, Himself is God. Paul talks about this on other occasions as well. An important cross-reference here is:

2 Corinthians 4:4-6

“In their case the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

In both of these texts, it is clear that Jesus is God and the representation of the glory of God. As we continue in this text, it will become even more clear that Jesus Christ is God and should be worshipped, both by virtue of His creation of all and the salvation that He offers.

The last aspect of the “image of God” is a logical outcome of the first two. Human beings were made in the image of God and failed to be obedient. Yet Jesus came as the perfect Adam who fulfilled all righteousness. Now, in Christ, we too,

are being made into the image of God. This is a common theme in Paul's other writings that he is setting up here and will bring back around in Colossians 3:10.

First, let's look at those other passages to get a frame of reference:

Romans 8:29

“For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

1 Corinthians 15:49

“Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the Man of Heaven.”

2 Corinthians 3:18

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

See all these themes coming together? We are human beings after the image of Adam in our physical realities, but God made us (and is making us) like Jesus, after His image. This is exactly where Paul is heading in the letter to the Colossians. And since we can, let's peek ahead for just a second to Colossians 3:10: “...and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator.” This is where we are going, both in the letter and in our sanctification.

FIRSTBORN OF CREATION

This is a very interesting concept that we need to take a second to think through since it is pretty foreign to our cultural context. When the Bible uses the term “firstborn,” it isn’t always referring to the actual first child born. And in this passage, we know that it couldn’t be used that way because Adam was the first human born in creation, not Jesus. So it must mean something else. Instead of thinking of firstborn in a literal birth order way, we need to think of it as a “positional” reality. Does that make sense? When you get a minute, you can check out the Hebrew practice regarding the privileges of the firstborn (Deuteronomy 21:15-17), but for now, let’s focus on the idea that the firstborn has a special, preeminent position.

Jesus is said to be the firstborn in two different aspects in this hymn: “of creation,” and “of the dead.” The first is “of creation.” And look at how Paul grounds his argument. He is saying that Jesus has supremacy in creation because He is the one who created all things. Now, in case you wanted clarification for what he means by “all things,” Paul is happy to oblige.

HE CREATED ALL THINGS

Here is where Paul gets super technical and over communicates. He is not satisfied to leave it as “all things.” Jesus created everything in heaven and everything on earth. Want more specificity? If it is visible, Jesus created it. If it is invisible (which I’ll be honest, I don’t even have a concept in my head how somebody could create something that is invisible), Jesus created that too. If you are thinking

about earthy rulers or spiritual powers...Jesus created all of those as well. All kings, all governments, all angelic beings, all realms, dominions, and kingdoms were created by Jesus Christ. And because of that, He has the supreme position over all of them.

HE IS BEFORE ALL THINGS

Not only that, but Paul wants to make very clear so that we understand that Jesus is so much greater than the created order because He existed before all of it. When Paul says, “He is before all things,” notice that the verb “is” is in the present tense. There are two things that this leads us to think about.

First, He continually is before all things both temporally (He pre-existed) and in status (He holds the preeminent position). Second, Paul describes Jesus this way to point us back to the “I am” sayings of the Gospels (specifically John) and the covenant name of God in the Old Testament, Yahweh, which is literally translated as “I Am.”

HE SUSTAINS ALL THINGS

Jesus is not the type of God that Deists teach about, the kind that started the universe and then let it go. He is actively sustaining the universe. Every second of every day, He is holding all of it together. Paul uses a different verb tense here that would literally be translated as, “all things have been held together in the past and continues now by Him.”

HE IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

In verse 18, Paul changes the direction of the hymn. In the first section, he focused on how Jesus has supremacy in creation based on being the firstborn of creation. Now he transitions to Jesus as supreme in salvation based on the fact that He is firstborn from the dead.

He starts this by saying that Jesus is the head of the Church, which is His body. This is a word picture that we often neglect. We are His body, intimately connected to Him and to each other. He is our head, and we follow where He leads. We find our identity in Christ. He is the beginning and the source of the Church.

FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD

Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. Now, you might be thinking, “Weren’t a lot of people resurrected before Jesus?” Yes and no. Yes, there are people who died that God brought back to life, yet those were resuscitations. They came back from the dead to die again. Jesus was the first to rise from the dead to not die again. And in so doing, He made the resurrected life available to those who would follow after Him. In this way, He is the “first of many brothers” (Romans 8:29).

HE IS PREEMINENT

Next, Paul uses a word that is only used once in the whole New Testament (Bible scholars have a term for a word used once in the Bible, “hapax legomenon”... you need to know that). Jesus is the firstborn from the dead so that in all things, He may have preeminence. He holds the highest place

above all things. Paul grounds this in the fact that all of what he calls “the fullness” was pleased to both dwell in Him, that is, in His incarnation, and to reconcile all things to Him. Scholars go in different directions as to what exactly “the fullness” refers to, but they all agree that it is an indication of His deity. All of the fullness of God or “God-ness” was in Him, and it is through Him that reconciliation is made possible with the creatures which He, Himself created.

MAKING PEACE

We all know that man was created good but is now fallen. Sin separates us from God, and the penalty for sin is death. We need a perfect sacrificial lamb to make atonement for our sins and to bring us back into fellowship with God. Before Christ, we all stood in hostility toward God in need of peace. This peace can only come from the blood of Jesus Christ on the cross for our sins. He willingly took our sin on Himself to make peace between God and us. This is the only way for reconciliation to take place.

What Does This Mean for Me?

1. Do you honor Jesus as God and give Him thanks?
2. Do you see Jesus as supreme in Creation? Do you worship Him as Creator?
3. Do you acknowledge His sovereignty over all? Do you worship Him as the one holding all things together?

4. Jesus is Lord of every authority in all the universe. How is that reflected in the way you live your life? Are you living as if He is really your Lord?
5. Do you see yourself as a part of the body of Christ? Do you follow Him as your head? Do you seek for peace and unity in the body? Or are you dishonoring Him by dishonoring your brother/sister?
6. Do you realize that your salvation cost the blood of Jesus that was shed on the cross? How are you treating that precious sacrifice?

Christ in You~the Hope of Glory

Colossians 1:21-2:5

SUMMARY

Wow, there are so many things to cover in this passage. We will not be able to do it justice in this 12-week study.

In this section, we get the most common reference to Paul talking about the mystery of God (he actually uses the term “mystery” three times in this section). As we work through the passage, it will become clear to you that when Paul uses the term “mystery,” he is not saying that there is still some hidden truth that you need to find out through a mystical experience. He will clearly articulate that when he is referencing the mystery of God, it is a mystery that has been revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Now, does that mean that we know everything there is to know about God? Of course not. But it does mean that everything we need to know regarding salvation and growth in Christ has been revealed to us in the pages of Scripture.

In addition to this, Paul is going to let us know the reason why he is writing to the Colossians. This is very important because as we

desire to have our understanding shaped by God's Word, it is necessary that we are driven by the text. And if Paul says, "this is why I'm writing," then we should pay attention. Specifically, in this case, since we know that the young Colossian church is in the middle of having false teaching proposed to them, Paul is writing to help them be grounded in the Word of God and not be drawn away by false teachers. This is especially pertinent to us today since we also want to be grounded in truth, so we do not go astray or pervert the Gospel of Christ.

WHAT IS THE TEXT SAYING?

YOU WERE RECONCILED

Scripture is explicitly clear that before we came to Christ, we were separated from God. Paul spells that out here by saying that we were formerly alienated from God, not just neutral, but hostile to God (both in our minds, how we think, and with our actions characterized here by "evil deeds").

However, Jesus Christ has reconciled us to God.

Notice that Jesus is the active agent here. You were reconciled to God by Jesus. This rules out any kind of "works-based" salvation.

But how was this accomplished? Jesus reconciled us to God by His death on the cross. The purpose behind this is so He could take our sin to the cross with Him and kill it there so we can have His righteousness. Paul makes this clear when he says that Jesus did this for the purpose of presenting us before the presence of God the Father as those who have been made: holy, spotless, and blameless.

What is really interesting here is that when we follow Paul's train of thought, we know that it is God that saves us, not our own good works. But what happens after that? Are we saved by grace, but have to keep our Salvation by works? No, of course not. Then why the "if"? If we are in Christ, then this is a work that has been established by God (notice again, this is passive. God is the one who established us). If God has established us in Him, then we will continue in Him. We will be steadfast. We will not shift from the Gospel. Our perseverance in Christ shows that we truly belong to Him, as we continue in the faith.

HOPE OF THE GOSPEL

This is the second time that Paul uses the word "hope" in this letter. And remember this isn't a far off wishy kind of hope. We can have rock-solid confidence in the Gospel. This Gospel has been proclaimed all over creation, he says that it has gone out everywhere that is under the heavens. If the Colossians can have confidence in the Gospel (a message roughly 30 years old at the time), how much more can we? We have seen that this Gospel is continuing to cycle around the globe and is growing more now than any other time in the history of the Church.

One last interesting point here. Paul calls himself a servant of the Gospel. This is interesting because he uses the word from which we get the English word "deacon." To be clear, Paul is not claiming to have the office of a "deacon." He is telling us that he is a servant of the Gospel.

REJOICING IN SUFFERING

(Filling Up What is Lacking)

This follows right after Paul's claim that he is a servant of the Gospel. If you don't take the time to look at the surrounding context of these couple sentences, you can be extremely confused. And, to be honest, even when you do so, it can still be confusing.

First, what Paul is not saying is that Christ's atoning work on the cross was somehow incomplete and that He is supplementing that. Let's be clear about that. Christ completed the work of redemption in a way that only He was capable of fulfilling as God incarnate. Paul is completing the work to which Jesus has called us to. Jesus told us that if we followed Him, we would be persecuted (Matthew 5; Mark 10; Luke 6; John 15). Peter tells us that persecution is coming (all over 1 Peter). And Paul has written about this elsewhere (Philippians 1:29; 2 Timothy 3:12). Paul is in prison for the Gospel, which is part of what it means to be a servant of the Gospel. This is what we should expect. For this reason, he can rejoice.

There is something about the fact that he is doing this for the Church. He mentioned that he was a servant of the Gospel. Now he says that he is a servant of the Church. And in a cool play on words, he says that he is experiencing this suffering in his body for Christ's "body." We are the body of Christ. Just like Jesus suffered in His body, we as His physical body (still on earth) will experience suffering.

Paul is doing this because God has given him unique stewardship over the Church. This is a unique “office” he has as an apostle of Jesus. He has the authority of an apostle but also suffers on behalf of the Church.

But why would he rejoice in this? First, because he is following in the steps of Jesus, but also because this is serving to advance the Gospel. His testimony is a part of fulfilling the Word of God. He sees himself as an integral part of the spread of the Gospel to the most remote places on earth.

THE MYSTERY PT1 - THE WORD OF GOD

Here we see a special grammatical relationship called “apposition.” Paul is saying that the “Word of God” he is preaching is the “mystery” (think of an equals sign in between the two sayings “Word of God” = “mystery”). See the importance of this? The “mystery” isn’t some super-secret hidden knowledge. It is, in fact, the opposite. The “mystery” is what Paul has already been preaching. He describes it more by saying, it used to be hidden (for ages of time, and from generations of people), but it is a mystery no longer. It has been revealed to the saints of God. It is the very Gospel that has been preached all over the world. God chose to reveal this Gospel to everyone, including the Gentiles, in all nations. This is the riches of His glory to them.

So why use the term “mystery” here? What was mysterious about it? Remember that Paul is writing during a transitional period for the Gospel. For millennia God spoke, almost exclusively, to the Hebrew people, and salvation was found through the Jews. This is why Paul would say that it was

hidden for years and peoples. However, now through Christ, God has opened the door to salvation to all people (Jews and non-Jews) all over the whole world. (This is very similar to what Paul says in Ephesians 3.)

THE MYSTERY PT2 - CHRIST IN YOU

Now, Paul takes it a step farther. He tells us the specific content of this revealed mystery. It is Christ in you, which is our only hope of glory. How does God save sinful human beings? How does He reconcile us to Himself? By declaring us innocent? Yes, but even more, by fulfilling righteousness inside us by taking up residence (somehow) inside us. This is our only hope. If only God is fit for heaven, how can we be there unless God resides inside us? And this is exactly what He does when He saves us. He makes us holy. What an amazing revealed mystery!

THIS WE PROCLAIM

This is the Gospel that Paul proclaims. There are two aspects to this. First, he mentions the negative aspect—warning of all people. This carries with it the idea of admonishing or calling people to repent of sinful activity. Second, he mentions the positive aspect—teaching of all people. This means that he is teaching, preaching, and discipling all men. The goal of all of this is to present all people to God as mature and complete in Christ.

THE STRUGGLE

To do this has been a huge struggle for Paul. Let's not forget he is writing this from a Roman jail, and the road there was paved with cursing, beatings,

and all other kinds of persecutions. He uses two different words from that family, which we get our English word “agony” from. However, he is not dissuaded by this because He knows that the energy that he has in order to endure has been given to him by God. He has a never-ending surplus of power by which to endure. Plus, he is focused on the goal to which he is working.

HEARTS ENCOURAGED AND JOINED

TOGETHER

This is his stated goal. That everyone who he hasn't met face to face will be equipped and encouraged. I love this word picture: that their hearts will be comforted by being knit together with love. Wow. And this isn't just so we would have a “lovey-dovey” feeling inside, but so that we will be united, possessing together the riches of the full assurance of certainty in Christ that is found in the knowledge of this revealed mystery.

THE MYSTERY PT3 - CHRIST

This time he simplifies the mystery completely for us. The mystery is Christ. Jesus is the Messiah that was promised. He is the perfect Adam that fulfilled all righteousness. He is the One by which God is reconciling the world to Himself. It is in Jesus Christ that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge exist.

I'M TELLING YOU THIS SO YOU WON'T BE DECEIVED.

So how is this going to help us? We need to truly believe that the Gospel is sufficient. We do not need anything else for our salvation. All we need is Christ. This isn't "minimizing" anything... if anything, it is maximizing the truth that if you have Christ, you have everything. This will safeguard us from believing all manner of false teaching.

We have already mentioned that the young Church in Colossae is in danger of giving in to false teaching. This is not something unique to their context. The Church has always had false teachers and has always needed affirmation in the truth. Paul is writing this to them so that no one will deceive them with persuasive speech. The best defense of false teaching is good teaching. And even though he isn't there in person, he is with them in spirit in hopes that his words will continue to ground them in the Gospel that they have received. A Gospel that is grounded 100% in Jesus.

What Does This Mean for Me?

1. Regarding your identity: do you see yourself as reconciled to God through Jesus Christ? How often are you humbled by your former alienation and rebellion and given yourself to worship God for His Grace?
2. Do you see yourself as holy, spotless, and blameless? God does.

3. Is your hope in the Gospel? If not, where is your hope? If it is in anything but the Gospel (church, pastor, family, ministry), it will fail you.
4. Paul owned his stewardship of the Gospel and fearlessly proclaimed it throughout the world. Do you have the same confidence? If so, are you proclaiming it? If not, what is holding you back?
5. If you are a Christian, then Christ is in you. Whoa. Take some time and reflect on that and think through what that means, not just for your eternal hope, but in your daily struggle with sin.
6. Is there any extra-biblical teaching that has been really attractive to you? Do you see areas where you think you could be easily drawn away from Scripture? You need to submit these to the Lord and put your trust in His Word.

5 - Colossians 2:6-15

Walk In Him

Colossians 2:6-15

SUMMARY

This passage marks a turning point in the entire letter. It is very common for Paul to start his letters heavy on theology and then move on to practical action. This pattern is even more obvious when you analyze the original language.

You may have heard preachers talking about the difference between “indicatives” and “imperatives,” so let’s take a minute and explain this and why it’s important in Bible study.

First off, these are grammatical terms. An indicative is a statement of reality, such as: “He is the image of the invisible God,” and “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness.” And an imperative is a command, such as: “Walk in Him,” and “Watch out.” See what I’m saying? Logically, we have these calls to action (imperatives) following from the truths of the Gospel (indicatives). What we see in this text is a transition from indicatives to imperatives. Because of this amazing Gospel that we have proclaimed, you should act in such a way. Are we clear?

The book of Colossians has 27 imperatives. This is important because these are commands that

God is calling the Colossian church to do in obedience (and by extension to us). One more small caveat: “imperative” is a grammatical term, but Greek doesn’t always function the same way that English does and will often have commands that aren’t strictly imperatives, grammatically. I say that to say that if you are going to say this is an “imperative,” then you need to make sure that it actually is. Ok, enough about that. Paul has been filling us (and the Colossians) with some awesome, Gospel truths and now he is going to tell us what to do in light of it.

Spoiler alert: it is still going to involve good, solid teaching.

Because Jesus Christ is totally supreme and preeminent over all of everything and because you have been filled with Him, you should walk in Him, that is, in light of these truths. Because you are a Christian, you need to live like one. To do this, you need to find your identity in Him and be on your guard for opposing truth claims, all the while remembering that Jesus is victorious.

WHAT IS THE TEXT SAYING?

WALK IN HIM - INSTEAD OF HERESY

Here we see the first of five “therefores” in the letter along with the first imperative. You will notice that every one of the “therefores” is followed (logically) by an imperative. The reason for this is clear. Paul is not just giving us isolated commands willy nilly, but he is basing them on what he has said before. In this case, it is the totality of everything he has laid down already in the letter.

Everything that he has said about them and the prayer that he has prayed for them culminates in the command to “walk in Him.” It’s really interesting because it looks like he summarizes the whole of what he’s already said with the phrase, “as you received Jesus Christ as Lord.” What does this mean exactly? Let’s make sure that we don’t just skim over words in the Bible. Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ, the Anointed One), but He is also the Lord, God. Don’t forget the New Testament often uses “Lord” to translate the Old Testament covenant name of God, Yahweh. His point is clear if you have received Jesus as your Lord, then you must walk in Him. That is, you need to live your life in every way so that it is for, in, and by Jesus Christ. If He is your Lord, then your life should point towards that fact.

However, this isn’t something that you can do on your own. This is a work of Jesus inside of you. He points this out with the participles that he uses to reinforce this command. Interestingly, he uses four participles here that seem to parallel the four participles that he used in his prayer for them.

First, is that we have been rooted in the faith. Here is an analogy that is drawn from the world of agriculture. It’s like we have been planted by God into the soil of faith. We are now to grow in Him.

Second, he says that we are built up in Him. This is a different picture from the realm of architecture. We are built up like a building on the foundation of Jesus.

Third, he says that we are strengthened by Jesus. This he qualifies with the phrase “as you were taught.” He is reinforcing what he has already

mentioned about Epaphras being a faithful minister. Paul isn't changing the message that Epaphras preached to them; he is building on it.

Lastly, he echoes 1:12 to help us understand that if we are living in Christ, we will be abounding in thanksgiving.

WATCH OUT! - FOR FALSE TEACHING

The second command in the text is to watch out, or as the ESV says, "see to it." I like the connotations that come with "watch out" more, in light of this being a call to be on our guard for false teaching.

Specifically, Paul is telling them (and consequently us) not to be carried off or taken captive by false teaching. This word is only used here in the New Testament and carries with it (no pun intended) the idea of being kidnapped or carried off as the spoils of war. What a powerful word picture!

You need to be on your guard so that you are not taken captive by false teaching. He explains further that we need to make sure that we are not taken captive (or captivated...same root) by human philosophy, or empty, vain deceit. These find their origin both in human tradition (which might refer to a past Judaism) and in false gods. Time out. Is he saying that it's possible that some of our false teachings come from evil spirits? Yes... so watch out!

Instead of being captive to these things, we need to be captive to (and captivated by) Jesus. It is only in service to Jesus Christ that we can have true freedom.

Plus, all of the sufficiency that we desire is in Jesus. Folks can often get derailed by lofty human education and look down condescendingly on Christian teaching. But, that's because they have never been exposed to good, solid, biblical teaching. All of the fullness of God-ness is in Jesus. That is anything but shallow and boring. And not only that, but if you are "in Christ," then He is in you. All the fullness of divinity is in Him, and you have been filled in Jesus. This involves a complete identification in Jesus.

This is also where we can find our security because of Jesus Christ in charge. Paul pauses here to remind us that this same Jesus, who is filling us, is the head of all rulers and authorities. This is the second time that we have seen these two words paired together. (The first time was in 1:16, and he'll do it again in 2:15). It is clear that Jesus created and is in control of all things).

It looks like the main reason Paul is writing this to the Colossians at this time is that they are faced with false and heretical teaching. Whatever heresy that's working its way through the Church in Colossae is fundamentally perverting the truth about who Jesus is. And the best way to confront this false teaching is to elevate Jesus. We need to hear this as well. Any time we are tempted to drift away from Christian truths either because of tradition or false teaching, we need to come back to the Bible to find our roots in Jesus.

TWO PICTURES

Next, Paul moves into two different pictures to help provide a broader foundation for why we are to

walk in Christ. The two pictures are circumcision and baptism.

The Old Testament understanding of circumcision was instituted to set apart the Jewish people and to signify that they were holy before God. Circumcision was always intended to point towards a true circumcision (Deuteronomy 30:6... a circumcision of the heart). Here Paul tells us that the Colossians (who are mostly Gentiles) have been circumcised by/in Christ. This isn't a physical circumcision. This is the spiritual circumcision that the Old Testament was always pointing towards. This is a circumcision that wasn't done physically (by hands), but spiritually (made without hands). And it's really interesting because there is a double meaning to the words that Paul uses. He says that this is a circumcision that involved "putting off of the body of flesh" however he isn't using "body" or "flesh" in the physical sense (like Old Testament circumcision). Rather, if we are in Christ, He has put off our sinful, fleshly nature. This is what he means by the circumcision of Christ.

But how is this accomplished? Here is where Paul brings in the second-word picture, baptism. We no longer are bound to live out our sinful flesh. That flesh has died and been buried, and our new self has been raised to life in Christ. Now, see how interesting this is? In baptism, do we actually die, get buried, and rise again? Of course not, but it is a picture of this. When we put our faith in the One who raised Christ from the dead, then we are also made alive with Him. This is another really cool word in the original language and is only used here and in the corresponding passage in Ephesians 2:5:

“...even when we were dead in our trespasses, (He) made us alive together with Christ— by grace, you have been saved...”.

We were dead. We sinned against God and were still bound to our sinful flesh. But God made us alive together with Jesus. This is huge! Who is the active agent here? Us? Nope, we were dead. What can dead people do? Nothing. God is the One who made us alive. How did He accomplish this? By forgiving us from all our sins.

VICTORIOUS CHRIST - NAILING OUR SIN TO THE CROSS

If you're not excited yet, buckle up because here it comes. So there we were dead in our sins, with a sentence of condemnation written out against us damning us to eternal hell, separated from God, without even a glimmer of hope in the world. But Jesus Christ took that court order for our execution and nailed it to the cross where He died. He took our just condemnation on Himself. In doing so, He wiped it away and removed the penalty from us. How awesome is that?!

These “rulers and authorities” that are still vying for our allegiance have been defeated by Jesus at the cross. It says here that He made a disgrace of them openly. This word is only used twice in the NT. The other was when Joseph refrained from disgracing Mary for getting pregnant without a husband (Matthew 1:19). Jesus did not have the same regard for the enemies that stood hostile to Himself and us. He put them to open shame by triumphing over them. In His

death, burial, and resurrection, He is leading a triumphal procession in victory and has called us into that victory with Him.

What Does This Mean for Me?

1. Are you living your life as if Jesus Christ is your Lord?
2. How are you preparing to answer false teaching and false truth claims?
3. Can you actually back up what you believe and, consequently, how you are living from the Bible? If not, you need to either change what you believe or how you are acting.
4. How much validity are you giving to the role of tradition in your life? Let's specifically think about this in light of "Christian tradition." Sometimes traditions are harmless or even beneficial, but we need to make sure that we are not holding our traditions up to the same level as Scripture.
5. Have you internalized the fact that you have been filled with Jesus? You are rooted, built up, and confirmed in Him. All the fullness of God is in Him, and He is in you.... How do your thoughts, motivations, and actions need to change in light of that?
6. Are you actually on your guard against false teaching? Pay attention. Watch out!
7. Are you finding your identity in Jesus? Do you really believe that you have died, been buried, and raised with him? If so, does your life reflect it?

8. Are you still living in bondage to your sin? Don't you know that if you are in Christ, you no longer have to?
9. Do you still feel condemned? If you are in Christ, He has taken your punishment and nailed your sin to the cross.
10. When was the last time you were humbled before God and praised Him for the victory He has accomplished on your behalf?

Let No One Disqualify

You

Colossians 2:16-23

SUMMARY

This section follows right on the heels of his main focus of the entire letter — We are to walk in Christ. We are to live lives characterized by the fact that we died and have been raised with Jesus. What a huge Gospel truth! Paul will continue to tell us how we need to live in light of this. Let's remember to keep this in context.

The first thing that we should notice is that there is another “therefore.” This is the second of five “therefores” in the letter. And, as always, we need to ask, “what is it there for”? This is connecting what Paul just said to what he is about to say. We have been raised with Christ, and the record of our debts, of our sins, has been nailed to the cross by Jesus. We are no longer subject to it. We have been born again and set free. So, in light of that, let's live like it.

This section is ordered around three main verbs. The first two are imperatives: “Do not let anyone judge you” and “do not let anyone condemn you.” The third main verb is a part of the question he asks

in 2:20, “why are you submitting to the rules and regulations of the world?” Let’s jump right into it.

WHAT IS THE TEXT SAYING?

DO NOT LET ANYONE JUDGE YOU

What exactly is happening here? This is one of those situations where it looks like we are hearing one side of a phone conversation, and then we try to guess what is happening on the other side. Why is Paul telling them not to let people judge them?

First, let’s look at what he is telling them not to be judged about. He mentions: what you are eating, what you are drinking, and then specific religious issues (feasts, new moons, and sabbaths). False teachers are trying to get them back to a type of Judaism. Remember that in Old Testament Judaism, there were a bunch of food laws, prescribed feasts, and holy days, not to mention a strict observance of the Sabbath. Honoring the Sabbath day and keeping it holy is one of the Ten Commandments.

But here is the issue, are all those food requirements and feasts wrong? No, of course not. But they do not bring you into right standing with God. They are not ends in themselves. They were always intended to point to Jesus. Look at the picture that Paul paints here. All of those Old Testament specific teachings were just a shadow. Are shadows real? Sure, but they aren’t the main thing. The substance (the body that is casting the shadow) is, and has always been Jesus. They had their proper context in the BC period. But now that

Christ is here, there is no need to elevate the signs pointing to Him.

DO NOT LET ANYONE CONDEMN YOU

Here Paul is shifting gears and attacking another heresy that is working its way into the Colossian church. He repeats the same basic command, slightly nuanced, saying not to let anyone condemn you (or rob you of your reward) regarding a whole new list of issues. These have to do with what looks to be a kind of self-sacrifice (maybe extreme fasting or another type of self-imposed discomfort) combined with a potentially mystic experience (either having visions or following the visions of others). Apparently, there are false teachers who want the Colossians to incorporate these practices into their church, all in the name of Christianity. This stuff is crazy and has no basis in the Bible. That is why Paul says that they are puffed up with pride without reason and are no longer connected to “the Head,” which is Jesus.

Paul is saying that these false teachers are in no way, Christian. If they were Christians, they would still be connected to Christ. As it is, they have separated themselves from Jesus and are like a decapitated body. In the Christian worldview, hope is found only in Jesus. Jesus is who connects us all together and gives true life.

Paul uses a similar construction here as he used earlier. In verse 16, he said that the substance (literally body) is Christ. In verse 19, still talking about Jesus, he says that in Him, the “whole body” with its joints and ligaments is held together. I love the “body” analogy that he draws out here. By

Christ, we are given nourishment and knit together in one body. These false teachers have separated themselves from the body of Christ.

IF YOU DIED WITH CHRIST, WHY AREN'T YOU LIVING LIKE IT?

Now we move on to the basis for his questioning. When you elevate these earthly standards, you are minimizing the real and eternal aspects of our sanctification. The point of this line of reasoning is to remind us of the reality that our sin has been paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. We have been purchased by Jesus, and we are no longer condemned, but set free.

All of these legalistic standards that we are tempted to submit to are all earthly and superficial. Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch... these all have to do with earthly things. Didn't Jesus tell us that none of these things can make us unclean? He even went into detail saying that what goes into our mouth, goes to our stomach and then out...in other places...How can that make you unclean spiritually?

This is exactly what Paul is echoing. These are merely earthly regulations. And, when you step back and think about it, all of these physical things are temporary and have been created to "perish as they are used up."

But this is not true of the Christian. If you are a Christian, then you have died to the principles of this world. You are no longer enslaved by them and no longer need to submit to their regulations.

So now we get to Paul's question: If you have died with Christ to the things of the world, then why are you submitting to its rules and regulations as if you were merely worldly? Answer: because there are teachers who sound wise telling them to do just that. But Paul anticipates that and undercuts their authority by saying that these might have an appearance of wisdom (literally, "a word of wisdom"). But, they have zero value in affecting our true selves on the inside.

He pulls no punches when condemning this teaching. He says it resembles something more like a "self-made religion" than Christianity. Sure, they are punishing their bodies and imposing a false humility on themselves look more "religious," but it only affects actions.

Paul makes a powerful comparison here between "body" and "flesh." These two words can be used interchangeably to refer to the body, but in this context, Paul is setting them up in opposition to each other. He uses "body" to talk about the physical body, and the physical aspect of the world and "flesh" to talk about our sinful flesh. See what he is doing here? This is just like Jesus in Matthew 15. They are trying to use physical means to achieve a spiritual end. They are being taught that if they impose all of these physical restrictions on themselves, then it will change their internal desires, but that is only partially true. Sure, if you set up good habits to avoid sin, it can help the way you think and act. The mistake that the false teachers make here is to put their faith in the process and not on Jesus. You can impose all kinds

of physical, earthly standards on yourself and still not change your innate sinful desires.

So what does change those desires? He's hinted at that in his question, but he'll explain it more in detail in the next section.

Spoiler alert: it has to do with applying the finished work of Jesus into every aspect of our lives. We have been changed on the inside, now we need to work that out.

What Does This Mean for Me?

1. Are there things in your Christian walk that you either say, "Oh, I don't think Christians should do that?" or "If you are a Christian, then you should do this?" If so, what is your biblical basis for it? If those are hard and fast commands from the Bible, then you should be able to back it up from Scripture. If not, then you should evaluate why you believe them.
2. Are you imposing specific regulations on yourself or others as if those are a means to righteousness? If so, that is legalism, and you need to repent and turn from that.
3. Do you really believe that you have died with Christ to these things? If so, then you need to daily remember those truths about yourself as a way of dealing with the various temptations to sin.
4. If you feel like you are constantly giving into and gratifying the desires of your sinful flesh, you must repent, seek accountability, and find your worth, value, and identity in Jesus Christ alone.

Seek the Things that are Above

Colossians 3:1-4

SUMMARY

This passage is awesome, and it really gets to the heart of how the rubber meets the road. Don't forget that we are still talking about what it means to walk in Christ as our Lord. In the last section, we looked at the negative aspect (don't let others judge you or disqualify you). Now, we are moving towards the positive aspects (seek and set your mind). Paul will continue on this same train of thought throughout the rest of this chapter and into the next.

During this section, Paul will refer back to other things that he has already addressed and will continue to expound on them. He will continue to talk about the contrast of the flesh and spirit, the earthly and heavenly, and what it means to have full assurance.

Depending on what translation you are using, you may or may not realize that this section starts off with another "therefore." The ESV, for instance, says "then" instead of "therefore." But, the point is still clear, these are commands from God

based on the fact that you died to the world and have been raised with Christ.

This section is built around two more of our imperatives: “seek” (verse 1) and “set your mind” (verse 2). As Paul addressed in the last section, you can’t just set up a list of rules to govern your behavior and hope that will lead to real transformation. Change must go deeper. What we think affects our actions. As we think through how we are to take part in our sanctification, we need to intentionally apply our new identity in Christ. If we see ourselves as sinners trying not to sin, then we are setting ourselves up for failure. However, if we see ourselves from the vantage point of our union with Christ, then we can preach these Gospel truths to ourselves daily and ask God to transform the way we think to coincide with the mind of Christ.

WHAT IS THE TEXT SAYING?

YOU WERE RAISED WITH CHRIST.

In the ESV, this verse starts with the word “if.” For most of us, that carries with it an idea of uncertainty, but that is not the case here. He is combining “if” and “therefore” together to provide certainty and application. As believers, we need to think of it as if he is saying: “since, therefore, you were raised with Christ...” Translating it this way will keep the connection to what has been previously said and reinforce the fact that Christians have both died and been raised with Jesus. Remember, Paul has already mentioned we have been raised with Christ (2:12).

This is a very unique word in the original language and is only used three times in the whole NT, these two times in Colossians plus Ephesians 2:6 (and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus). All three of these uses help us to understand our union with Christ. What an amazing thought! If you are in Christ, you have died with Christ and were raised with Him in His victory over sin, death, and hell. This should affect the way that we live.

SO SEEK THE ABOVE KIND OF THINGS

This is another imperative, a command. Based on the fact that we were raised with Christ, we should now live the type of life characterized by our union with Jesus. This is exactly what we see throughout Paul's writings.

Galatians 2:20

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

This starts with how we think.

It has been said that “ideas have consequence,” and that is so true. The way we think and feel on the inside will affect the way we act. This is why it is so important for us to submit our inner thoughts and desires to the Lord. Also, we need to stop and think about what those thoughts are valuing and ask ourselves if this is something that the Lord values.

Look at the words of Jesus:

Matthew 6:33

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Jesus is contrasting the things of the world and the things of God, which is the same type of context that we are in with the Colossians. We don't need to worry about our physical provision because Jesus will take care of us. And we don't need to value the things of this world any higher than they deserve. They are temporary, Christ is eternal. They perish as they are used. Christ endures forever.

WHERE CHRIST IS SEATED

We need to be thinking about these heavenly realities instead of cheap, earthly substitutes. Remember, all of these earthly things are just signposts pointing towards Jesus. And now we know that Jesus has ascended into heaven and is seated in glory at the right side of God the Father.

There are two things we need to point out about this. First, Jesus is God in a place of honor in heaven. Paul continues this very high Christology. Second, notice that Jesus is sitting down. This is important since the earthly priest would never sit down on the job. He couldn't because his job was never over. Yet, the writer of Hebrews tells us that this is not the case with Jesus. “And every priest stands daily at his service, repeatedly offering the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God” (Hebrews 10:11-12). Wow, Jesus finished the work of the high priest, on our behalf!

SET YOUR MIND

Paul gives us another command with a slightly different word. This word carries with it the idea of giving careful attention considering something; to be intent on; to set your mind on. Not only are we to seek out these heavenly realities, but we need to change our way of thinking into a heavenly, Christ-centered way of thinking. This will not happen on accident. We must do this on purpose, intentionally.

This is just like what we see Paul saying to the Philippians: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” (2:5). The word translated “have this mind” is the exact same form as we have in our text for “set your mind.” The crazy thing to try and grasp is that Scripture will say both that we have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16) and that we must intentionally have the mind of Christ. We have been made perfect and complete because of our union with Him, but we still need to play it out in our lives. This is again a call to take an active part in our sanctification towards Christlikeness.

YOU DIED

Paul has already said this in the letter (Colossians 2:20). We must now internalize these heavy spiritual realities. We have died to our earthly flesh and raised into Christ’s life.

YOUR LIFE HAS BEEN HIDDEN

This is huge. Throughout this letter, Paul has been assuring the Colossians of the confidence they should have in Christ (remember 1:5 regarding the

hope that has been reserved exclusively for us in heaven). Now he takes it a step farther. This is in a past perfect tense that carries with it the concept that our life is 100% secure with Christ in God.

CHRIST IS YOUR LIFE

Now everything is different. Everything. We have a new identity. We are no longer subject to sin. We are in Christ. Simply put, He is our life. That means that we need to think that way. Which also means that if there are other things in our life that are characteristic of our former lives in the world, they no longer have a place in our new life with Christ and must be forsaken.

WHEN CHRIST IS REVEALED, SO WILL WE

Here we get to a really cool idea regarding the future. What we are seeing here is what theologians call a “realized eschatology.” Let me explain. “Eschatology” is a fancy word for talking about the study of the end times. And “realized” means that we are already seeing some of the end times playing out right now. An easier way of describing this is to talk about the “already, but not yet” tension. And it’s cool because Paul uses a play on words when He talks about Jesus being revealed. This is the same word that he used to talk about the mystery of the Old Testament being revealed in Jesus (1:26). So Jesus has already been revealed, and He is still to be revealed in the future when He returns.

That promise helps us understand more about Jesus, but it also helps us understand ourselves. Right now, because of our union with

Christ, He is our life, we are hidden with Him in the heavens, but we are also stumbling through life on earth (not resembling glory at all). We are already made perfect in Christ. His righteousness has already been credited to us. But when He comes back, He will make us like Himself. His glory, combined with our union with Him, assures us of our future glory.

What Does that Mean for Me?

1. What am I seeking? What am I living for? What am I giving value to? What does that tell me about where I am finding my identity? Am I paying attention to my internal motivations? Am I submitting my desires to the Lord?
2. What do these reveal about where I am finding my identity? Do I really believe that I have died to the world? Does the world have a hold on my heart, or does the Lord?
3. Do I really see Jesus as exalted in glory in heaven? Why not?
4. What am I setting my mind on? What is occupying my thoughts? Are they temporal or eternal?
5. Are you intentionally cultivating a Christlike mindset? Or are you just floating along? Yes, sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit, but you are called to be actively involved in it. You need to intentionally apply God's Word to the way that you think.
6. Do you trust that if you are in Christ, then you are His for eternity? Do you doubt that He will

hold you? Your life is hidden with Christ, and you are united with Him in God.

Put to Death

Colossians 3:5-11

SUMMARY

In this section, Paul continues to call us to action in our spiritual growth. This paragraph is focused on three main commands: Put to death, Put away, and Do not lie. All of this is a further articulation of what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (from 1:10) and comes from the fact that we have died and been raised with Jesus (2:20; 3:3).

Additionally, we need to notice that this is a continuation of the realized eschatology that we discussed previously (already and not yet). Plus, we need to step back and look at the irony at work. We died, so now we need to put things to death... what exactly does that mean? If our old, earthly self is dead, why do we need to put it to death? This is all coming from the tension that we are now heavenly people living on earth. At one time, we were characterized by earthly actions and attitudes, but now we need to be identified as Christians. If we can draw our identity from that, we can walk in those truths more easily.

WHAT IS THE TEXT SAYING?

PUT TO DEATH

This is a command. We are commanded to put to death those things that are earthly in us. Again, we have already died, but we are still living in a fallen, sinful flesh in the middle of a fallen, sinful world. The battle has already been won. The victory is assured. We are on the winning team. However, now we are still commanded to fight so that our actual living reality mirrors what is true about us.

The best part about this is that we are equipped for this fight. Not only have we died with Christ, but we have also been raised with Christ. We are now unified with Jesus. This is why Paul began this section with our fourth “therefore.” Because we have died and been raised spiritually, we need to put these things to death practically.

THE EARTHLY THINGS

The word he uses here is unique and usually means members, parts, or limbs. These are a legit part of our lives and need to be eradicated. He then lists five things: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, and greed/covetousness.

These are all pretty straightforward, and most of them involve sexual sin. The first word, translated as sexual immorality, is the word from which we get pornography but carries with it a host of sexual sin. Simply stated, all sexual activity is reserved for marriage. This is a very serious (and often unpopular and unheeded) teaching. More often than not, when young, single, Christians start asking questions like, “How far is too far?”, they are looking to justify something they already think is

wrong but want to keep on doing. Instead, ask yourself if the activity is sexual. If the answer is yes, then the answer is no...get it?

From there, he mentions impurity or uncleanness. Follow that train of thought, “Is what you are talking about representing purity?” if the answer is no, then it has no place in the life of a Christian because we are united with Jesus.

Next, he mentions passion and evil desires. These are similar to each other and are most likely referring to sexual desires or lust. The first two seem to be referring more to actions, and the second three are more closely affecting our hearts. As Christians, our sinful flesh has been defeated, and we still need to submit its desires to the Lord. We need to put them to death.

The last sin he mentions here is a logical step from the other four, which touches the core of our heart’s desires and exposes our intentions. We need to put all greed and covetousness to death. We need to kill our desires to want more than is our lot, especially when we are longing for something that belongs to another. To explain the seriousness of this, he tells us that this is idolatry. What?! How?! Think about it. When we have a longing desire for something else that is this strong, we are valuing it higher than it deserves. We make it our source of joy and belonging. We make it our functional savior—a false god that will never satisfy.

THE WRATH OF GOD IS COMING

This makes sense in light of how seriously God takes the sins of our hearts. God’s wrath is going to be justly executed on His enemies, so we need to

make sure we do not ally ourselves with them. These enemies are called “sons of disobedience.” Interestingly, this could easily have been translated as the “sons of disbelief.” We need to always keep in mind the close connection that the biblical writers have between true belief and obedience.

YOU FORMERLY WALKED IN THEM WHEN YOU WERE LIVING IN THEM

This is super encouraging. Do you have sin in your past? Of course. Do not be held captive to that. All of these sinful actions and attitudes used to have a place in your life because you were once only worldly and living your life among the sons of disobedience. But no longer is that the case. You have been made new. You have died and have been raised. Christ is now your life. So put those things to death.

See how he is using the term “walking” here. As a non-Christian, you walked like a non-Christian. Now, as a Christian, you need to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. This involves our entire lives.

PUT OFF

This is the second command in this paragraph and carries with it the idea of taking off an item of particular clothing. You have been dressed up like a sinner. But, now you’re a saint—take off those sinful articles of clothing. Put them away from you. This particular word is used nine times in the New Testament. Here are the most pertinent uses for our context:

Romans 13:12

“The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.”

Ephesians 4:22

“...to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires...”

Hebrews 12:1

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

James 1:21

“Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”

1 Peter 2:1

“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.”

Again he has a list of five things: anger, wrath, evil, blasphemy/slander, filthy talk (from your mouth). These are related to each other and deal with the relational side of our sanctification. The first three are more focused on our attitudes and the last two with our speech. These five things characterize the children of disbelief, not children of faith.

DO NOT LIE

Finally, the last of the three commands in this section, might seem a little out of place at first. Do not lie to one another. This is obviously a valid command, after all, it is one of the Top Ten, but why mention it now? We can understand this better in this context when we look at the fact that he grounds his command in two essential realities: you have put off the old man and have put on the new man.

You should not lie to one another because that is characteristic of the old man. If you are in Christ, then you have put off this “old man” and all of his practices. These have no place in the life of the believer. Remember, Christ is your life now, and Jesus would not lie.

Not only have you put off the old man, but you have put on the new. He will come right back to this idea in verse 12. Think about this as if putting on a piece of clothing. This is giving the picture that you have been clothed with Christ. How cool is that?! This means that when people watch the way that you act, they should see Jesus.

In case you were thinking that this is impossible, keep in mind that it is a process. We are still talking about the “already, not yet” tension. You have been declared holy by God. You have put on the “new man,” but now you are continually being “renewed”. But how does this happen? What is the secret sauce? You are made more like Jesus as you read and study His Word, letting the thoughts of God shape your thoughts. That is why he says that

you are being renewed in knowledge after the image of your Creator.

According to the Christian worldview, we can view the world through the lenses of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. All of creation, including man, was created good. However, through the Fall, this has all been subjected to sin and futility. But in Christ, we have been redeemed, and now are in the process of becoming like Him until we are with Him, eternally restored. Right now, we are in the middle of this. We are being made into who we already are in Christ. We should let the knowledge of our union with Christ fuel us to be more like Him.

CHRIST IS ALL AND IN ALL

This flows from the last command not to lie. We don't lie because we've put off the old man and put on the new man...which is Jesus. We need to understand that not only are we (individually) united to Christ, but we (corporately) have also been united to Him. Through Christ, all the worldly distinctions have been put away, and we need to love each other rightly as the body of Christ. So there isn't Jew, Greek, circumcised, uncircumcised, Barbarian, Scythian (nomadic folks), slaves, free, Buckeyes, Patriot fans, Cross-fitters, or vegans. If we are in Christ, the one thing that should characterize us is our union with Christ. This means that we need to treat each other like we are different body parts in the same body. All that matters is Christ and Christ is in all of us.

What Does that Mean for Me?

1. The idea of “putting to death” is violent and permanent. Are you taking your sin that seriously? Are you actively putting your sin to death? John Owen said, “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.” (The Mortification of Sin in Believers) Which is it for you?
2. How serious are you about sexual sin? Are you losing in a battle for your sexual purity in thought or action? Now is the time for accountability and drastic measures. We need to view sexual sin as seriously as God does.
3. How seriously do you take the wrath of God? Do you realize that God is just to punish sin? How does that change your daily life?
4. What about your emotions? Are you submitting them to the Lord? Your emotions are the least stable thing about you and are just as much a part of your flesh as sexual temptation. You must submit them to the Lord.
5. How do you see yourself? How much are you identifying as the “old man” and how much as the “new man”? We need to see ourselves as new people in Christ. This will help fuel our sanctification.
6. How much are you intentionally conforming yourself to Christ? Are you spending time reading and studying His Word—not just checking it off as done but being changed by it?
7. Does your speech reflect that of a Christian, or is your conversation filled with dirty language or lies? These should not characterize us if we are in Christ.

8. Are you showing partiality and distinction? If we are all one in Christ, this is hypocritical.

9 - Colossians 3:12-17

Put on Holiness

Colossians 3:12-17

SUMMARY

Okay, so when we look at this section grammatically, we have four explicit commands and three implied commands. I'm sure that is confusing, so let me explain. In the original language, there are four actual imperatives: Clothe yourselves (or put on), Let the peace of Christ rule, Be thankful, and Let the Word of Christ dwell. In our translations, we have three instances where the translators have supplied the English version with two more implied imperatives: Forgive, Put on love, and Do everything. Let me be clear about this, I'm not saying that the English version is corrupted, or that it is adding to God's Word. What I'm saying is that for us to understand the intention of the original author, we have to supply the English word where the text simply implies it. We will explain all of this as we walk through it.

In the previous paragraph, Paul went into detail in some of the negative aspects of our sanctification. Meaning, he explained a host of things that we need to put off or destroy. Now he is explaining the positive aspect of our growth in Christ. These are things that we need to put on. I have summarized this by saying that we should put

on holiness. Whoa?! That's impossible, right? Yes, on our own, it is. But, remember what we have been talking about: God has equipped us for this in light of the fact that we have died and been raised with Jesus.

As we talk about our responsibility in sanctification, we need to make sure that we don't get the cart in front of the horse. Sanctification is a work of God that He is working in us. But more than that, He has invited us into this work with Him. We can't get sidetracked into thinking that we are saved by grace but sanctified by works. That is not the case. We must understand the balance that God is sanctifying us and that we need to expend every effort in this work with all the strength that He is working in us (1:11).

WHAT IS THE TEXT SAYING?

CLOTHE YOURSELVES

This section begins with the last of our "therefores" in the book. Paul is following the same train of thought. All of this is coming from our union with Christ and is instructive to how we are to walk in Him (1:10; 2:6). It also follows logically from the last paragraph. He just told us all the things we need to put off. So, now he is going to tell us what we need to put on. And let's not forget, he just said that we have put on the new man. Now we are to clothe ourselves with the things that characterize this new man, just like we must take off the things that characterized the old man. See how we are still living in the "already, but not yet" tension?

SO WHAT ARE WE TO PUT ON?

1. Bowels of compassion... seriously.

This is one of those times when we see the differences between the ancient culture of the Bible and our own. We talk about our hearts being the emotional part of us, but for those living in the New Testament time period, it was their guts. It makes sense, right? After all, that's where the butterflies live. The point is we need to have compassion for others.

2. Kindness/generosity.

3. Humility.

He's already used this twice in this letter highlighting false humility. The old man tries to manufacture a type of humility that points to itself (ironic, right?). For those of us in Christ, we are to cultivate a real humility that points away from us and to others... ultimately, Jesus.

4. Gentleness (this is also mentioned in the lists of fruit in Galatians 5).

5. Patience/forbearance.

Notice that there are five things listed here. For some reason, Paul likes the number five in this letter. He mentioned five things we need to put to death in 3:5, and five things we need to put away in 3:8, so it only makes sense to have five things to put on here.

CHOSEN, HOLY, BELOVED

Before we continue explaining what we are to put on, let's take a break to focus on our new identity in Christ. It is easy to skip over words that we hear all the time in the Bible, but let's not forget that everything there is from God and for our good. He calls the Colossians (and subsequently us): chosen, holy, and beloved. Wow!

If you are in Christ, then this is a providential work of God. He chose you before the foundation of the world to be his son/daughter. This parallels what we see in Ephesians 1:3-10 (which was written around the same time by Paul). You were not an afterthought. God wants you in His family so much that even before you were born, before you could do anything worthy of anything, he chose you.

Since you are in Christ, He has clothed you with His righteousness. You are holy. We have already talked about this in this study, but since Paul mentions it again, it is worth the reminder. We are saints. Holy ones in Christ. When God looks at you, He sees the righteousness of His perfect Son.

You are loved by God. The Creator God of the universe, the One who spoke all of this into existence, loves you. What a wonderful remedy to loneliness and depression. God loves you, He chose you, and He made you holy.

BEARING WITH, AND FORGIVING

Now we're back on track. These two participles come down off of the command and tell us what needs to characterize us as we put these things on.

We need to bear with one another and forgive one another. This makes sense, but it is hard to apply. It is easy for us to sing, “He’s still working on me” to remind ourselves that God is going to finish this work in us (Philippians 1:6; 3:12-16) and to remind others that we are a work in progress. But do we show the same type of forbearance with others? Aren’t we quick to judge others and slow to judge ourselves? Yeowtch! Try extending the same benefit of the doubt to others as you would want them to extend to you.

This leads to the fact that we need to forgive others whenever we have any complaints against them. Grammatically this covers it all, “if any of you have a complaint towards anyone”... forgive them. If you are still holding back and waiting for someone to prove to you that they deserve your high and mighty forgiveness, look at how Paul grounds this statement. You should forgive “in the same way” that Christ forgave you. Whoa?! Strong words. Here we have what’s called a bilateral construction (you totally don’t need to know this, it’s nerdy but helpful). This is where the same proposition comes in between two other propositions functioning as either the grounds or result. Here it says “forgiving each other” because Christ forgave you, which in turn is why we are commanded to forgive. Get the point? Forgive others. This is also the first of our implied imperatives. Technically the text says “in the same way also you,” but if we are to understand the intention of the original author, we need to see this as a command to forgive. Whew!

PUT ON LOVE

This is the second of our implied imperatives. Technically the original text says, “above all these, love.” We have to go back to verse 12 to get the verb. Love binds all of these things together (the five things he mentioned), leading to our maturity and completion. If you have ever read 1 Corinthians 13, you already know that this is part of Paul’s theology.

None of these things matter if they aren’t fueled by love. Christians should be characterized by love (John 13:35).

LET THE PEACE OF CHRIST CONTROL YOU

This is such a difficult passage to apply. It is an interesting concept grammatically because it is a command for us, but it is in the third person. Wait, what? Yeah, so the subject of the verb is the peace of Christ, but we are the ones commanded to have the peace of Christ be what controls our decision making.

This particular verb is only here in the New Testament and was used in the ancient world for something like an umpire for an athletic event. That’s why it is translated as “rule” in several translations. But let’s get practical. In a crazy world (like what we are living in), we need something to provide internal stability. We need the peace of Jesus to control us.

His peace needs to comfort us and guide us. Christ’s peace should be the decisive factor in all of our thoughts and actions. We have been given the mind of Christ, now we need to intentionally apply it.

BE THANKFUL

If we are thinking and acting according to the peace of Christ, then we will be filled with gratitude. Paul has peppered this little letter with words from this family of words: grace, gracious, thankful, and forgiving. This specific word is only used this time in the New Testament. Christians are those who have been given grace, so we should be the ones most thankful/grateful.

LET THE WORD OF CHRIST MAKE ITS

DWELLING IN YOU

This is another one of those commands in the third person. It is your obligation to give God's Word residence in your heart and mind. This word is from the family of words used for household or dwelling place. It is used five times in the New Testament, most often used regarding the Holy Spirit's indwelling of the believer (Romans 8:11; 2 Timothy 1:14), but is also for the Father's promise to make His home in us (2 Corinthians 6:16).

But how do you let the Word of Christ dwell in you? You have to make it your ambition to read God's Word, to study it, and to memorize it. As we do this, we are making God's thoughts our own. Not just His specific thoughts but also His way of thinking. We want to do this so that it is dwelling in us "richly."

Paul uses three participles to describe how this will flesh itself out in the way we live our lives: teaching, admonishing, and singing. These each highlight three different aspects of application.

First, when we fill ourselves to bursting with God's Word, we will be teaching others. This will become a natural part of our conversation. So what is God teaching you? Not only that, but this teaching will be an actual conveyance of wisdom because it will be coming directly from God. This is the more positive aspect.

Second, there is a negative aspect. Not only will we be giving positive teaching from God, but we will be calling each other out. This word carries with it the idea of a warning to cease and desist from sinning (also look at Colossians 1:28 and 2 Thessalonians 3:15). Now, be careful because this must be done in humility and truth. You do not want to call someone out in their sin because it annoys or inconveniences you. You want to do it because you love them, and you care about their relationship with God.

The third result is that we will be filled with thanksgiving in our hearts to God that cannot be contained. It will result in worshipping God. We will be singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (literally "odes") to God... and I think, to each other. Look at the parallel passage in Ephesians 5:19, where he actually adds "to each other." Pretty cool.

DO EVERYTHING IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS

This is the last of our "implied imperatives." If this were translated literally, it would be something like:

"and also all the things that you might do in word or in work do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus."

To understand what he is saying, we have to supply the command “Do.” What does it mean to do all things (our words and actions) in the name of Jesus? Don’t you think that this could be a restatement of 2:6 “as you received Jesus as Lord, walk in Him”? I do. We are called to live our lives in such a way that everything we say and everything we do could be stamped with the name “Lord Jesus” on it. It is notable that here too he calls Jesus our Lord. If He is Lord of our life, He is Lord of our words and actions.

Finally, he adds one modifier to this. As we live this out in our lives, we should always be thankful to God through Jesus Christ. It is very important in Paul’s practical theology that we are thankful. It helps us remember who is actually Lord.

What Does This Mean for Me?

1. Do you see yourself as chosen by God, holy, and loved by God? Does this form your identity? If not, meditate on these Gospel truths.
2. Are you intentionally putting on:
 - a. A heart of compassion?
 - b. Kindness?
 - c. Humility?
 - d. Gentleness?
 - e. Patience/Endurance?
3. What about forgiveness? Are you a forgiving person? Do you hold things against others that God has forgiven them of? Do you hold your forgiveness

out of reach? If so, you need to think through the amount of grace and forgiveness that has been extended to you and apply that to others.

4. What about love? Are you a loving person? Remember not to legalistically apply these things to your life. You must submit it all to God and let Him use you to love others.

5. Is the peace of Christ ruling in your heart? If not, how can you internalize His peace in that way?

6. Are you thankful? If not, you don't understand the first thing about the Gospel. Meditate on it.

7. Are you internalizing God's Word? Are you reading? Studying? Meditating? Memorizing? Talk this out, put together a plan, and get accountability.

8. Are you so filled with God's Word that it's coming out in your conversation with others? Share what you are learning.

9. Is there something that you know needs to be confronted in someone's life? If so, submit it to the Lord and be obedient in humility. You might be what God uses to bring about their repentance.

10. Is your heart submitted to the Lord and overflowing in worship?

11. Can you see the stamp of Jesus as Lord on your words and actions? If not, repent and daily submit them to the Lord.

Practical Obedience

Colossians 3:18-25

SUMMARY

This section goes into detail to provide us with a more extended application to explain the command to “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.” As we follow the apostle’s train of thought, he has decided (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) to hand out specific instructions to six different groups of people: wives, husbands, children, fathers, bondservants, and masters. Not only do we get these specific instructions (for each specific demographic), we can also understand more of what God requires from us individually. You might be thinking, “I’m not someone’s master or slave, how does this apply to me?” Great question. Remember that these are the words of God, and every passage of Scripture is profitable, leading to your growth and maturity. Think of it this way, if your dad is giving instructions to your brother or sister on how to do something, can you learn from that? Absolutely. So let’s approach this in such a way that we are asking God to teach us something personal from His Word. Or to put this another way, we can glean general principles of application from these specific commands. And let us respond in obedience.

WHAT IS THE TEXT SAYING?

WIVES, SUBMIT

Wives are commanded to submit to the leadership of their husbands. This should not take you by surprise. This is the consistent teaching all over the Bible (Ephesians 5:24; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1,5). Often when confronted with this teaching, people respond by saying that the Bible is oppressive to women, but that is not the case at all. We don't have time to go into too much detail on this, but the Bible is a very radical book that has elevated women above the way that the first-century culture viewed them. We are talking about the fact that the Bible teaches that men and women are created in God's image. Not only that, but God became a man, lived a perfect life, and died on the cross to save men and women.

This is crazy.

Not just in the original setting, but even now, the Bible is a radical book in the way that it elevates women, especially in the marriage relationship.

“How,” you ask? Check out this parallel passage in Ephesians 5:

Ephesians 5:22-24

‘Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the Church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. Now, as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.’

Ephesians 5:25-33

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the Church, because we are members of His body. ‘Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”

Wives are told to submit and respect their husbands. But look at the command for husbands: husbands are told to have a self-sacrificial love for their wives that mimics the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. And further down, if a man doesn't love his wife, he doesn't love himself. This is a highly elevated position, especially since the Jewish, Greek, and Roman culture of the day saw women as basically second class citizens.

One more example of this comes from 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. Here we see the Apostle Paul say that a woman's body doesn't belong to herself but to her husband. This would have been the majority opinion in that culture. That isn't in the least controversial. However, what he says after that would have been seen as cultural blasphemy. Paul has the audacity to say that in the marriage relationship, the wife has ownership of her husband's body. What?! That is crazy. It gets even crazier when you think about the fact that this is all in the context of sexual fulfillment. He is saying that a man's body is supposed to be used for his wife's sexual satisfaction. If that isn't happening, then it is disobedient to God. Wow. How could anyone who seriously considers the words of the Bible think that it is oppressive to women?

Now, with that behind us, what is this text saying to women? Wives need to submit to their husbands. This is fitting, which is appropriate in the Lord. It is a little confusing what "in the Lord" means here, but I think it has to do with the appropriate submission of a wife to her husband and points to the submission of the Church to Jesus. In doing this, wives have an opportunity to put a spotlight on the Gospel.

HUSBANDS, LOVE

There are two commands handed to husbands: one positive and one negative. First, is the common biblical instruction to love their wives. As we saw above, this is similar to Ephesians 5. What is unique about this passage of Scripture is the negative command, "do not cause your wife to be bitter."

This specific word is only used four times in the New Testament (the other three are in Revelation) and carries with it the idea of “causing bitter feelings.” Interesting. So what he is saying here is that a husband is told that he needs to be concerned with his wife’s feelings. Wow.

Notice again how this is an elevation of the woman’s status. In that culture (and in many around the world today), a woman’s feelings were largely deemed irrelevant. But in a thoroughly Christian marriage, a husband needs to love his wife in such a way that she feels loved and appreciated by him. If she doesn’t feel that way, then it is a problem that he is obligated to correct. A corollary teaching is found in 1 Peter 3, where husbands are told to “live with their wives in an understanding way.”

CHILDREN, OBEY

This is also a continual refrain in Scripture; after all, it comes from the Fifth Commandment. It is also repeated in Ephesians 6, along with the reminder that “this is the first commandment with a promise,” and “that it may go well with you.” The specific emphasis in this text focuses on two qualifications: “in everything,” and “that this is pleasing to the Lord.” The “in everything” is almost self-explanatory. Children are commanded to give 100% obedience to their parents as the authority that God has established over them. The “pleasing to the Lord” highlights the fact that when a child is obedient to their parents, they are being obedient to the Lord. This is the same idea that we see in

Romans 12:1, where he talks about being “acceptable” to God.

FATHERS, DO NOT PROVOKE

Again we see the idea of a servant leader in a household. Just like husbands are to be concerned with their wife’s emotional state, fathers are told to care for the well being of their children. It is interesting that the Christian household is concerned with so much more than just making sure that the family is adequately cared for financially. Now don’t get me wrong, this doesn’t mean that wives and children are supposed to be leading the homes with their emotions, far from it. A good husband and father is one that exercises his God-given stewardship of the home by shepherding his family in every possible realm. He should mimic the servant leadership of Jesus in the way that he responsibly leads his home.

The specific command here is that fathers should not stir up their children to anger. Should a father discipline his children? Absolutely, but not in a way that provokes his kids to anger. Fathers are supposed to follow the “father-ship” of God in disciplining his children for their good. If he rules with an angry iron fist, then there is a good chance that his kids will be discouraged (this word is only used once in the New Testament and has the connotation of losing motivation by becoming dispirited).

It is important for us to realize the “why” behind these negative commands. In general, men can be hot-tempered and loose-tongued, but this is not the way a Christian father or husband is

supposed to act. God knows our weaknesses and gives us each (husbands, wives, fathers, children, and servants) commands that are specific to our individual temptations.

SLAVES, OBEY

Here is where we have to get a little more intentional to find a specific application.

Remember that in all of these different situations, there are principles we can learn from them about God and ourselves. In this context, he is addressing slaves or bondservants, which I'm assuming none of you are. However, it does give us some general principles in how we are to interact with those whom God has placed in authority over us.

One other introductory comment needs to be made. Don't forget that when we talk about slavery in the Bible, it isn't a direct parallel to the type of slavery that was practiced in antebellum America. For the most part, New Testament slavery was a relationship that an individual entered in order to pay off a debt and usually did not last for their lifetime. Don't get me wrong, during this time the bondservant was still seen as property. There were situations where abuse took place, but it was economically and not racially motivated. And there was always the option to work yourself free by paying off your debt.

OBEY

Bondservants are told to obey their masters in everything. The actual word for "masters" here is the word we usually translate "lord" and is more reminiscent of something like a British lord. What

is most interesting is that he qualifies it by saying your lords “according to the flesh,” which is in opposition to your Lord in heaven. But we can learn from this, we need to obey our earthly lords similarly to how we are to obey Jesus. That might sound like I’m taking this too far, but just wait.

There are two participles coming off of this command that better explain how we are to obey. First, Paul says we should not obey “as people-pleasers” in eye service. What he means by that is that you shouldn’t just obey when your master is looking. Whoa. Think about it, that’s not genuine obedience.

Second, he says that we need to obey our earthly masters because we fear the Lord (our heavenly master). Yeowtch! Follow the logic: Your earthly master is not always looking, but our heavenly master sees everything, even the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). This is why we are to fear the Lord and obey with a sincere heart.

WORK FOR THE LORD

This is even more explicit. This is where we need to see the universal principle at work. Whatever it is that you might do, you should see it as working for the Lord, and not working for man. Not only that, but he says that this should be done from your very soul, with everything that is inside you.

Look at the distinction that he is making between earthly and heavenly. You are not living and working for the things of this world. You are doing earthly work for a heavenly master and a heavenly reward. That is why he says to do this,

knowing that it is from the Lord that you will receive your inheritance as a reward. Wow. Every day, every hour, as you work, remember that you are working for the Lord and His reward.

SERVE THE LORD

There is a little bit of confusion as to how this little sentence needs to be translated. Some think that it is describing the previous command, "because you are serving the Lord." Others will say that it is an emphatic command, "Serve the Lord, who is Christ." I'm with the others on this one. Jesus Christ is our Lord, and if we are going to "walk in Him," it requires us to serve Him with every aspect of our lives.

The following phrase provides additional grounds for the command to serve the Lord. He just said that we will receive a reward from God for our obedience. Now he balances that by saying that the one who does wrong will receive punishment for the wrong that he does. There are consequences for our actions, and God shows no partiality in giving out reward and punishment.

MASTERS, BE JUST AND FAIR

Just as he warned husbands and dads, now he is warning masters. This makes sense because inherent in being a master, there is a temptation to rule unjustly. So he says that masters need to be fair and just. But look, this isn't just for the sake of fairness and justice. It should be motivated by the fact that they have a master in Heaven. This echoes everything he has said up to this point. All of us have a master in Heaven for whom we are living

our lives. This should motivate us to live our lives in a way that pleases Him. Amen.

What Does This Mean for Me?

1. This might sound like an odd point of application, but how do you view gender roles? Do you have a biblical understanding of gender roles, especially in marriage? Or, is your thinking influenced more by your current culture? This is a big deal. Talk this out and make sure you are getting your view of these issues from the Bible and not imposing your beliefs onto Scripture.
2. How do you interact with those people whom God has placed in authority over you? Are you prone to rebellion? Only you know your heart. Are you prone to excuses and justification? Are you obedient in word only? Do you obey just for show, when they are looking?
3. Do you see yourself as a people pleaser? Or are you living to please God?
4. What about how you are leading others? How do you use your influence on others? Are you using it to discourage or encourage? Do you see yourself actually caring for those whom you are leading?
5. How do you view your work? Are you just working for your paycheck, or do you understand that you are working for your heavenly Father?
6. Do you see yourself as a servant? Do you see your time on earth in terms of serving? Never forget that we are called to serve God and others.

General Instructions

Colossians 4:2-6

SUMMARY

We are coming close to the end of the letter, and Paul is winding down. He spent some time giving us specific instructions for those six groups of people, and now he is transitioning to some general instructions.

As we look at this little section, we need to remember that Paul is writing from prison to this group of people that he has never met in person and that his primary focus has been on what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (or simply to walk in Him). These general instructions help inform us as to what it looks like for us to be faithful to the Lord in the way we are devoted to God, other believers, and the lost.

In this section, we have two explicit commands and one implied command. The explicit commands are to persist in prayer and walk in wisdom. The implied command (which remember has the same force, but just isn't technically in the original language) is to have our words seasoned with salt.

WHAT IS THE TEXT SAYING?

BUSY YOURSELF IN PRAYER

This word has the idea of persisting, being busy with, or being devoted to. Paul is telling the Colossians to keep on praying. We see this same language several times in the New Testament regarding prayer. Here are a few examples:

- Acts 2:42 “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”
- Acts 6:4 “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word.”
- Romans 12:12 “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”

This is, unfortunately, one of the easiest areas of Christian discipleship to neglect. We need to be in prayer constantly. We have been given access to address the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and we aren't. Why? All too often, we are lazy, unfocused, and selfish. The truth of the matter is if we want to see God work in this world, we should take part in it through prayer.

BEING WATCHFUL

If you are like me, when you see “watch and pray” together, you automatically think about the words of Jesus to His disciples in the Garden (Matthew 26:41; Mark 13:35). However, there is some ambiguity as to how we need to understand it in this context. Grammatically it looks like describing how they should be praying. Kind of like: “be watchful, while you're praying.” But what are we being challenged to be watchful of? It could be that we need to be on our guard not to give in to

temptation (1 Corinthians 16:13). Or maybe because there are dangers out there trying to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8). Or it could be that we need to be looking for Jesus to return. Most likely, we need to have all of these in mind. The point is we need to be awake and pay attention to what is happening around while being thankful.

PRAYING

Paul intentionally repeats the word prayer here. This time it's to show us the content of the prayer that he wants the Colossians to pray. Where "being watchful" is concerned with their own well being, this second participle is concerned with Paul's. He asks them to (at the same time) be praying for him and his team.

He is basically asking them to have two requests before God (or actually one request and one hopeful result). The first is that he wants them to be praying that God will open up a door for them to preach the Gospel. This is really interesting to think about because it has two possible interpretations. Remember, he is in jail behind a literal locked door. He is either asking for a release from prison or an increased opportunity to preach while in prison. Philemon (the book) was written around the same time, and in verse 22, he mentions that he is hoping to get out soon to visit. Either way, he is asking for them to pray that God gives him more opportunities to preach.

Next, we come across the fourth mention of the word "mystery" in Colossians. If you recall when Paul is preaching about the mystery of Christ, he isn't talking about something that is still secret

and hidden. It is a mystery hidden for ages of time and generations of people. Yet, it has now been revealed in the Gospel. Paul made it his life's ambition to preach the revelation of this mystery and is now in prison because of that.

This leads to the second request: that they pray that he would be faithful to preach. So he's asking them to pray both for an opportunity to preach, and that he would have the strength and boldness to take hold of that opportunity. It's cool because this word that he uses for this has to do with revealing or making known. Paul wants to feel the weight of compulsion to preach this Gospel. Not only Paul, but we also have been given stewardship of this mystery, and it is necessary for us to reveal it to the world as their one hope for salvation.

WALK IN WISDOM

The second command here should be no surprise to us. Walk in wisdom. Paul is constantly interested in how the Colossians are to walk (his shortcut for "live"), and this is the last time he mentions it in the letter. This time they need to walk in wisdom, specifically among those who are not Christians (the "outside ones"). This follows easily after his prayer request. It looks like he is using his request that he be bold to challenge them to be bold as well.

MAKING THE MOST OF THE TIME

This is a really cool word. If you know a little bit about the Greek culture, you might remember that they called their outdoor markets the Agora. This word comes from that and has to do with buying back from the Agora. This is why you see it also

translated as “redeem.” It is only used four times in the New Testament. It’s used twice in Galatians (3:13; 4:5) to talk about how Christ redeemed us. And it’s used in a parallel passage in Ephesians (5:16) regarding time.

There are several ways that we can look at this. The first is in the realm of evangelism. Paul has been talking about opportunities to preach the Gospel, and now he says that we need to make the most of our time around non-believers. The obvious interpretation is that the best way to use our time around non-Christians is to share the Gospel with them.

Second, we need to realize that we only have a certain amount of time on this planet, and we must intentionally think about how we are using it. In the parallel passage in Ephesians, he mentions that the days are evil. Sure, we are holy people living in a fallen world, how can we make the most of it for our eternity?

LET YOUR WORDS BE GRACIOUS

This is where we get that implied command we mentioned earlier. Paul is telling the Colossians that they need to have their words be words of grace, seasoned with salt. What exactly does this mean? This is a situation where we need to make sure that we are seeing everything in context. Christians need to make the most of their time with unbelievers. As we walk in wisdom, it is important that our conversations be filled with grace in each interaction we have. Our words should be seasoned in just the right way for each conversation. See how he says this will result in “knowing how it is that we

answer each”? We need to exercise wisdom with the way that we approach Gospel conversations with non-Christians. There isn’t a universal way to do this. It is going to be different with each person. Sure, it’s good to have evangelism strategies, but just like each individual is different, each Gospel interaction will be different.

What Does This Mean for Me?

1. What is your prayer life like? Are you devoted to prayer? Why not? What is keeping you from it? Is it something you just haven't ever cultivated? Do you understand prayer for what it is, namely, communication with your Creator and Savior? Do you actually think you can do this on your own? Now, more than ever, we need a commitment to prayer. Get a plan and accountability.
2. Are you watchful? Are you on your guard against the temptation to sin? Are you actively looking for the attack of the enemy, or are you constantly walking into ambushes? And are you looking for opportunities to be thankful?
3. Are you looking for ways to share the Gospel? Do you have the boldness to do so when the opportunities arise?
4. How are you using your time? You have an ever decreasing amount of time left, how are you using it? Spend a minute each morning and commit to using your time wisely today, then spend a minute each night reviewing the day. If you need to, go write out how you are using your time. If you have a smartphone, check out how much time you are spending on that, and on what, and ask yourself if

this reflects a genuine desire to use your time wisely?

5. What about your words? Are you using your words well? Would you (or others) say that they are filled with grace?

6. Learning how to answer each one individually might mean you need to study more. You may need to study apologetics some (read *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel). You definitely need to study people more. And by that, I mean, we need to practice loving people well and learn how to use our words in a way that seasons our conversations with grace.

Closing Words

Colossians 4:7-9

SUMMARY

We finally made it to the end of the letter, and we come across this list of people that Paul is commending, greeting, or challenging. It would be easy to skip over this as if it doesn't apply to you, but again we have to reiterate that every word of the Bible exists because the Holy Spirit of God inspired it to be written. So let's say that this is important for us—how do we figure it out? To be honest, it's not like there is some secret to it; we just need to stop and think. Look at what Paul is saying to or about these people and discern if this is something commendable or not. Either way, there will be something we can learn about the Christian life. It will expose actions or attitudes to either incorporate into our lives or cut away from it.

In this section, Paul mentions the two people who are carrying the letter for him: Tychicus and Onesimus; then three Jewish coworkers: Aristarchus, Mark, and Epaphras; then three of his Gentile coworkers: Epaphras, Luke, and Demas. After that, he has personal greetings for Nympha and a challenge for Archippus. Plus, we have the added bonus of seeing the whole Bible from a zoomed-out perspective, and there are a couple

more observations we need to make. As you read the text, some of these names might stick out to you, specifically Mark and Demas. These two men give us two opposing testimonies of faithfulness that we will need to learn from as we go.

WHAT IS THE TEXT SAYING?

TYCHICUS

Paul uses three different terms to apply to Tychicus: beloved brother, faithful servant, and fellow-slave. As a beloved brother, he is a part of God's family. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ and need to treat each other with the same degree of love and honor that should be apparent in a household. More than that, actually, because our relationship to our biological family is by nature temporary. Our relationship in the family of God is eternal.

The word translated servant here is the same word from which we get the word "deacon." This is the fourth use of it in Colossians being used previously to refer to both Paul and Epaphras. As we have already mentioned, he doesn't have the church office of a deacon, but that of being a servant. And Tychicus has proven himself to be faithful to God in his service.

Last, the word "fellow slave" has to do with being a bondservant of Christ. Paul also used this word to refer previously to Epaphras. In doing so, Paul is calling both himself and Tychicus slaves that have committed their entire lives to the Lord.

ONESIMUS

You may be familiar with Onesimus if you have read the little book of Philemon. Onesimus was from Colossae but left under the shadow of scandal. He was a slave to Philemon and then escaped. Now, remember that this means that he probably owed a debt to Philemon and entered into the bondservant role voluntarily to pay off his debt. Then he escaped. Then sometime after he ran away, God saved him. Now Paul is sending him back to Colossae with another letter to Philemon (you'll have to read that later). This time he is sending him back to Philemon and Colossae as a brother, and he calls him "faithful" and "beloved." This is a totally different Onesimus than the one who left from there.

Paul is sending these two guys to the Colossians for two purposes. First, he wants them to be updated on everything that is happening with Paul and his coworkers. Second, he wants the Colossians to have their hearts encouraged. How ironic? Paul is in prison and writing letters of encouragement to his friends.

ARISTARCHUS AND JUSTUS

We don't know much about either of these guys. Aristarchus has probably been with Paul for a while, we see him three times in Acts, and then he's mentioned in Philemon. What is interesting about Aristarchus is that it looks like he might actually be in prison with Paul. He calls him his "fellow-prisoner" a word only used three times in the NT, ironically once of Epaphras. All we know of Justus

is that his real name is Jesus, but he's called Justus (it's less confusing that way).

MARK

Now Mark is a really cool story. To really do it justice, it would take more time than we have, but let's follow it just far enough so we can see a biblical example of restoration. Mark is identified here as a cousin of Barnabas. This means he is the same Mark that we see in Acts 12, who accompanied Paul on his first mission. However, somewhere along the way, Mark turns back, and Paul sees this as an abandonment (Acts 15:37-39), so he refuses to take him on another mission. Well, if all we had was the book of Acts, it would look like it was over between the two of them, but that isn't the end of the story. Look at what Paul says about him here.

First, we see that Mark, Aristarchus, and Justus are the only Jewish members of his team. He calls them his coworkers (the singular of this word is Sunergos... which just happens to be the best coffee shop on the planet). But not just that, they are coworkers in the Kingdom of God. That's high praise.

Second, he isn't just sending his greetings from these guys. Apparently, he has already sent them additional instruction concerning Mark, personally. If Mark happens to come to them, they have been told to welcome him. This would make sense if he was previously known to shrink back.

So here we have a wonderful example of restoration in the Body of Christ. Yes, there will be times when we have conflict, even to the point of breaking off relationships in ministry. But that

never needs to be the end. Between believers, reconciliation is always an option. To see the end of this happy story, look at what Paul says to Timothy at the end of his letter to him. “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.” (2 Timothy 4:11) Oh yeah, and he wrote the Gospel of Mark.

EPAPHRAS

Epaphras is only mentioned three times in the New Testament (the two occasions in Colossians, and then in Philemon), and Paul only has good things to say about him. He is a native of Colossae and most likely the one who started the church there. He is the one that told Paul all about their faith and is the main reason that Paul is writing to them now. It is also possible that at the time of this writing, he is in prison with Paul, but his commitment to the Colossians has not ended. Even though he cannot be with them in person, he is laboring for them in prayer.

Paul calls him a bondservant of Christ, who is always laboring (the same word we get for agonizing) in prayer for the Colossians. We also get to see the purpose behind these prayers. He is praying for the Colossians that they would be established in their faith, mature and complete. Ultimately his prayer is that they will be fully assured and confident in all the will of God. Paul finishes up by saying that he is a witness to the commitment that Epaphras has for the Colossians. He says that he is working hard for them, not just them but also the believers in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

LUKE AND DEMAS

Luke, we know and love. Paul calls him the beloved physician. He was a faithful companion to Paul and wrote the Gospel of Luke and Acts.

DEMAS IS A DIFFERENT STORY.

At this point in time, Demas is a traveling companion of Paul and is sending his greetings to the believers in Colossae. However, just like Paul's second letter to Timothy tells us about Mark, it also tells us about Demas. In 2 Timothy 4:10, we see that Demas has deserted Paul because he fell in love with the present world. What a sad, sad end. This should be a warning to us all. You cannot get the strength of your faith from others. Never, ever stop personally pursuing the Lord.

NYMPHA

Paul shifts to send his greeting to Nympha and the church in her house, and also to the Christians in Laodicea. He follows this up by giving instructions to make sure that they read this letter and then send it on to Laodicea. What is really interesting is that at the same time, he has apparently sent a letter to the church at Laodicea that he wants the Colossians to read.

Side note: just because the Apostle Paul wrote something, it doesn't mean that it was Scripture. Sure we'd love to have the letter of Paul to the Laodiceans or the other letters that he wrote the church at Corinth, but that doesn't mean we are missing part of the Bible. God inspired and preserved His Word

for us. We aren't missing anything that He wanted us to have.

ARCHIPPUS

I always find these kinds of addresses a bit awkward in the pages of Scripture. It's not as awkward as Philippians 4:2, where he calls out two ladies who are in a fight (but you'll have to read that later). Here the church (or at least the church leaders) has been given a charge to give to Archippus. He is giving them the instruction to tell him to pay close attention to the service that God has called him to and to fulfill it. We don't know what it is, but it was apparently important enough for us all to learn from it. This is a good challenge, especially in light of the way Demas ended up.

REMEMBER

This is the last command in the letter. Paul wants them to remember his chains. Along with this is the reminder that he is in prison for the sake of the Gospel. He has been faithful, and God has been faithful to him. No matter how difficult our current situation may seem, there are others who are experiencing far worse, and it is worth it for all of us in light of eternity.

GRACE

He leaves them the same way he opened – with the grace of God. All of this is about God's grace extended to us. Paul's ministry, and ours, should be focused on the proclamation of this grace to everyone that God brings into our path.

What Does This Mean for Me?

1. As we think of all of the people Paul mentioned, we need to be thinking about how we are going to finish the race. Are you looking ahead? Are you focused on that which God has called you? Where is your hope? Where are you drawing your confidence?
2. From where are you drawing your identity? It cannot be your church or ministry, it must be your union with Jesus. If being on Paul's ministry team couldn't sustain Demas then whatever ministry you are a part of isn't big enough either.
3. Are you personally pursuing the Lord daily through His Word and prayer? If not, get a plan and accountability.
4. What kind of reputation do you have? Would people refer to you as "faithful minister," "beloved brother/sister," "servant of Jesus"?
5. Do you realize that even today, there are Christians all over the world being persecuted for the exact same things that you believe? If they can remain faithful during persecution, then you can remain faithful in prosperity.
6. How much time are you spending in prayer for others? Remember, God is the one that is working, and He has called us into that with Him.
7. What about reconciliation? Have you had a conflict with another believer that you need to resolve? There is always a hope of reconciliation among believers. After all, we are brothers and sisters for eternity.

KEEP GOING

Visit our website to find more resources on Colossians and other topics related to the Bible and ministry. We've published hundreds of videos, podcasts episodes, and articles to help you keep growing in your faith.

And, you can learn a little more about Snowbird along the way.

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