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Colossians Series Guide

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Week 1

COLOSSIANS 1:1-10

New International Version (NIV)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
2 To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, **4** because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— **5** the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel **6** that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. **7** You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant,[c] who is a faithful minister of Christ on our[d]behalf, **8** and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, **10** so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

We all know who Paul is, the Apostle, the major author of the New Testament Epistles (letters to the churches), and a mentor to Timothy. But Paul is more than that. He often introduces himself as the slave (doulos) of Christ. He is the bond-servant, or the one who puts himself voluntarily into bondage to Jesus, because he knows that this is his only hope in the world and beyond.

So he writes to the church, but he also writes to Timothy, whom he is mentoring.

Timothy is the ward that he has taken under his wing. The young man in which Paul sees so much potential. Potential to be not only a man of God, but to also become a powerful preacher and sharer of the gospel. Why use the word "sharer?" Because it is not fair to say that we only "Preach" the gospel. In fact, it is probably much more effective to share the gospel through the way that we live the gospel, than through words that are often tired, cliché'd, and unworthy of the God that we serve.

What do you feel about meeting people for the first time? How do you introduce yourself? What identifiers do you use to explain who you are? Traditionally, men have asked each other what they DO. Women have asked more relational questions. (These are generalizations, and of course are not perfect examples...) But do either of these questions really speak to who we are as we introduce ourselves? For Paul, the greatest identifier was his connection with Christ, his status as a child of God, and his purpose in living for Christ. What if we found this to be our greatest identifier? What if we led with this?

It might turn some people off. Perhaps they would think that we are trying to convert them from the very beginning. It certainly could be interpreted that way. But if that is the greatest identifier in our hearts, then even if we don't say the words "I am a follower of Jesus", they will know in whom we live, love, and find our purpose.

How are you living the Gospel today? What would that look like in your family, your job, or your leisure activities?

What does it mean to have Christ as your greatest identifier? How might we begin to introduce ourselves differently?



2 To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brother and sisters in Christ Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

There was already a church Colossae. It was young, and it was vibrant, and it was just discovering its potential and the potential of the Gospel to be a transformative force in their culture and community. It seems that they even inspired Paul to really share the true nature and universal character of Christ with them. In other words, it sure seems like Paul liked them, and really wanted to encourage them. In fact, he uses such evocative language that we can wander in understanding the point of the letter. Suffice it to say, that in the above texts, he is greeting a group of people for whom he has a great deal of respect, love, and joy. I wonder if Paul would say that about Crosswalk? Would he say that about each of us? Our families?

Have you ever been called Holy? What does Holy mean? It means to be consecrated to and for God. We are sacred when we come in contact with Jesus. In fact, coming in contact with Christ makes all the ground we walk upon Holy Ground. And while Moses was asked to take off his shoes because he was walking on Holy Ground, perhaps we need to think of every step we take as being barefoot for Christ. Christ doesn't just make the ground we are on Holy, but he makes the feet on our legs

holy, the hands on our arms holy. Our thoughts, our emotions, our dreams, and our desires can be made holy in connection with Christ. Our prayers become priestly prayers as we are committed to the Gospel and to Jesus. Paul calls the brothers and sisters in Colossae holy because they are, and so are you.

He also mentions that they are faithful. That means that they have made God's priorities their own priorities. This is like when you fall in love with someone and find yourself doing something that you wouldn't normally do, but you care so much for the other person, you are willing to put their likes and wants first, before yours.

What is your greatest identifier today? How could you introduce yourself so that people knew that you are a child of God?

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How sacred/holy do you feel? If you thought of yourself as Holy, would that change how you go about your day?

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3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people

Paul is saying here "I am thanking God for you..." Has anyone ever said that to you? There is an implication that you are a gift from God, and so God deserves thanks for creating YOU! That is a pretty amazing thing to think about. Some days, you might just be the answer to someone's prayer.

And why does Paul pray for them? Because word of their faith in Christ and love for others had reached his ears. This means that reputation is important. Not only are those who are in the faith hearing about you, but so are those who are judging faith. Is Crosswalk a church that Paul would write this letter and would say the same things? How can we all contribute to being a community of belonging that is faithful to Christ

and loves others well? Our #lovewell mission statement is a reminder that we have a call to be the love that the world needs. If you put one of those bumper stickers on your car, you are telling the world that you belong to a community that seeks not only to love, but to love beyond, to love those who don't experience love each day, and to continually aspire to show God is through the way that we live our lives!

Oh, and Paul says that he thanks God when he **PRAYS** for them. That means that we should be praying for one another. This is sometimes lost in the hustle and bustle of life. Truly, what we want to do should be prayed for first, and then acted upon. By keeping each other in our prayers, we are reminded of our responsibility to love in real, tangible, and meaningful ways.

Who have you prayed for today? Who is your answer to prayer?

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Have you ever been someone's answer to prayer? How did that make you feel? What/Who is something/someone that you can pray for today?

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Do you know your spiritual reputation? What would Paul say about you? What would Paul say about your church? How can we #lovewell more effectively?

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5 the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel 6 that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace.

Take a moment to read these texts again. Did you notice this phrase: “the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven...” Remember, that is the ending of the previous sentence that we studied yesterday. So as the sentence continues, about the faith and love they have shown, and how that is part of their reputation, Paul is now saying that the faith and love they have actually comes from the hope that is stored in heaven, FOR YOU! And Paul is saying that the Colossians already know this, because they heard the true message of the Gospel.

So let’s take a moment to ask, what is the true message of the Gospel? It is that heaven is for you, that there are riches (faith, hope, and love) that are stored for you in heaven, and accessible now. “On Earth as it is in Heaven. . .” (Matthew 6:10) is not just hopeful words, but they are the reality of the Gospel. What Jesus did on the cross gives us access to heaven today, and in heaven, there is no end to the joy, the hope, the faith,

and the grace that comes from God.

Muse for a minute on the incredible reality of this. None of those things can run out in your lifetime. You will always have a storehouse full of these--these greatest of things, to pull from in times of great plenty, and in times of great want. That is an incredible outcome of accepting Jesus Christ. Could you imagine winning a contest that gave you free fuel for your car for the rest of your life? All you would have to do is put a sticker on your car saying where the winnings came from! Would that change the way you drive? Perhaps we should change the way we live if we know that these things are available to us each and every moment of every day. Incredible.

Oh, and when you live like this, the gospel spreads and bears fruit. This is how you know if you truly have the gospel. It will bear fruit not just in your life, but in the life of others around you. This is what was happening in Colossae, and this is what can happen in your life as well. All you have to do is ask!





7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Who in the world was Epaphras? Paul says that he was a colleague, fellow servant, and faithful minister. It was Epaphras who gave the gospel to the church in Colossae, and in that way Paul feels indebted to this man. As well, this man did not leave that church and say bad things about them to Paul. Rather, he told Paul of love “in the Spirit” that they had for everyone. I love it when I hear “Good Gossip” about certain people or churches. Unfortunately, we don’t often hear gossip that says good things about people, organizations, or churches. We usually share that which is juicy, and that is not usually good.

When was the last time you used “gossip” to do further the love of the Gospel in the world? Scripture speaks

about gossip well over 30 times, and yet it is still one of the most damaging things we have to deal with in our lives and in the church. What would happen if we committed to only being positive in our gossip about other people and other churches? Perhaps we could change the narrative around the idea of gossip.

Have you ever been the victim of vicious gossip about you? How did that make you feel? How do you feel when you have heard that someone is saying great things about you? Also, have you ever entertained negative gossip about other people? How can you stop doing that?

The truth is, it takes a great deal of character to be able to say that you don’t want to listen to the gossip that someone wants to share with you. Today, we can try to stop negative gossip in its tracks!

How have you been positively speaking about other people lately? How have you been negatively speaking about people lately?

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What would it take to change the way people feel about gossip? Can you commit to only saying positive things about other people today?

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9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, **10** so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

Paul was so encouraged by what he heard of this young church, that he immediately took up being a prayer advocate for them. He knew that they would struggle as they grew in the Gospel, and so he became their greatest fan and advocate before God. His prayers were specific; for knowledge of God's will, for wisdom, and for understanding that can only come from the Holy Spirit. And there is an outcome hoped for through these prayers. That they would live a worthy life, and that they might grow.

Do you know of someone who is praying for you everyday? Some of

us have people in our lives who do this, and some of us might not. You know what is the best way to make this happen in your life? Become the person who prays for others daily. Let them know.

Every once in a while, I received a note from someone who has been praying for me. I especially like the notes that say “today I prayed for you. . .” and then they speak of specific things that they prayed for me. I love this, it is amazing to think that someone took their sacred prayer time and spent it thinking and praying for me. What a blessing it is to receive something so thoughtful and gracious. Could you do that for someone today?

Take 5 minutes and send a quick not to someone who you have prayed for today. Don't make it long, keep it simple, but encourage them.

Today, we take all these texts and look at them in a cohesive whole. We start with an introduction to the book of Colossians. Pastor Isai will walk us through this first section. Now that you are familiar with these texts, let's go a little deeper into the introduction to this book, these people, and the message the Apostle Paul wanted them and wants us to hear today

Colossae was not a big town, although it had been in the past. It's bigger brother, only about 10 miles away, is a town called Laodicea. You have probably heard of that town, and that church, as it is mentioned in the book of Revelation in chapter 3. Laodicea is famous for being lukewarm in the counsel they receive from the angel in Revelation.

The church in Colossae is young, a bit immature, but with lots of energy, and excited to do the work for the gospel in their town. Paul is deeply committed to them. He prays for them and encourages them. As well, he gives them wisdom, as they sometimes listen to those they probably shouldn't. I always think of them like a teenager, eager, passionate, inexperienced, but willing. Those are not bad characteristics for a church. They are a church that knows how to #lovewell!

In the introduction to the epistle (letter) Paul wants them to receive

the grace (charis) and peace (shalom) that God has for them. In this way he is acknowledging both their Jewish heritage, and their greek culture. Also, this is to let them know that God grants these things both to Gentiles and those who would consider themselves chosen by God, the Jews. There is an incredible benevolence that is displayed by Paul for including all groups within the church. Paul obviously believed in creating communities of belonging!

Verse 10 Mentions that we should be "growing in the knowledge of God." How does this happen? How do we study in such a fashion that we understand who God is, what He wants for us, and how we can connect with him? Should we commit to a small bible study group? Should we watch more sermons online? Should we pray more? Should we read the bible more?

The answer to all of these questions is a resounding yes, but it is also true that if the right spirit is not in our hearts, these things become activities, but they don't bring with them a better understanding of who God is. It is possible to be very spiritually "busy", yet not grow. It is possible to be doing all the good things mentioned above, and yet still have very little spiritual growth and very little spiritual maturity. These things become real when we ask the Holy



Here are some questions to go

These questions are meant to help engage conversation in your small groups.



Week 2

COLOSSIANS 1:11-14

New International Version (NIV)

1 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you[a] to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and

Power is a great thing, and a dangerous thing. But the power that comes from God is a specific kind of power, that allows us to express His glory in palpable ways. And in this text, it says we should be strengthened with “All Power.” We could call this the “fullness of power,” or the “complete power of God.” This power is power that is for the glory of God, but it shows up in people. In other words, it is “Manifested” in people. It shows through in so many ways!

In what ways does it show through?

Love. That's first. The way that we love and lovewell. How much easier is it to say loving words rather than

show loving actions? It is so easy for Christians to say that they love someone, but to get involved in their lives means that action has to take place. In fact, the word for Compassion is *splagchnizomai* and this word literally means to be moved as to one's bowels, hence to be moved with compassion, have compassion (for the bowels were thought to be the seat of love and pity).

Endurance and Patience. This text mentions a few other things, namely, endurance to keep going, and patience to keep focused. And when it comes to love, these things are paramount to showing God's glory. It is when we lovelong and lovewell that the glory of God is expressed in our lives. I think back to Waveland Mississippi, and how, after hurricane Katrina, Anderson Cooper went back to that town month after month, even after the rest of the news cycle had moved on. He took the opportunity to lovelong and make sure the story didn't die. Is this how we love those God has put under our influence and care? Love is not an event, it is a sustained obedience toward God and those he would have us serve.

Take a few minutes today and see where you can serve for the long haul in someone's life.

1. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kiv&strongs=g4697>

2. Ibid.



**11 being strengthened with all power
according to his glorious might so that
you may have great endurance and
patience,**

We will spend a second day on this text as it has more to say to us this week.

Have you ever run for a prolonged period of time? Or perhaps you have swam significantly, or even done a triathlon. These kinds of activities means that you are willing to suffer for the deferred joy of a successful ending. When you come to the end of these activities, there is a deep sense of purpose and fulfillment, as well as exhaustion and fatigue. But the exhaustion and fatigue fail in comparison to the completion of purpose and satisfaction that we receive when we find ourselves on the finish line.

In this same way, the Apostle is wishing for us all the power that God has, which a great deal of power, so that we might show his glory in the way that we love, the way that we endure attacks by the enemy, and the way that we have become long-suf-

fering and continue to show his love through continuing past when others have already left.

So far, Paul has been praying for so many things for us. It is really a great sense of care that he gives to us by continually praying for these things. Perhaps he does this because he knows that love is a commitment, both from God to us, and from us to Him, and that it is no small or easy task. It is a commitment of the heart, a commitment of the body, and a commitment of the Spirit of God to be allowed to work in and through us.

You can be an amazing catalyst for love in your family, your circle of influence, your job, all you have to do is accept the fact that you are an heir of all this good work and power that God has for you. While it is easy to become discouraged, there are many out there that are praying for you, praying for your kingdom influence, and praying that you might have ALL POWER that God grants us for endurance and patience.

Find a way to love today. Even if it is a small note, a smile, or a kind word, thank God that you have the ability to influence the world for the kingdom.

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Think of someone who needs Power, Endurance, and Patience today, and spend 3 minutes in prayer for them.

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12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

Verses 12-14 speak of the thanksgiving that Paul has for those in Colossae. This becomes interesting, because Paul has not been praying for these upcoming things for the people, because he recognizes that the people of Colossae have already received these things. You see, the Father is the one who has qualified those people to inherit the Kingdom. This is true of all of us. We are all qualified for kingdom because of the work that Jesus did on the Cross. His sacrifice allowed us to be inheritors of the Kingdom of God, and as His children, we are to give thanks for this great gift. This is also some foreshadowing, as the believers in Colossae have been duped a bit by some “teachers” who would try and “disqualify” them from their Kingdom inheritance, but more on that later.

You might ask why there are more “thanksgivings” at this point, didn’t Paul already have a great deal of these kinds of thoughts toward the beginning of Chapter 1? An easy answer would be that there is more

to be thankful for! Paul has not yet exhausted his thankfulness for everything that God is doing through the group in Colossae. As well, they need encouragement to see that God is faithful to qualify them for the kingdom, even when there are those who would be happy to let them think they are lost.

Unfortunately, it is easy to see why someone would want to make those in the congregation feel lost. When you manipulate a group of people into thinking they need you to foster the favor of God, you become very important to them. Paul wants them to know that they don’t need anyone to create more favor for them with God. God is already 100% on their side and is excited for them to continue his work.

By the way, he feels that about you today as well. If you have any questions about whether you are qualified for the Kingdom, the answer is a resounding YES! You are qualified and saved because Jesus has done the work for you. Your invitation is an inheritance, not an accident. You are called a Child of God, and He loves you as such!

Have you needed encouragement about your salvation? Read chapter 8 of Romans today if you have some time.

What can you do that qualifies you for the Kingdom? Just accept the work of Jesus on the cross today!



13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

For the next 3 days, we will continue to read these 2 verses, in order to really delve deeply into their meaning, and in order to make sure that we understand what the Apostle was bringing to the congregation, and what God is bringing to us through these words. Take time to really let these words sink in today. We know that often, darkness is pushing in on our lives, and that we feel as if we are drowning. (We also want to make a clear distinction and call, if you are suffering from any behavioral illness, or feel as if you might be, please go see a professional counselor. Depending on which campus you experience CW, there are resources for you to connect with someone who can help you on your journey.)

Verse 13 makes it clear what God has done for us through his son, Jesus Christ. We have been rescued. And by the way, the tense of this

action has happened in the past. In other words, we have been rescued by what Jesus did on the cross, and that is a finished action! We no longer live under the dominion and power of darkness, or the power of sin. Without this God-given deliverance, we would have been lost. But because of Gods' love for us, we are now living under a new banner, a new grace and a new King and kingdom!

Have you ever had someone do something nice for you, that you couldn't repay them? There is something that is almost uncomfortable about having received a gift so great, that "thank you" is all you can say. No repayment would make any sense because of the disparity of what was given to what could be repaid. This is how it is when it comes to what the Apostle is trying to tell us about the love of God, and what it means for us. The fact that the kingdom that we have been brought into is His Son's kingdom is important. Through Jesus we have forgiveness and redemption!

Do you know you are saved? How can you know? What does being saved mean to you? Why does it sometimes feel as if we are not safe with Jesus? Can you think of ways to remind yourself about what He has done for you?

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13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Verse 14 can be considered important, in that too often we separate the idea of redemption and forgiveness of sins. Why are these two ideas together? Perhaps because forgiveness needs redemption. The power of sin is one that constantly attacks us, so we need to make sure there is a breaking of that power. This breaking, is redemption. God not only forgives our sins, but he breaks the power of that sin by delivering us from the power of sin. God's forgiveness is no small "one time" deal. Rather, it is the cumulative power of heaven to continue our salvation through our lives. Redemption calls us to remember what Christ has done

for us, and to call on it when we are in need of the power to overcome sin.

This forgiveness, and this redemption is new every morning. We are constantly living in the renewed grace and mercy, forgiveness and redemption that God offers those who would accept His sacrifice through Jesus, His son. Wouldn't it be nice to walk outside to a brand new car every day? The grace and promise of Jesus is so much more valuable than a new car, and it is new every morning. It is waiting to drive you home every night. We have a tendency to live as if we will never really have a new car, but yet, we are given one each day. When the promises of God are recognized in your life, you realize that we are amazingly blessed to be able to live in His grace each day.

What has His grace done for you today? Are you living differently because of it?

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Are you ready to receive His mercy and love today, even if it is not for the first time?

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13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins

All of these texts, from verses 11-14 speak of the incredible patience and perseverance that we are given by the power and strength of Jesus. We also become “joyful thanksgivers” through this process. It is fascinating to realize that Paul actually becomes one of those who gives great thanks by reimagining what we are thankful for in verses 11-12. He is modeling for us how it looks to give thanks joyfully to those who have received and will receive his teachings. Paul does not take it for granted that God has finished the work on the cross, and therefore we are able to take a hold of the grace that God has given us through his son, Jesus Christ.

As we take a look at the sermon for this week, it is important that we understand a couple of things:

1. Patience comes from God.

We need patience to see what God will continue to do. Sometimes, if we move too quickly, we are going to take matters into our own hands, rather than allowing God to work on his time frame. Patience is for God and from God as well.

2. Perseverance takes both patience and courage.

Perseverance is not a simple thing. But it uses the gift of patience and the grace of courage to allow us to continue on. It is not always easy to believe that God is in control, but if we persevere in the work that God has given to us, we will be able to see His amazing work.

Can you name a time when you were patient, but it must have come from God?

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When have you persevered and have seen God at work because of your willingness to stick to His call in your life?

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11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

When God gives us power, He gives us “All Power”, and that kind of power is not something to be trifled with. It is the power that God gives, through his Son, Jesus, and through the Holy Spirit. This power is so that we might be given to great patience and perseverance. Why do you think that we need such patience?

Patience is a funny thing. When you don't have it, it is hard to conceive of it as being a worthy attribute. But when even a little patience is infused with the mighty power of God, it becomes an incredible asset as we do the work of God in the world. We need such power and patience because the work of ministry is a work we do by miles, but the work we do by millimeters. Sometimes, it feels as if we are moving backwards, and not really forwarding the work of God. There are obstacles, there are setbacks, and there are mistakes. However, if we believe that God has called us to something, then we also must believe that God is the one who

can make it happen. It is when we get impatient, we get too far ahead of Him, that we find ourselves in trouble.

God has not called us all to do the same thing. Some of us will work in places and in ways that never push the boundaries of where God has us. Some of us will be called to be on the cutting edge of what is happening for the kingdom of God. We all have to use patience and the power that God grants us in the ways that are appropriate to His will and work in the world.

When we understand what it is that we have been saved FROM, we can begin to understand what we were saved FOR. We were rescued from the power of darkness, as the author is using the juxtaposition of light and dark to represent God and evil. The kingdom that we have been brought into is one of light and love, while the kingdom that we were rescued from is heavy and dark. And this only happened because Jesus died on the cross for us, and was resurrected on the third day! As Stott says: “It would be hard to exaggerate the magnitude of the changes that have taken place as a result of the cross, both in God and in us, especially God's dealings with us and in our relations with him. Truly, when Christ died and was raised from death, a new day dawned, a new age began.” (pg. 165)



COLOSSIANS 1:15-23
New International Version (NIV)

Christ Is Supreme

- 15** Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.
He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,
- 16** for through him God created everything
in the heavenly realms and on earth.
He made the things we can see
and the things we can't see—
such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.
Everything was created through him and for him.
- 17** He existed before anything else,
and he holds all creation together.
- 18** Christ is also the head of the church,
which is his body.
He is the beginning,
Supreme over all who rise from the dead.[b]
So he is first in everything.
- 19** For God in all his fullness
was pleased to live in Christ,
- 20** and through him God reconciled
everything to himself.
He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth
by means of Christ's blood on the cross.
- 21** This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. **22** Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.
- 23** But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God's servant to proclaim it.

15 Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,

What does it mean to be the visible image of the invisible God? Simply put, we are talking about the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. This “enfleshment” is the way that we can truly see who God is. Without Jesus, we would never have the 360 degree view of the character of God like we have in Him. Jesus is God in the Particular! Jesus came to a particular region, at a particular time, in a particular gender, to a particular language group, to a particular group of people. Why did he choose all of this? While we could spend a great deal of time having you research this, give you references to books and articles and websites that discuss and argue about things like; “the coalescing of history and geography at the time of Jesus”, or “there were no other places and time when Israel had been this important to the ancient crossroads of Rome”, we could also simply say that God knew what he was doing.

Did you ever wonder why, right after the introductions to this letter, Paul chooses to go into a phenomenal explanation of who Jesus really is? Why do you think he did that? Perhaps the reason is that this was a young church, and they were not trying to be unfaithful on purpose. Rather, it was that they were being confused by teachers who wanted

them to think that Jesus was not enough for them. That his sacrifice was insufficient for their salvation, and that they would be in dire straights if they simply believed what they had been told by Paul. Therefore, the Apostle begins to set the record straight.

As well, Paul wanted to place Jesus at the very heart of Heaven. This is why he places Jesus there as existing before Creation, and over all Created things. His placement of Jesus here is so we should not forget the supremacy of Christ in all things. Jesus did not begin his existence at Creation, because his existence is not contingent on anything. He is part of the trinity, that Godhead that was, is, and forevermore will be. There was not a time when Jesus did not exist, as there was not a time that the Father or the Holy Spirit did not exist. We see them from before Creation and into the New Creation. To forget this, is to do damage to the “Godness” of Jesus. We call anything that diminishes the role of Jesus one simple word: Heresy.

This beginning phrase marks a turn from introduction to declaration. Paul wants us to know that he will use the very highest praise, the very highest terms, and he will do this without apology. If you want to see who God is, look to Jesus, for he is the full explanation of God, the full and visible expression of God, for Jesus is God, and our salvation!



Did you know that the word “image” in Hebrew is not just a copy, but the complete manifestation of a thing? In that way, Jesus is not a mirror of God, but He is God.

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Does it give you some encouragement that you can “know” God through Jesus? This is why studying His life, His death, and His resurrection is so important for us as Christians.

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16 for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.

Wow, this is important. Paul, who in the previous verse sets Jesus clearly, plainly, and definitively in heaven at Creation; now says that he was responsible for Creation because “through him” all things were made. In fact, it’s not just things on the earth that were made through him, but all things in heaven as well. We should take a moment and consider this—that everything in heaven, all those things that we assume just existed, were just THERE—they were created through Jesus as well. Too often we have assumed that God is the Creator of all things, and that Jesus is the Savior of all things. However, this text is prompting us to understand that Jesus is the source of all that is in heaven as well.

And the text goes further! Because Jesus made those things that we can see, like animals, plants, the weather, all those things that we take for granted. But it doesn’t stop there, Jesus also made those things that we can’t see, all of the intangible things

of this world, those things that we have hints and allegations of, He had a hand in those things as well.

That final phrase, “everything was created by Him and through Him,” is a catch-all kind of phrase that the author uses in order to make sure there is nothing left to chance. Everything you can see, everything you can’t see, everything you know to be true and that which you have only hoped to be true is all made possible because of Jesus and for Jesus.

This all-inclusive take on Jesus should calm our nerves when we wonder if Jesus was powerful enough to save us. He was powerful enough to create the universe, saving us shouldn’t be too hard of a task. We often underestimate the power of Jesus in our lives, and this text should push us to agree there is nothing Jesus cannot do for us. This text is almost begging us to give Jesus more credit than we often do. Why do you think that we underestimate the role that Jesus plays in the universe? Is it because we are afraid of that much power? Are we afraid to turn our lives over to Him? Or do you think it is because we just can’t conceive of this much power being wrapped up in even more love?

How can we agree that Jesus has this much power? Does it change the way that we look at Him? Take some time to think about how safe you are in the arms of the one who built both the heavens and the earth.



**17 He existed before anything else,
and he holds all creation together.**

**18 Christ is also the head of the church,
which is his body. He is the beginning,
Supreme over all who rise from the
dead. So he is first in everything.**

In v. 17 there are two powerful statements that must be spoken to: First, that Jesus existed before anything else. In our family, the oldest has priority on getting the front seat when we go anywhere. Therefore, first it is Mom who has the passenger seat, and when she is gone, it is the oldest sibling. Now, the oldest sibling can give away that priority to the next youngest, and so on, but it is at the grace of the older. This text has a time stamp, and for the ancients, chronology has a priority, the earlier the better. So the argument is that since Jesus was first, He has priority over all. That means he definitely has priority over us! And this couldn't be better news for us, as Jesus also cares for us more than anyone else.

But there is a second phrase which we must look upon as well: "He holds all creation together." Whenever I read this phrase, I think of Jesus, somewhere in space, somehow holding all things together. Somehow, He is holding gravity in place, He holds the air in our atmosphere--in such a way that life is sustainable! This word picture, can be seen as the

expression of the sustaining power that Christ has over the universe. So it is understood that not only do we a creator-God, but we have a sustainer-God as well. This should give us some comfort when it seems that things are falling apart. They can't! Because the one that created all things holds them all together as well.

V. 18 now brings it home in a way that we can understand. As part of the church, we all understand the metaphor of the Body of Christ which Paul speaks to in other writings and epistles (1 Corinthians 12, specifically). Well, every body needs a head to keep it all together, and so not only in the universe, but in the church as well is Christ first and foremost. He is the founder, creator, sustainer and ruler of the church, which is His body. It states specifically, that Christ is the BEGINNING! How did the church begin? Through His resurrection from the dead, of which He was the first as well. Lazarus was resuscitated, but Jesus was resurrected! Lazarus went back into the ground, eventually. But Jesus is still in heaven and is still interceding for us.

Simply put, you can be sure that wherever you go, Jesus has gone before you, because He is the first of all things. This should give you peace as you go about your day today!



**19 For God in all his fullness
was pleased to live in Christ,
20 and through him God reconciled
everything to himself.
He made peace with everything in
heaven and on earth.
by means of Christ's blood on the cross.**

Paul's first claim in this section was that Jesus was the visible image of the invisible God (1:15), and this claim is reiterated in v.19, but with more emphasis. We can come up with many different ways to say it, but the point is that all that God is, so is Jesus. You cannot look at Jesus without seeing the totality of who God is as well. Because they are one, you cannot separate one from the other. Oh, and by the way, the only reason you are even thinking about this is because the Holy Spirit has prompted you to consider these things. In this way, there is no thought of Jesus, no thought of God, not prompting of the Holy Spirit that is not a Trinitarian experience. And this is the beauty of the way that God works. All three, all the time. The "community" of God is a 360 degree, 3- 4 dimensional experience. We cannot think of one without the other 2, it is simply impossible.

But God did something spectacular with this situation, He made Jesus the focus of this experience, because it is the one which we can most profoundly connect. We are blessed to understand God through a human being, like us. And while Jesus is God, his

divinity was quiescent, or shrouded, in order to live like us, love like us, suffer like us, but overcome sin, something that we have never been able to do.

By his death, He has conquered sin, and by His resurrection, He has conquered death. There is nothing more that He could do for us. His sacrifice and resurrection is perfect, and perfectly for us!

So now that peace (Shalom) has been given to us, we are held within His sustaining grip. Within His love we live. We don't have pay Him back for his gift, as that would sully the spirit in which it has been given. However, when someone gives a gift with such an amazing cost, we become changed by the very nature of the gift itself. There are some gifts that shift the trajectory of people's lives, and Grace is just such a gift. What's more, according to this text, it comes from the fullness of God, which is expressed in Jesus Christ.

Now, this is heavy for a 500 word devotional; so we won't linger. But this is the Gospel of Jesus Christ! That God would love us in such a way as to sacrifice, to give Himself, and then to make peace with all that was broken through sin. We have been restored to His kingdom by his grace. The truth is that we are not simply recipients of the gift, but we are heirs to his kingdom, and heirs to his grace and power. As the book of Romans says:



“While we were still sinners. . .” We
have been restored, we have been
renewed and we have been refreshed.

How much more so now, knowing who
God really is, can we experience His
love for us?

**Is there anything that could be better than this? How can your life be a
testament to His grace, not to pay Him back, but to express your grati-
tude?**

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**Come up with three ways to show his love to others today, so that they
might experience His mercy and grace through you today!**

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21 This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. 22 Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

Remember, Paul is talking to the Colossians, who went from unbelief, from idolatry, into belief in Jesus. So he is reminding them that there was a time when they were not with God, because they did not know they had been reconciled to Him. He did this before they understood who Jesus was. This is the power of grace, that before any of us knew Him, or were even born, God had made a way for us to be reconciled and redeemed.

V. 22 is even more powerful than v. 21! Not only have we been reconciled, but we have been brought into His presence, and in that presence we are holy and blameless. How can we be holy and blameless? Certainly it is not because of the things that we have done. NO! In fact, because we were far away from God, not just because of our actions, but even our thoughts were headed in the wrong direction. Because of this, the work of salvation doesn't just turn our hands and hearts, but it also turns our heads (minds) to the things that are of God.

And the truth is, when we have inaccurate thoughts about God, our

actions often miss the mark of what He wants for us. Remember, sin, Harmartia (Greek) is literally translated as "missing the mark." When our view of God is twisted, confused, or broken, we will assume that God's character is not perfect, it is not loving, it is not looking out for us all the time. So many people are confused as to who God really and truly is. This is why studying who Jesus is, His life and death and resurrection are incredibly important, and this is why Paul began his letter this way. He wanted the Colossians to know that once they had regained an accurate picture of God through Jesus, the rest became so much easier.

All of this to say that God sees the best of you when you stand in His presence, not because we have "cleaned up well" or because we have convinced Him of our worth or goodness. It is because He knows the very deepest part of us, and He knows our hearts, as they turn toward Him. This is the Holy part! The Blameless part comes from the forgiveness that is ours to accept. This act of care for us has changed our status when we stand in the presence of God. We no longer have to fear judgement, because the judgement that has been rendered has been seen through the life of Jesus, the one that we took on as our own. Today, you can claim this promise; that God sees you through Jesus. Make today amazing!



If we are holy and blameless in front of God, what should our response be? Should it be praise, should it be worship? Should it be prayers of thanksgiving?

How can we know we are in the presence of God? Can you think back to times in your life when you were sure you were in the presence of God? How can you get back to that place or time in your life?



23 But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God's servant to proclaim it.

Here, Paul gives an exhortation, as well as a logical conclusion. He states, "You MUST continue. . ." and if you believe it, you will continue to stand firm in it. He is both stating that he wants them to continue, and they must continue, because they believe in the Gospel which had been shared with them. While Paul is so impressed with who they are, he is also expressing his concern because they are young, because they are new to the faith, they can be confused by other ideas that run counter to the Gospel that he proclaimed to them while he was with them. This is always a fear for those of us who go and teach, that the moment we leave, they will forget and go back to their old ways.

The church in Colossae was not going back to its old ways of disbelief; rather, they were moving toward a gospel that was not gospel at all. A gospel that diminished the work of Jesus on the cross, and laid waste to the incredible grace that Paul had preached to them prior to this letter. And this fear, that people might be confused by teachers with sweet words, but devoid of the gospel, is

one that we can only combat by leaning into the word of God that is most accessible expression of God's love for us. Everyday that we are reminded of God's great love for us, of the power of the Gospel and His sacrifice for us, we are reconnected and reestablished as heirs and as children of God.

At the end of this verse, Paul uses the term Minister, rather than Bond-servant (a term that he normally uses when talking about his relationship with Christ). This is significant, not because it changes the meaning, in fact, the NIV translates the word either way (doulos), but here, Paul is talking about the work that God has given him to do for the world and for the gentiles who he had been called to serve. We have all been given a task to "minister" to the world. We are all asked to become part of the work of God. Paul takes his work of ministering very seriously, as we probably should as well.

The overall takeaway from this text is simply that Paul wants those Colossians to remain faithful to the clear gospel that he preached to them while he was with them. He doesn't want them to become confused by any teachers who take away from the amazing and complete work of Jesus on the cross. If we can live our lives with this sort of crystal clarity for what the gospel is and what it does in our lives, we will be forever changed!



These texts are some of the most incredibly texts in all of Scripture. If we were to build a manifesto of language to speak of Christ, this is the place, and these are the texts to which we would go. We spent the week exegeting these texts, so we will not do it here, but you can watch the video of the sermon for this week and have a refresher. In your small group today, or in your devotional, ask a few questions to help clarify people's understanding of what Paul was trying to do.

1. Why did Paul go immediately to an explanation of who Jesus was after the introduction of this letter?
2. Are we ever in danger of losing focus on the gospel? How can we guard ourselves from becoming confused to the teachings of Scripture?
3. What is your study life like? How can you create a habit of studying scripture?
4. Why would someone want to teach false teachings about the Gospel? What would be their motivation?
5. How can you discover your ministry potential in Christ? Perhaps a first question is to ask yourself what you like to do, and can you do that for God in some manner? Whether through the church, through other organizations, or on your own. Can you create a space where your calling can be expressed?
6. If God worked for your salvation while you were still his enemy, what does that mean for those who don't know Christ under your influence? Could it be that Christ is working through you so that they might know salvation?
7. What is the best way to tell someone about Jesus? Could you use the same kind of language as we find in the texts for this week? It is, in many ways, winsome, universal, and thoughtful. Perhaps we should learn how to speak like this about Jesus!

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Week 4

COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:3

New International Version (NIV)

24 I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for his body, the church. **25** God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you. **26** This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people. **27** For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory. **28** So we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect[a] in their relationship to Christ. **29** That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me.

CHAPTER 2

1 I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other believers who have never met me personally. **2** I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, which is Christ himself. **3** In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for his body, the church. 25 God has given me the responsibility of serving his church by proclaiming his entire message to you.

First of all, who is glad when they suffer? Do you think Paul might be laying it on a bit thick there?

The truth is, Paul often speaks about rejoicing in his sufferings, and he did suffer a great deal! He was not one to shy away from being beaten and bruised for the gospel. He actually delineates his suffering in 2 Corinthians 11: 24

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea. 26 In my frequent journeys, I have been in danger from rivers and from bandits, in danger from my countrymen and from the Gentiles, in danger in the city and in the country, in danger on the sea and among false brothers, 27 in labor and toil and often without sleep, in hunger and thirst and often without food, in cold and exposure.

Paul went through a great deal of suffering, so when he says that he is rejoicing in it, he must mean that he knows he is being effective for the gospel, as it is becoming disruptive in the life of the communities in which he serves. As well, he is identifying with Christ in those sufferings, because he knows that no matter what his physical suffering might be, he will never suffer the anguish that Christ suffered on the Cross. That suffering was not only physical, but it was spiritual as well. Christ felt the loneliness that comes when God pulls himself back. He cried on the cross a

true cry of dereliction (Matthew 27), a true loss of connection between himself and God. Paul, throughout all of his physical suffering, knew that no matter what, regardless of what he went through he would never have to experience that kind of separation. Because of what Jesus went through and suffered, Paul knew that he would never have to experience that kind of separation. And he desperately did not want the Colossians to suffer that same sort of self-imposed separation by forgetting about the gospel as Paul had given it to them.

Paul also mentions that he feels a huge responsibility to serve them by making sure they stay safe within the entire message of the Gospel. The entire message of the Gospel is Jesus, his life, death, resurrection and ascension, but we have to include the idea that Jesus is coming again for his people. In this way, there was an eschatological portion to his message that he did not want the Colossians to forget. It is important that we don't miss out on this portion of the message as well. We do believe that Jesus is coming again, and we look forward to His second coming.



This message was kept secret for centuries and generations past, but now it has been revealed to God's people. 27 For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance of sharing his glory.

This sounds exciting, this message that was “kept secret.” For Paul, this means that there was a message of truth to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures, but they were not made clear until Jesus Christ revealed all that God was plainly. So this time of clarity, this moment of understanding was made clear in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since then, Paul has been able to tell the gentiles who God is, and how they have been given this same gift that was given to the children of Israel from time immemorial.

The truth that Paul is revealing to the Gentiles is that Christ is in you, and He is the hope of glory! In other words, salvation comes through Jesus, and all have access to His grace, mercy, compassion and favor.

This focus on Christ was like a laser for Paul. Have you ever watched a cat try to catch a light that is being moved back and forth? We have all done this with a cat, taken a laser pointer and tried to get them to

chase it. Something happens, even with the most lazy of cats; they become dangerously focused on that little light. And while they will never catch it, they will never stop trying. We, on the other hand, have the opportunity to focus in the same way on Jesus, knowing that he has been given freely. But just because we have Jesus doesn't mean that we should stop focusing on him all the time. Paul understood this.

There is a last section, that Christ lives in you, and this promise should give you assurance of your salvation. The truth is that if you are not sure if you are actually saved in Jesus, you will live your life very differently than if you have that assurance. Once you KNOW you are saved, you can go about the business of really living abundantly in the kingdom of God. If you are never sure that you have that salvation, you will constantly be worried, and that worry will create anxiety, and that anxiety will create frustration, and that frustration, ultimately, will express itself in despair. This is not what Paul wants for the Colossians or for you, and this is definitely not what God wants for you either.

Have you needed encouragement about your salvation? Read chapter 8 of Romans today if you have some time.

What can you do that qualifies you for the Kingdom? Just accept the work of Jesus on the cross today!



28 So we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ. 29 That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me.

The best thing about these texts is that there can be no mistaking what Paul's message is: It is Jesus Christ. Paul believed that the continual hope for us as Christians, and truly, for the world, is all resting in a person. The gospel is no system, it is not a hierarchy of assent, or a set of any rules or regulations. It is simply the work and person of Jesus, who is both the message and the messenger.

He mentions that we do this in two different ways: 1) through telling people, or teaching them. 2) by exhorting (warning) or confronting them. This word, confronting, has a negative connotation, and to be sure, there are times when "confronting" someone with the gospel can be a negative interaction. However, we need to look at it from his point of view; whoever he did not tell, would not know about

Jesus. So it became paramount to Paul to continually confront people with the truth. Now, this, of course, was not done in judgement, but in love. He would be strident, he would be truthful, but he always started with Jesus, rather than with criticism. Perhaps, that is not a bad way to do this work!

But this work is tiring. It is exhausting. But Paul does not only think it is worth it, but he knows that he can press on toward the goal because his strength is not his own. It comes from God, and that is the power source from which he will pull.

Need more energy in your life? Call on Christ! Are you struggling? Call on Christ. For Paul, Christ was a real and present source of love and energy. I wonder if we take that same understanding into our lives? We don't have to do this all alone. In fact, we should be expecting to fail, because that is when we will need God the most. If we can remember that, then there is nothing that we can't handle, and nothing that we can't overcome.

**Where do you need Christ's energy and strength in your life today?
Pray for it right now.**

How can you join in the work that Paul began by telling those under your influence about Jesus? How can you teach and when should you exhort?



Chapter 2:1 “I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other believers who have never met me personally.”

This chapter introduces at least one of the other churches in the region into the picture. Laodicea is a church that you have probably heard of, if not from here, at least from its most

“Revelation 3:15 “I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! 16 But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I

famous instance, in Revelation 3:15

And this is a pretty serious indictment on the church to come from Christ, through John the Revelator. Laodicea was about 10 miles or so away from Colossae, and later in the letter, Paul greets people specifically from that church. So while Paul was familiar with the reputation of the church, he had not been there. He wanted this letter to the Colossians to make its way to Laodicea, so that they might benefit from its instruction

as well. So while it was not an unfamiliar church, it is clear that Paul has not been there, and that they had a reputation of being “neither hot nor cold.” Some have theorized that there is a lost letter to Laodicea that we have somehow lost to the ages. While it does us little good to speculate on what we don’t have, it is not outside the realm of possibility to believe there are lost letters buried somewhere out in the Middle East.

However, the words that we have are given to us by God, for instruction, and so this beginning of the second Chapter emphasizes Paul’s personal struggle for the church in Colossae and Laodicea. Paul cares for these congregations personally, and he has worked hard that they might understand the Gospel in its fullness. He had dedicated himself to their growing faith maturity.

What is faith maturity? A mature faith has some clear aspects that should be mentioned, as Paul wants us to mature in our faith as well.

1. A mature faith is one that is not afraid of questions, but is deeply rooted in scripture. Understanding that “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us. . .” (2 Timothy 3:16-17), a mature faith is one that is grounded in the study of scripture, but is not afraid to ask difficult questions. Asking questions and having faith are not mutually exclusive activities, rather, a mature faith invites difficult questions so that it might search the scriptures for answers.
2. A mature faith is one that understands that truth is a person, Jesus Christ. This does not diminish the importance of doctrine to



the mature believer, but it also puts doctrine into its rightful place as the explanation of who Jesus is.

3. A mature faith seeks to express compassion to those who are in need, whoever they are. Caring for people is a sign of a mature faith in Christ, and therefore, as Jesus is our model, we find ways to express tangible compassion for those who are most deeply in need. (This is our connection to the mission of God as found in Luke 4:14-28)
4. A mature faith understands that they are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ, through faith. Maturity means that we are clear on the importance of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, what that has done for us,

Paul wants the Colossians to understand that not only is Jesus enough for all their salvation needs, but he is also with them as they grow

toward a more mature faith. Paul is also deeply invested and is agonizing over that journey for them and for those in Laodicea.

Are you growing toward a more mature faith? What structures have you put in your life to help you with this? (Thanks for working with this artifact, we hope it helps!)

What stands in the way of your spiritual maturity? If there are questions that you should ask, please don't hesitate to reach out to info@crosswalkvillage.com and we will have a pastor get in touch to continue the conversation.



2 I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love. I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, which is Christ himself.

In the previous verse, Paul also mentioned that many believers had not "met him personally." This sounds a bit arrogant, admittedly. But for Paul, personal connection was the strongest way to encourage those in the churches. He knew that God had given him a calling and care for those people, and so he wanted to make sure he was fulfilling that calling by being available. This was in the years before technology had advanced in such a way as to make communication be something that can happen between continents in just seconds (Text messaging, etc.). So to be personally available to the churches is Paul's greatest desire.

The reason for this is that he wants them to "encouraged" and to be "knit together" by love. This is an exhortation. His encouragement to them grew out of genuine love which would increase a stronger tie, something more than just a physical understanding and proximity to one another. Paul was looking for a spiritual connection both with them, with Christ for them, and from them to one another. The greek word for being tied together usually includes a sense of instruction (Symbibasthentos). The connotation is pretty logical in that a mature faith is always interested in learning more,

especially if that instructions comes from love and is about love.

While there is a connection with instruction, the better and greater understanding is that this connection comes from the love of Christ for those in Colossae, and through that love that Christ has for them, so does Paul have a great deal of love and care for this congregation. Christ's love is the common bond that all Christians share with one another. It is easy for a Christian to call one another Brother and Sister, as we are all Gods' children. However, we must never let this position create an arrogance in us. Rather, the humility that comes from understanding Christ's overwhelming love for us should hurl us into the world to become agents of Gods' grace!

Part of that humility comes from the understanding of, as Paul says; God's Mysterious Plan. But then, at the very end of this verse he reminds us of that plan, which is Christ Himself. For Paul, the center and circumference of his faith could be explained in one name, Jesus. For Paul, it was Jesus over everything, Jesus plus nothing. Jesus was the totality of his faith. Paul understood that to put our faith into anything else other than Christ was a fool's errand. And this understanding led him to a faith maturity that has rarely been seen before or since!

What is the center and circumference of your faith? Is it Jesus or something else?

How can you focus even more on Jesus today?



3 In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

All wisdom originates in Christ. This is truth that Paul lives. He says it this way in 2 Corinthians 2:2-

“For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified.”

Paul was clear on what he was teaching. Using a term like “hidden” is an assent to the fact that the Colossian Christians were having to deal with gnostic teachers in their midst, those who would teach a “secret” or “hidden” knowledge. But for Paul, that “hidden” knowledge was complete in Christ. In Christ is the perfect storehouse and expression of real and useful knowledge for salvation. The people of Colossae were seeking knowledge, like most of us are, but Paul wanted them to know that all of the mysteries of the universe are held and accessed through Jesus Christ.

As well, being a part of the community of God, specifically through local congregations like Colossae, would bring a better understanding of Jesus and His Gospel. How could this happen? It would, and will happen when those who profess the love

of Christ live together in community, deepening those bonds of love, and seeking to share compassion with each other and with those who desperately need the compassion of Jesus to be visited upon them in tangible ways.

Wisdom grows as wisdom is acted upon. This happens through relationships, through service, and through the perseverance of love. Love is not something that is easily experienced, easily given, or even easily received. But as we love one another in the grace of Jesus, we begin to understand what true love really is. And as we understand, we find ourselves seeking and giving love in much greater ways. Just when we think we might be out of love, Christ gives us more and more to share with others.

If in him lie all the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge, we could also say that in Him lie all the mysteries of love. For as we love Jesus, and experience His love for us as well, we grow in understanding who He is, and therefore, who the Father is as well. All of this is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

How are you experiencing love today? How are you giving love today?

Do you think you understand Jesus and His knowledge a little better each day? How can you continue in this growth pattern?



Today's sermon seeks to give us a clearer understanding of the mysteries that are revealed through Christ, His life, His death, His resurrection, and what we can learn as we love one another in community. It is also a call to continue in the instruction of Paul, that we might become a community that seeks faith maturity, and a community interested

in growing in compassion.

Sermons can only do so much. They are 30 or so minutes to break open scripture, to find application and to bind us together in love. This text is worth so much time, and we have spent that time this week. The highlights from the week are as follows:

1. Suffering, for us, will never equal the suffering of separation that Christ experienced on the Cross. Because of His suffering, ours will always pale in comparison, and we will never have to despair that we will be separated from Christ.
2. All wisdom and knowledge is accessed and originates in Christ. We will always be striving to know God more completely, but God has placed his "fullness" in Christ. To know Christ is to know God.
3. Paul is deeply concerned about their spiritual growth and maturity. He wants them to understand all the mysteries of God. And Paul knows that those mysteries are revealed in Jesus.
4. Paul also wants them to understand that as they seek this knowledge that comes through Christ, this maturity journey they are on, they will be tied more deeply together in love for one another. Journeys often make a group grow more closely together.

These journeys of discovery that we are on together should bind us both to Christ, but to one another as well. Paul understands this and wants the church in Colossae to know it as well. It is his gift to them, and he wants them to know him as well, so that their binds might grow as well. Ultimately, this is what Paul,

and in turn Jesus, want for us. To grow in grace and knowledge, be tied together with the bonds of love, and to express that love through compassionate care to one another and to others. This is the gospel that Paul wants them to understand, and for us to understand as well.





Week 5

COLOSSIANS 2:4-15

New International Version (NIV)

4 I am telling you this so no one will deceive you with well-crafted arguments. **5** For though I am far away from you, my heart is with you. And I rejoice that you are living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong.

6 And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. **7** Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

8 Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. **9** For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. **10** So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

11 When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature. **12** For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead.

13 You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. **14** He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. **15** In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and

4 I am telling you this so no one will deceive you with well-crafted arguments. 5 For though I am far away from you, my heart is with you. And I rejoice that you are living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong.

Paul was very concerned that the young Christians in Colossae being hoodwinked (yes, I used that word!) by preachers who have slick sounding arguments, but don't truly express who Jesus is and was. In the first century, there were already preachers who taught that Jesus was not fully God. Gnostics were already running around and preaching a "secret" gospel that only initiates were allowed to know, and Christological heresy was beginning to rear its ugly head. So much true heresy, or false teaching, has always centered around the idea that Jesus is somehow less than God, or that diminishes the work of Jesus on the Cross.

Today we hear words like "legalism" and think it is just another word for "strict", however, that is not true. Legalism is actually a very nefarious form of heresy. For the legalist, the only thing that ends up making a difference is one's adherence to the Law. They have forgotten what Jesus did on the cross, and truly, are trying to put themselves there instead. A great article by a theologian, Edward Heppenstall, deals with this topic succinctly. (Google: How perfect is perfect? Or follow this link: www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/de/

node/444)

It is perhaps sad that 2000 years later, we are still dealing with "well-crafted arguments" that seek to undermine the basic premise of Christianity, which is the fact that Jesus is our salvation, and through His sacrifice on the Cross, we are able to enter into His Kingdom.

Have you ever felt bullied by someone who is using the bible in a way to push you to their side of the argument? Perhaps you find yourself wishing that you could "Point and Shoot" as well as they can with proof texts to undergird what you are saying. If you have ever been bullied this way, know you are not alone. There are many that would cut up scripture in order for it to fit their own purposes and desires. It is a shame that there are those who would seek to twist scripture in order to win an argument or craft a discussion.

This is why it is important to study scripture in the way we are over these 70 days. Without a deep understanding of the context, language, intent and purpose of a whole book of scripture, we cannot hope to "win" an argument, or to know when someone is trying to make scripture work to his or her own ends. This week, continue to do the hard work, the deep work, of finding the intent of the author of these words and what they mean for you today.



6 And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. 7 Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.

This text is important! V. 6 states that they had already accepted (received is perhaps a better word in this instance) Christ Jesus (Order of the words is important) as YOUR Lord. This is the only place where the use of the personal pronoun is used. What this means is that the focus is on the fact that they had received the Lordship of Jesus in their lives, and they were not to let it go through someone else's arguments against Jesus as their Lord.

So why did the Colossians get such preferential treatment in Paul's language? Here, it is because he wants them to understand that since they had received Jesus as Lord, it is up to them to continue to follow in His ways and in His grace. He was encouraging them to go deeper into their relationship with Jesus, to linger so their roots would grow deep and be strong. To make Jesus their habit, not just their hope.

You see, they had been thankful throughout their process of learning and growing in the faith, and Paul does not want them to lose their way. He does not want them to forget in whom their faith is built, Jesus, and

his incredible love and desire for them to remain faithful. Paul has dealt with many of the people who were preaching heresy before, and he also knew the remedy for someone who teaches falsehoods, a direct and intentional focus on Jesus. This is why he brings them back, in v. 6 to the fact that they had given themselves to and received Jesus at the very beginning, and it now would behoove them to continue to follow Him.

Paul has this incredible way of connecting a Christians faith with his thankfulness. So what are you thankful for today? If you are living by and in the grace of Jesus, thankfulness will always be a close companion. As we realize that what Jesus has done for us fuels our hearts, fuels our compassion, and even fuels our day, we begin to live in a different manner. We live in a manner that continually acknowledges His goodness, His great love for us, His power to help us overcome sin, and His incredible forgiveness when we don't.

To live a life of gratitude is no small task, as we have to give away our natural tendency to gripe about what we DON'T have, and remember all those things that we DO have. It is a shame that this is not our default setting. The rise of social media has exacerbated the feeling that we "don't have what they have." This is



We have this incredible family picture from Norway. The kids all look amazing, my wife looks beautiful, it wasn't even a half-bad picture of me. What you can't see is the 30 minutes it took to take this picture!

The tantrums, the screaming, the tears, and that was just from me! In the end, the story it tells is beautiful, but it is not true. I look back on that picture with a fair bit of humor, as it reminds me that what we see online, is often not the reality.

What reality are you living today, and is it one that includes thankfulness?

When did you receive Jesus as your Lord, and are you following Him today? How can you grow deeper roots in Him? Would committing yourself to a ministry at Church help? Or joining a small group?



8 Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. 9 For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.

We have come to what we could call the “theological heart” of the letter to the Colossians. This discussion will go through chapter 3 verse 4. So buckle in, and let’s do some great theological work. You may say; “I want a devotional thought, not a theological treatise,” and you would be fair in saying that. However, we need to honor the text, and this is where it is going to take us. Don’t ever be afraid of theology, as this is the work we do to understand God in a coherent and thoughtful manner. You don’t have to be a professional theologian to do the work of a theologian. In fact, everytime that you talk about God, you are doing the work. Everytime you explain why you believe in God, you are doing the work!

Here, Paul again emphasizes that he is concerned that they will allow someone with a good use of language to confuse and seduce them into believing something that is less than the Gospel that Paul brought to them. In fact, he reminds them that these thoughts are not just coming from nefarious people, but also from “spiritual powers”

that are not from Christ. Remember, the “spiritual powers of this world” would be seen as different from Christ, as Christ while 100% human, was not of this world (as he was 100% God as well).

In v. 8, we see Paul fighting against “philosophies” that were human, were from human tradition, and therefore did not seek wisdom from God. It is not that Paul hated philosophy as a field of study, rather, whatever philosophy they were teaching at the time, he was desperately opposed. For Paul, if it did not originate with God, through Christ, it was not worth mentioning and it was a distraction at best, and heresy at worst.

He seeks to give them a remedy for this way of thinking, and the remedy is always going to be Christ. So what Paul does is remind them of who Jesus is. This statement, much like that of 1:19, is a reminder that all of who God is rests in Christ. The two are not separated. Therefore, any philosophy that seeks to degrade, downgrade, or diminish Jesus as God is anathema. In this one statement is an assent to the fact that Jesus is Lord; no more questions to ask.

But would that have been enough for them? Perhaps not, this is why the conversation lingers. Have you ever had a conversation with



10 So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority. 11 When you came to Christ, you were “circumcised,” but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature.

Wow! 2 things are happening in this first sentence:

1. You are included in this union of God and Jesus. How? Through the power of Christ on the Cross, you have been asked into this incredible relationship with God. What Jesus did gives us access to God in the same way that Jesus can connect with the Father. There is no need for a go-between. Our prayers go to God in the same way that the prayers of Jesus went to heaven.
2. There is an establishment of the authority of God, who is over everything. So even when someone makes a strong philosophical argument, it can never be seen as having more authority than God has in this world. This was important, to remind the Colossians that they have to be listening to God first. And all the theology and philosophy that they would hear, had to put Jesus and God in their rightful place over all, or it was something to hold with suspicion.

Paul then moves on to what we can only call an “uncomfortable” conversation. He moves on to circumcision, which for the Jewish tradition was important. Quickly, it is the removal of the foreskin from the penis. In the Jewish tradition it is done on the 8th day after the birth. It harkens back to the covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:9-14) as he was commanded by God to circumcise himself, and all the male members of his household, his descendants and his slaves as a sign of an everlasting covenant between God and his legacy. Jews, in the days of Jesus and Paul, and even until today, still take part in this ritual as a reminder

of this legacy and covenant.

So Paul begins to use this idea as a metaphor for what Christ has done for us. This is an argument that those coming from the Jewish tradition to Christ would have understood very well. In fact, it was probably so close to home as to be almost offensive, as circumcision is part of the identity of the Jewish faith, and is, obviously, linked back to their “chosenness.” Paul uses this idea to bring home a point that he was trying to make about the supremacy of Christ. While there might have been a physical circumcision that gave identity, the spiritual circumcision that Christ performs is a much more powerful



and important circumcision.

The Jewish readers of this letter would have understood, although struggled to accept that one of their identifying markers was being taken over and overshadowed by what

Christ does for us. And remember, this “spiritual circumcision” is something that comes to EVERYONE who believes in Jesus. What does this do to the idea of being the “chosen” people?

Have you ever felt chosen? Did you like it when someone else is let into that exclusive club?

How does being complete through our union with Christ help you understand your identity as a Christian and as a human? What does this mean to you?



12 For you were buried with Christ when you were baptized. And with him you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. 13 You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.

Who do you identify with the most? It is probably your best friend, husband or wife, sister or brother. There are certain people in life that we just connect with. Sometimes it has to do with shared history, both good and bad. Sometimes it is because of shared preferences for certain things that are important to you. Sometimes you just “click” with someone and they become close to you, and you to them.

Paul is making the argument that we have deep union and connection with Christ because we are buried and resurrected with Jesus through baptism. As well, it is the power of Christ that raised us, and binds us together. It is what Christ did that saves us from our sins through forgiveness. For Paul, our sins had us living constantly in a state of death, and new life began as we accepted Christ.

Let us not underestimate the power of forgiveness of sins that Christ offers to us. It binds us together, grows us toward one another, and gives us a tangible expression of His love for us. For God, what Jesus

did on the Cross is given to us, so we are bound in the same way, we lived and died with Christ, and God doesn’t differentiate between Christ’s sacrifice and our lives. This is such an incredible news for us! It means that the one who judges is also the one who advocates for us.

I have a best friend; more than one, actually. But the one I am thinking about became my best friend when we were in 9th grade together. We played in band, he played the trumpet, and I played the french horn. (A decision (the french horn), which led me on a very different philosophical understanding of who I am, but that is a discussion for another time) We became friends and for the next 7 years saw each other almost every day. We have a deep union that binds us together. He is that friend that I don’t have to apologize for not talking for a few months, or a few years. He now lives on the other side of the US, but we are still close. It is this kind of a union that Christ wants to have with us, and that we can have through his death, resurrection and glorification.

We have a union with Christ that transcends time and space and dimension. We have a bond that is so powerful, so strong, that there is nothing that can take it away from us. It is a family bond, no, deeper than that. It is a bond of grace and



sinful nature, circumcising us and baptising us with Christ. These are spiritual actions, but they have practical applications in our lives.

spiritual actions, but they have practical applications in our lives.



14 He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. 15 In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.

Paul speaks in a transactional way here. I am no accountant, but I know that having a record of charges canceled is a good thing for us! And he wants us to know that the legalism that has been espoused by those teachers can have no hold over us anymore. This use of transactional language is meant to push back on those who are so connected with the law that they can't see their spirituality as anything but a transaction of sin and behavior to and from God. But this is not the way things work in God's kingdom. In fact, Paul is making the argument that if it is transactional, God has taken care of the account!

Just keeping a list of what you did right and wrong is no way to live. In fact, it brings death every time. Do you remember being little and believing that if you didn't confess every sin that you did that day there might be some left-over sin that would keep you out of heaven? That was such a frightening thought to me when I was young. I would scour my memories to

make sure I didn't forget anything, fearful of what I might have forgotten. I truly believed that if I didn't confess everything Jesus might not be able to forget it. I became a sin manager in every aspect of my life. There was no freedom in the transactions, as I was always afraid.

It wasn't until I really began to understand what freedom there is in Christ that my life began to change. I always felt that faith was a burden, and that Christianity was something that I would have to deal with my whole life, and that became sin and guilt management. But when I learned how truly expansive grace really is, how amazing the forgiveness of God can be, and how it really frees us from the transactions of sin and sacrifice, I began to finally live. Faith became a diamond, rather than a burden, and I was happy to carry it. I wish this for all of you who read this text. It is important for us to know that the grace of God transcends our sin, it is a much greater power in the world than our behavior, and the books will never balance, as there is no greater gift that can be given than the gift of Christ Jesus, our Lord.

When did you experience real grace for the first time? Can you remember it?

What did it feel like, and how can you help someone else to experience that grace as well?



The texts for this week bind us to Jesus in death and resurrection, they remind us of the forgiveness of all our sins, they use a metaphor to explain what Christ has done, and they show us that if things were transactional in nature, the books tilt to our side because of how God sees us in Christ.

There are so many good things in these texts! We are all becoming

theologians as we study, in depth, the reasoning that Paul uses in as he explains to us why what Jesus did is powerful, and how it argues against the philosophies that were being put out by those who were harassing the church in Colossae.

Read these texts again as a group and discuss the following questions

1. Have you ever been convinced of something that was wrong in scripture by well-crafted arguments that were meant to confuse and distract you from Christ? What were they, share with the group.
2. How did you get away from that kind of thinking? Was it a focus on Christ and what He did for us?
3. How do you guard yourself away from being confused by these arguments? How can you get ahead of them?
4. Have you ever thought of baptism as the union we have with Christ? Was Paul speaking in the literal sense, or was he speaking spiritually when he spoke of baptism, and circumcision?
5. What is the best friend that you have ever had? What bonded you both together? Are you still friends? Do you live in the same town?
6. How can you know your identity is in Christ?
7. Have you ever struggled with legalism? What steps did you take to finally get out from under that burden? Are you still under it? What can we do to help you understand the great gift of grace that God gives?
8. Have you read the Heppenstall article "How Perfect is Perfect?" What did you think?
9. Did the article help you understand why Perfection will never be what God wants from us, but what He gives to us?
10. How can you show that same love and grace and forgiveness that you have received to someone else this week?



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.



Week 6

COLOSSIANS 2:16-3:4

New International Version (NIV)

16 So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. **17** For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.**18** Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud, **19** and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it.

20 You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as,**21** "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!"? **22** Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. **23** These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires.

3 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand.**2** Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. **3** For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. **4** And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

16 So don't let anyone condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating certain holy days or new moon ceremonies or Sabbaths. 17 For these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.

Okay, these are some pretty strong words. And these are words that, especially for those of us who grew up in certain denominations, will perhaps have an issue with. When Paul is talking about the fact that people shouldn't be condemned for not keeping Sabbaths, or what you eat or drink, what does he mean?

Remember, this is taking place in a broader discussion about what is happening in the church in Colossae, and so it must be taken in that context. As well, Paul is speaking to those who are being led astray by some very shady teachers, who were trying to put the Colossians back under the burden of the law. So Paul had a vested interest in helping them understand the law would never save them, nor was this ever the function of the law. The law was there to point out sin, and it did a very good job of pinpointing sin in our lives. However, it did not do a very good job of saving us, in fact, it never saved anyone. Only Jesus can do that!

So for a Jewish population, these words would have been very hard to hear. Paul is pushing back on not just their religion, but this is a pushback

on their culture and identity as well. Not only would it have been hard to hear, it would have been almost akin to heresy, perhaps it was heresy to them. Everything they had become was wrapped up in the way they attended to their religious ceremonies, sabbaths, and their health habits. To do away with those things would be to lose a great deal of history, culture, identity, and meaning.

While I don't think that Paul was trying to hurt the tradition, he was trying to emphasize the importance of Christ as the revelation of all that God is and can be. Jesus, in the "fullness" of God that was placed into His human form, is the full revelation of who God is. This means that all other things will pale in comparison to how Christ reveals himself to us. While these other things are still good, if one does not do them, others should not judge the first for not doing it.

Perhaps we could simply say that while something is good, it does not become salvation for us. Of course, watch what you eat and drink, but these things won't save you. Keep Sabbath as a gift from God, but again, the Sabbath cannot save you. The only thing that can save you is the full revelation of God's love as expressed through Jesus on the Cross and his resurrection into new life!



18 Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud, 19 and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it.

We have to keep the Christological argument that Paul is making first and foremost in our minds. It is easy to get caught up in the minutiae of what we are or are not doing. In fact, Paul is the one who is always demanding more discipline and more fruits of our devotion to Jesus. So for him to take this stance tells us how important keeping Christ as central to our theology and to our experience must be deeply important to him.

The beginning of v.18 says not to let "anyone condemn you", but perhaps a more accurate translation would be to not let anyone "disqualify" you from the prize of your commitment to Jesus Christ. For Paul, maintaining your commitment to Christ was considered the most important thing that you could do. It was actually considered a prize in his mind. I wonder if we think of our commitment to Christ as the same sort of prize that Paul did? What would that look like if we did? Would Christ be at the forefront of everything that we do?

Paul continued to talk about "pious self-denial", which could have meant feasts and such as they related to the tradition. However, these self-denials were not for the purpose of becoming closer to Christ, but for self-aggrandizement and so that others would think of them as greater than. But the warning here is that when we do things to be seen by others, then we are in danger of becoming proud, and disconnecting with Christ in the aftermath.

Then, Paul again redirects our thoughts to Christ, to his purpose in holding the whole of the Body of Christ together as it's head. As well, there is a connection with God and how God nourishes the church itself through Christ. This gives us a clear clarion call to remember that Christ is the supreme being that we should connect with and in everything having to do with our spiritual walk toward God.

Maybe a question before we finish; how do sinful minds make us proud? Simply, we allow ourselves to think more highly of ourselves than we should. We give all the credit to ourselves for the things that have been clearly given by God to us. This misplaced pride gives us a sense of competency that makes it difficult for us to see how much we need God.



20 You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, 21 “Don’t handle! Don’t taste! Don’t touch!”? 22 Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. 23 These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person’s evil desires.

Okay, before everything goes off the rails here, let’s take a deep breath. It is easy to see these words and feel as if you have been living under the dominion of the law, and you should just throw it all away. And that would be understandable, given this text. It might feel like you have been shackled to ideas that we shouldn’t even be worrying about. Specifically, health ideas and how to keep the Sabbath and such. Many of us grew up with a narrative that sounded very much like “Don’t handle: Don’t taste, Don’t touch!”

Paul was dealing with false teachers that were looking to put the church in Colossae back under the yoke of slavery to the Law. So it seems that he was using their slogans (Don’t. . .) against them. By the way, this is not the only time that Paul uses the teaching and slogans of the opposition against them.

10:23 You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is good for you. You say, “I am allowed to do anything”—but not everything is beneficial.

In 1 Corinthians 10:23, Paul does much the same:

This is Paul using their own slogans

against them. But obviously, Paul was dealing with the opposite problem at Corinth.

So Paul is wanting them to move their focus from the law, to the beauty and richness of Christ; but in Colossae they were listening to false teachers who wanted to control them. And truly, it does feel like someone who is keeping every bit of the law is the most holy person that you know. However, this may, and often is not, true. While people who keep the law are often considered pious, they may be keeping the law for all the wrong reasons. It is so much easier to keep a list of laws than it is to love someone. If I had asked my wife to marry me, and then asked what was the least I could do stay married, to go ahead and “just make me a list”, I don’t think we would have made it the last 24 years. However, to simply agree that we will seek what is best for one another, and to keep that as a flexible and ever-changing focus of the relationship means that we are in it for the long run. We will do whatever it takes to make the other person happy, to make them feel safe and secure and deeply loved. This is a much harder ask than to simply fulfill a checklist.



Paul is working hard to get them to see that loving Jesus is so much more fulfilling than simply obeying the letter of the law. And this may feel like we are letting our standards down. However, the truth is that we are raising our standards much higher than one who simply keeps the law.

We are placing the law of God on our hearts and allowing our lives to become greater reflections of His love for us, and our love for Him. This is so much more powerful, so much harder, and takes a much greater degree of devotion on our parts.

When have you just kept the rules without really knowing why? How did that work out for you?

What can you do to move past the law and move into relationship with Jesus? What would it take to change the way that you interact with God?



20 You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, 21 “Don’t handle! Don’t taste! Don’t touch!”? 22 Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. 23 These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person’s evil desires.

Today, we are looking at the same verse as we did yesterday. There is simply too much to handle it all in just 500 words. Let’s look at the very final phrase of the pericope (scripture section) today.

“But they provide no help in conquering a person’s evil desires.”

Why don’t the rules provide help? That doesn’t seem to make sense.

Don’t we need rules in order to be able to know how far we are supposed to go? Without rules, are we just going to be running around, doing everything that we want? What will help us in conquering our evil desires? Here is a helpful illustration from Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch in their book, *The Shaping of Things to Come*:

“A useful illustration is to think of the difference between wells and fences. In some farming communities, the farmers might build fences around their properties to keep their livestock in and the livestock of neighboring farms out. This is a bounded set. But in rural communities where farms or ranches cover an enormous geographic area, fencing the property is out of the question. In our home of Australia, ranches (called stations) are so vast that fences are superfluous. Under these conditions a farmer has to sink a bore and create a well, a precious water supply in the Outback. It is assumed that livestock, though they will stray, will never roam too far from the well, lest they die. This is a centered set. As long as there is a supply of clean water, the livestock will remain close by.”

In the context of this text, this quote makes so much sense. It is not by finding the fences, or what the rules outline that give us help in overcoming our desires; but rather, it is in understanding the source of all grace that allows us to overcome that which plagues us as we try to follow God’s plan for our lives. We are so used to looking for fences, that we forget

there is a deep well of grace that we need to stay close to and continually draw strength from. It is not in the fence-dwelling that we grow, becoming overcomers, but in the learning to count on His mercy and power for us.

It is common that we would think that by building a hedge around ourselves, we would be safe. Those rules and laws seem to keep temp-



3 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand.² Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.

*The world is too much with us;
late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay
waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a
sordid boon!
William Wordsworth*

Everytime I read this text, I think of this poem, and the converse is true as well. We often think too much of this world, and not enough of the world to come. That is not to say we don't think this world has value, of course it does, Christ created it! But we often spend so much time thinking about the things of this world, that we forget about thinking of the things of heaven, and how they can become a reality in this world God has given us. To be converted means that you have a different way of thinking; a mind that is changed to think on things of heaven and how they can become things of earth. "On earth as it is in heaven. . ." is the new mantra for the believer.

This text uses a couplet, in a sense, to talk about the new reality of becoming a Christian, and how we are supposed to feel and think. Because

we have been raised with Christ, a new life begins. That new life begins with a new heart (3:1). In this translation, it says sights, but "heart" is a great translation as well. "Set your heart on things above" is often how we hear this text voiced. So we begin with a heart that is cast to heaven. And then our minds (3:2) begin to think about the things of heaven as well.

While there is no greek word for heart used here, it is inferred from the context. The use of mind and heart really means that there is an expectation that the "converted" or "transformed" person will become one whose values and even loves are transformed by the grace and power of God to begin to think of the greater things, the heavenly things, rather than be stuck thinking about only the things of this world.

The command to think on things above, and the recognition that Christ is at the right hand of God (sovereignty) shows that we are to think about the rule of Christ in the world and in our lives. As well, our soul purpose is that we should make what is a reality in heaven a reality here on earth. This is a tireless and thankless job, but one that the Christian moves toward on a daily basis, seeking first the kingdom of God, and of course, His righteousness expressed throughout our lives.

6 The World is too Much with Us. Poem. William Wordsworth. (Excerpt) 1807.

7 Matthew 6:10.



How can we make heaven a reality here on earth? Can you list 2 things you can do today that will help make earth a little bit of heaven?

Where is it that you feel like you are the closest to heaven? Can you get there today or sometime this week or this weekend? Write down why that place means so much to you!



3 For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God.

4 And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

Paul is wrapping up this particular section by presenting 3 different reasons why the Christian should continue to seek the things of heaven. The reasons are: The resurrection with Christ (3:1) the new life source (3:3-4) and the future glory that we will share with Him (3:4).

Resurrection with Christ: Because you died with Christ, and were resurrected into His life, the life that you lead now is not your own. In fact, it is even hidden within the life of Christ. His life is what gives us energy, it is what gives us wisdom, and it is a never ending source of grace for us to lean into and claim as our own. Our classification as Christian comes from His life being manifested in all that we do, so at the end of our time, we will be known as someone who expressed a beautiful recollection of who Jesus is! It is in this way that the term "Christian" becomes not a label, but a verdict; one that we are worthy to wear.

The New Life Source: Christ is our life. Now, because of our death and resurrection with Him, that same power that brought him from the grave is now alive in us! What amazing news this is, and I am sure that it is not something new. When I lost my father last year, every time there was

a worship tune that spoke of freedom from the grave I would cry my eyes out. This truth becomes so real in times like this. And while my father is gone until Jesus returns, I can live with the comfort of knowing that the same power that brought Jesus from the grave will bring my father from the grave as well. Some say that is a "cute" way to still think about Christianity; but for me, it is one of the most powerful ideas given to us through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Future Glory we will Share with Him: When all is said and done, Christ will be glorified! That means we will see Him for what He truly is; God over all! And we will be seen as His people. While our lives remain hidden in His, we will see what grace really does for us at the end of all things. Whether we have been misunderstood, suffered for our faith, struggled to remain faithful, or have just lived a quiet yet obedient life, we will see everything that God has been doing for us through Christ so clearly as to be astounded by His love for us.

For these reasons, we should continue to look to heaven as a place to fix our minds, rather than onto the things of this earth. For we have a greater destiny than this earth, it is a destiny built from eternity and for eternity!



What do you think of when you think of heaven? What do you hope it will be like? Write down your thoughts.

How, even though our lives are hidden in Christ, can we manifest Christ and heaven on this earth? I know it sounds like the same question over and over, but we need to discover--each day-- a more profound expression of Jesus into the world!



What a powerful text we have discovered this week! The idea of living for heaven, even though we are here on this earth is always important. As well, understanding the power of staying close to the source is paramount to our overcoming sin. There is also the difficult texts that point us to how important a high Christology (or understanding of Christ as sovereign and transcendent) is to us. Rather than spending time worrying about what we eat or what we do each day, perhaps a deep focus on Christ was what the Colossians needed, and maybe that is what we need today as well.

It is easy for us to want to throw out the old structures when we find there is a new and more free way to understand grace. However, we should always be thoughtful about what those structures have given us, and how they have helped us, at times, stay on the path that God has for us. However, those structures will never save us, and sometimes cause us to become judgmental of others. The point of these texts is to remain deeply focused on Christ and let nothing distract us.

Here are some questions to go along with the sermon for this week.

1. When have you focused on behavior more than Christ? Did you grow up thinking that was the best way to live?
2. How can our church culture lead us to thinking more about what others are doing than thinking about what Christ is doing in us?
3. What does it mean to have our lives hidden in Christ's life?
4. What does it mean to be glorified with him at the end of all things?
5. Why should we always seek the higher things of heaven, rather than the things of earth?
6. How can we make sure that "the world is not too much with us?"
7. What can your group do that will connect heaven and earth today? What would that look like?
8. What is the best thing you think of when you think of the things of heaven?
9. What do you think it means to have your heart and your mind trained on the things of heaven?

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Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.



Week 7

COLOSSIANS 3:5-17

New International Version (NIV)

5 So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. 6 Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. 7 You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. 8 But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. 9 Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. 10 Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. 11 In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized,^[c] slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

12 Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

16 Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. 17 And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

3:5 So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. 6 Because of these sins, the anger of God

Now, even after Paul seems to have been lax, at least a little, on items having to do with the way we express our spirituality, he comes back pretty hard to make sure we understand that we are still to live lives that seek righteousness. Paul is always pretty good at putting lists together (See Romans 1, Romans 8), and this list is no exception. Paul is interested in putting to good order how the Colossians should look at living their lives. He wanted to make sure they were not living like those around them. To Paul, the idea of being set apart seemed to permeate much of his thoughts.

Interestingly, the themes of death and resurrection seem to continue in his thoughts. He first wants us to discard any vices that we might have. He then moves on to discussing the implications of being alive and involved in the Body of Christ.

He starts off with an interesting phrase, one we don't hear anywhere else in Paul's writings. Paul wants us to "put to death" anything that remains from our previous life. What are those things? Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires, and greed. Why should we put those things to death? When we die

with Christ, we are raised as new creatures, with new life, new habits, and new desires. However, even Paul understood that it takes a while to create those new habits, those new expressions of life, and to understand our new hearts. In some ways, Paul is being graceful to those in Colossae to remind them that they don't have to live this way anymore. Since those parts of them have been put to death, they should not invest in those things anymore. However, Paul seems to understand that this change takes time, takes intention, and takes the ability and power to sustain. Paul is giving knowledge here, which is important.

He lists 5 sins, 4 of which are sexual, and one that is idolatry (or covetousness). These five sins are sins of personal aggression. The person who does them thinks of themselves more than others. For Paul, this is part of the old self, which died with Christ, as we know think of others more than we think of ourselves.

He also gives one more reason not to sin, and that is the wrath of God. Many preachers spend a great deal of time on the wrath of God, what it looks like, and how it will feel to the individual believer. However, Paul does not spend too much time or detail here. The wrath of God is a fact for Paul, one that can only be thwarted by new life in Christ.



What does your new life look like today?

**What sins do you struggle with? Are they holdovers from your old life?
How can you begin to die to them?**

**While these sins do not separate you from God, they do build regret in
your life, how can you begin to separate from them?**



7 You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. 8 But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.

A second reason not to sin is that it connects us to our lives before Christ. That demarcation, that difference between death and new life is always so important to Paul. For many of us who grew up in the church, that line is harder to delineate. Because we have always been around Christ, and His culture has been our culture, it is difficult to see the before and after. Because we don't have some crazy conversion story, it is sometimes hard for us to see how we were before we were saved. In fact, many of us struggle to use the term "saved" at all, because things don't feel that much different.

I want to encourage you today, that things are very different. Before you had decided on Christ, you let the faith of others be your faith. You let your doctrines and traditions do your believing for you. While this may sound strange, it is true. When you accepted Christ into your life, whether it was when you were 12, 20, or 125, your faith became your own. You took responsibility, and so these words of Paul are for you as well. Once your heart has encountered Christ, you become a different person. Don't think Christ didn't save you from much because you around

the culture of Christianity for your whole life. Before Christ, you were lost, and after, you are saved.

Because of this salvation, because of this change, it is time to live a life that sees the longer view. Anger, rage, malice, slander, and even cursing, when allowed to be unbridled in our lives, takes us down a path that never leads to something good.

I am writing this in the aftermath of another shooting, this one a road rage incident. Growing up in Southern California, road rage was something that was real. I was once driving on the freeway, I must have been about 17 years old, and I inadvertently cut someone off. I didn't mean to, but as that person pulled up beside me, they had a pistol in one hand, and seemed to be making sure I knew that I was only living because they were choosing for me to live. Needless to say, I pulled off the freeway and hyperventilated for a while. Road rage could have killed me, and does kill many people each year. But rage never ends well for the person experiencing it, or for anyone else. It is a short-sighted reaction to an emotion, and Paul seems to want us to take a longer view of our lives.

To take a longer view means to realize that sometimes, it is best to let God handle our emotions, to not let things get the better of us,



so that we can live our lives without regret. Remember, regret always pulls us back to those things we wish we

hadn't done. Living the life that Christ wants for us means we can continue to move forward.

How do you want to move forward today?

Write down a prayer in your journal for those emotions that you would like to have God take away from you today, this week, and this month.



9 Don't lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. 10 Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him.

So, was lying a big issue in the church in Colossae? Is it a big issue in your church? If so, what are people lying about? And what were they lying about back then, in Pauls' time? Maybe it is just that people are people, and there always seems to be some sort of lying when humans are around humans? Did you ever have a friend that just seemed to not understand the difference between "spin" and simple lying? Someone who always had a better story than everyone else, but sometimes it seems so outrageous that it feels as if it is hard to believe? Perhaps this was the kind of lying that Paul is referring?

The truth is, we don't know for sure what specifics Paul was speaking to, but we don't have to. This passage continues in the vein that Paul had begun just a few verses before, that we should die to our old ways. The metaphor he is using now is like taking off an old coat, and putting on a new coat.

Could it be that easy? Could we really just take off our old clothes that defined us and put on a new outfit that God made for us?

Have you ever had a clothing crisis? Have you ever stood in front of your closet and taken a look and realized there is nothing in there that you would want to wear, that is flattering with the few extra pounds you are carrying, or that fits the season or where fashion is going just right? If you haven't, praise the Lord; but if you have, you know what I am talking about. Putting on new clothes can be exhilarating, but it can also be overwhelming, uncomfortable, and an exercise in insecurity.

What Paul is encouraging us to do is to take off those old clothes of unrighteousness, and put on new clothes that, while we may be unused to wearing, will ultimately make us look, feel, and be more like God. Wearing someone else's clothes can be strange, until they become your own, which they will the more you wear them.

So here is the question: What are you wearing today?

Can you think of a time you had to wear some clothes that were not your own? How did you feel?

Have you ever had a clothing crisis? What do you do when you get rid of your old clothes? Do you hold onto them? Do you throw them out?

What will you do with the new clothes that Christ has given you?



11 In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

Paul now moves from Character Creation to Value. What Paul does in this situation is to call out all the false divisions between us as humans. While the divisions are quite evident in New Testament thought, and in the life of the New Testament church, Paul doesn't seem to think they are real or valid.

So let's ask a question right from the beginning; What dividing lines do you place between yourself and other people? Is it race, is it belief, is it socio-economic class? What does it take to make you think someone is "them" as opposed to "us?"

These are tough questions for us. People are different, in some aspects. We don't all grow up the same, understand the same language, eat the same food, believe the same things about the world, God, and each other. We often make generalizations and assumptions about people and people groups we don't understand. We are often offensive, even unknowingly, and we often are offended by what other people say.

These boundaries, says Paul, don't seem to matter. "Christ is all that matters" and there is a simple reason that this binds us together: "He lives in all of us!" This is the great equalizer. We are all part of the kingdom, the same kingdom, the

kingdom that has no boundaries and has no borders. All who claim Christ have access to this kingdom, and all who have not are welcome to come in as they begin to see Jesus through each of us.

But you have to remember this statement and the context in which it has been given. It is no small thing that Paul is saying, rather, it is a huge statement of belonging. We live in a global society, but in the first century they did not. They lived in a small area, there were often skirmishes and wars with people around them(Although the Pax Romana stopped much of this), and just like today, there were gross generalizations and assumptions about people who were not like them. These attitudes were hard to change, especially because of the inability of most people to travel and see the world. Today, we can book a cruise, a flight, or a train from our phone. But back then, things were much harder. This simply builds in those prejudices much more deeply.

Paul is making the argument that we are all the same in Christ, because Christ dwells in each of us. That not only changes our status to brother/sister, it also means that we have become responsible for each other. Regardless of background, we have to take care of each other. We have to become the family that God wants us to become.



Who is in your family today?

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What does it mean to have Christ living in you?

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What can you do today to break down a dividing line between you and someone else in your life? Make it small, but make it doable!

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12 Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. 13 Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

Now, this feels like a turn around from the earlier texts that talk about sin! But Paul is making his lists again, and these lists are great, they are beautiful. While he is continuing with the metaphor of the clothing, he wants us to wear those things like Mercy, Kindness, Humility, Gentleness and Patience. We are asked to take care of each other, and to forgive each other. There is precedent for that forgiveness, in that Christ forgave us.

And then of course, there is LOVE. He lands on love because he knows that love conquers all evils, all divisions, and all brokenness. Paul is seeking for the Colossians to become a community of belonging, and that belonging begets living as a unified body for Christ. Here, he is talking about how we can develop those virtues that Christ has, and how we can then live those virtues together, if we

are all seeking the same thing, and that thing is Christ.

Paul here moves from asking us to personally be virtuous, to being unified corporately in that virtue. What do I mean? I guess, for Paul, Christianity has always been a corporate expression of who God is. You can't be a Christian alone. You need community. And as God works in your heart, that community, some call it the beloved community, becomes the corporate, or the collaborative expression of God in the world. This makes our witness not just our own, but also our collaborative effort of love.

It is easy to love in principle. It is much harder to love in reality. We can say we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, but when we have to live with them, it is much more difficult. That is why Paul emphasizes individual virtue, and also emphasizes corporate forgiveness and patience. Anyone who has grown up in a home of siblings knows how this works. You love them, and often want to kill them at the same time. However, we have to learn to live together in order to consistently be a witness for Christ as his body and as His expression of love to the world.

So how are you loving today? And is that love leading to the peace of Christ in your hearts?



**16 Let the message about Christ,
in all its richness, fill your lives.**

**Teach and counsel each other with
all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms
and hymns and spiritual songs
to God with thankful hearts.**

**17 And whatever you do or say,
do it as a representative of the Lord
Jesus, giving thanks through
him to God the Father.**

The section for this week ends with an incredible encouraging message for the fledgeling church in Colossae. First, let Christ, the words about Him and His words as well, be the thing that fills your life. When we fill ourselves up with the words and deeds of Christ, when he becomes our sole focus and purpose, our lives become richer than we could have imagined. I can give you proof.

When I was in college, I loved playing music. However, there was no place to play in church. I loved Jesus, but the kind of music I wanted to play didn't have a place in our churches at that point in time. So I went to a place where I could play that music, the club, the bar, the festival—just about anywhere that I could play. The band I played in got kind of “locally” famous, so we were a go-to band on the “scene” in the area. We got to the point where we would play 2-3 times a week. We never made any money, but we had a lot of fun. However, there was always a part of me that wanted to play for and with

the people that I knew believed like I did.

Fast forward a few years. I had accepted a call to be a pastor, and put behind me the dream of playing music. I literally had prayed and given it to God. But I met a few other pastors-to-be in seminary, and we started playing around a bit in my basement. One thing led to another, and we started playing the Christian music scene in the midwest region of the country. I didn't even realize there were other Christian bands out there. I thought Christian music was Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith, who I was not really resonating with. But we began to meet new bands, play more churches, youth groups, youth rally's and then some Christian festivals. It turned out that over the next 10 years I played to exponentially more people than I ever would have if I had simply continued in my own way.

**The moment you allow Christ to fill
your life, He will create an over-
flow. Simply because that is what
Jesus does.**

**He then wants us to teach each
other, and one another account-
able to what we know about Him in
His wisdom.**

And then we are told to sing



psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God!

He is explaining to us what church really is and can be. Teaching, Singing, Community.

But whatever we do, we do it for the glory of God and as representatives of God as well. Whether it is singing, giving testimony to Jesus

in our lives, singing, fellowshiping, working, or simply playing or praying, we do this as people of God and for God. Never forget that the world is interested in placing a verdict on whether you are a Christian or not. By living this rich and full and abundant life, we can show them what it really means to be a member of the body of Christ!

How has God showed you the richness He has for your life? Write them down!

How can you show others what their lives could be like if they were to accept Jesus as the sole and most important focus in their lives?



The texts for this week start in what seems as a pretty dark place, but end with a great reminder of the richness that we have in Christ Jesus. As we can see, Paul likes lists, whether negative lists, those lists of sins, or positive lists, of the fruits of living in Jesus, Paul is quick to delineate what it means to live in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ.

As well, Paul is making a distinction between the life that you used to live, and the life that we live in Christ. Before, there were things that we did as second nature, however, now we need to make

sure that we not only don't do those things, but we put on the clothes of our new lives, which bring so much joy and peace that our lives will be overflowing with all that God has for us. This will bring us to accountability not only personally, but corporately as well. Those changes we make in our lives will be expressed as the collaborative expression of Jesus in the world through our local body, or the church.

As you meet in your group, use these studies as your guide. Watch the sermon for this week and answer some questions.

1. What kind of lists do you like to make? Share with the group.
2. Are you the kind of person that likes to check everything off a list, or are you the type of person that makes lists and loses them? Move to the one or the other side of the room depending on which one you are.
3. How often do you find yourself falling back into the trappings of your old life? How can you get further away from that old life?
4. Paul uses the metaphor of putting on taking off old clothing, and putting on new clothing. What is that experience to you? Do you like buying and wearing new clothes? Is anyone around the group wearing new clothes today? How do you keep new clothes from becoming old?
5. If God promises that we will have a full life in Christ, what would that look like in your context? What does being filled with the Richness of Christ look like?
6. How can we become the corporate expression of Jesus in the world? What can the church do in a more profound way to show the world who Jesus is?
7. If you could do anything for Christ right now, what would it be?
8. If you could do something for someone in your life so that they would come to know Jesus



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.



Week 8

COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:1

New International Version (NIV)

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord.

19 Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

20 Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.

22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord. 23 Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. 24 Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ. 25 But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done. For God has no favorites.

CHAPTER 4

1 Masters, be just and fair to your slaves. Remember that you also have a Master—in heaven.

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord.

19 Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

20 Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.

This may take a couple of days. These are some texts that are hotly debated, have been used to oppress, and have often simply led people to say "I'm done with it!". They have also been used to forward some significant heresy around male-headship theology. So we are going to have to take a bit of a deep dive into these texts over the next few days.

Of course, there are those who say, "just read what it says. . ." and assume that this is enough for us to come to a clear understanding of the text. However, while that seems like it would be the easier route, it is possible that we do damage to the text in its original meaning and purpose. Why? Because Paul was not writing

specifically to modern people living in a first world country. Rather, he was writing to a young church, in need of instruction, and coming from a pagan world. This would have been a much different conversation than the kind that we have today about this kind of topic.

Perhaps we should first take a look at the order of the letter. It begins with an admonishment to Wives. (3:18) It would be good for us to ask why is Paul speaking to wives, especially if the husbands were the important ones? Remember, in their society, it is fair to say that women were held as significantly "less than." Some would say that they were considered possessions as much as anything. So, for Paul to address them, and to address them first should be seen as significant. In fact, in each one of the counsels, wives, children, slaves, we see a second counsel to the men that would be seen as suspect. This is how it is laid out:

"wives be subject to husbands_____ husbands love wives"
"children obey parents_____ fathers do not provoke children"
"slaves obey masters_____ masters treat slaves justly."

"The teaching on the left side of the paradigm was assumed in the culture. The original culture would have seen this teaching as familiar and safe and socially appropriate.

The instruction on the right side of the paradigm would have sounded revolutionary and suspect. The idea that the dominant member of the pairing had such responsibilities



would have been what the original audience would have noticed!"

In this way, Paul was being pretty radical in his teaching. First, to even recognize the women, children, and slaves as people to be addressed, there is something to notice. But also,

the directive of the counsel also, and more importantly perhaps, goes to the man, that he treat these categories as humans, and not possessions.

We will stop here today, but revisiting this text tomorrow as well.

Have you ever had to readjust your preconceived notions on something you have thought was one way, but changed to another way with more understanding? Is that something that is happening with this text?

If this is new information for you, how does it help you understand what the author was trying to do in his letter to the Colossians?



18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord.

19 Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. 20 Children, always obey your parents, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.

These “rules for the household” were not uncommon in the ancient world. However, Paul wanted to elevate those rules to a place where they not only kept some order in community, but also became rules that honored God. Neighbors of Christians in Colossae would have been comfortable with their expression of the cultural norms, but they would have noticed that there was a great deal more respect and love between the members of the household. The husband has been admonished to be a great lover of his wife, family, and even his slaves. This was uncommon and unusual for the time. And again, in this way Paul was creating a much different paradigm from which to live. This harkens back to Galatians 3:28-“... There is no Jew or Gentile, no Male or Female...” In a way he is elevating the conversation, as he was often wont to do.

In v.19, we see that husbands are to love their wives, and not to be harsh with them. This is some pretty distinctively Christian teaching! The world around them would have probably known such terms as

“to love” but it would not have been included in rules for the house at the time. But remember, Paul is coming from a worldview where the highest command is to Love.

It seems that Paul may be speaking more to the men than the women here. Why is that? Because The men would have been husbands, fathers, and slave masters. They are the one consistent in this whole conversation. The counsel then, becomes paramount to how a man is supposed to approach and treat his wife, his children, and his slaves. Could we see this as a reprimand for the man who is the object of this teaching? Perhaps, but more so, we should probably see this as Paul trying to hold Christian men to a much greater standard than the men of the surrounding culture.

Again, Paul is elevating the conversation from possession to love. From duty to loyalty and obedience. We can get so hung up on the discussion of submission for wives, that we forget the majority of the counsel goes to the man in this situation.

However, a great many heresies has come from these texts, particularly surrounding the idea of male headship. I would like to be clear, there is no male headship arguments in scripture when understood correctly! The trinity, often an example of hierarchical relationships in this way



22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord. 23 Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.

We don't keep slaves, nor are we slaves, so there is a possible disconnect with this text. But Paul is up to something here. He is working incredibly hard to raise the level of servanthood to that of a servant or slave of Christ, rather than of man.

At first glance, it seems that he is upholding a system of slavery and oppression that was rampant in Roman society at the time. Why would he keep this system in place? Why didn't Jesus, or at least Paul, sweep away with this kind of human servitude?

The truth is, we don't know. I have had someone make the argument to me that this must be the way God wants it, or he would have done away with it, but I find that very difficult to believe. Rather, I believe

that the gospel always works from within broken systems to help people unbreak themselves and connect them with Jesus. It is like the prisoner who finds Christ, while his body may still be in prison, his heart and his mind are fixed on things much greater and more expansive than the cell where he finds himself.

In the same way, Paul is reminding the slave that he/she should do his/her work not wanting to simply be an "eye-pleaser," or doing work that is done because the boss has an eye on them or to catch the bosses eye. This is to try and please a mere person. But they should do their work with sincerity, or "from the heart" in order to please God with the work that they are doing. In fact, says Paul, you don't even work for those people anymore, you work for God, he is your master. Which would have meant something to Paul as he often introduced himself to others as a "slave to Christ."

Have you ever felt like a slave to a boss who felt more like a taskmaster? How did you deal with it?

Is there a way to think not of that boss as your master, but as Christ as your master, and you work for Him in your job situation?

Would that change the way you see your day?



24 Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ. 25 But if you do what is wrong, you will be paid back for the wrong you have done. For God has no favorites.

Have you ever received an inheritance? What did it feel like? Was it from someone who was close to you, or did it fall into your lap like a gift you couldn't have foreseen?

Here, Paul is reiterating the fact that the slave is no longer working for a master, but is working for The Master, who is Christ. One of the hardest parts about being a slave is that you see no reward for your work. You literally "work like a slave" and then have nothing to show for it. It is simple exploitation. This has to be frustrating for the slave, how could it not be?

But with these words, Paul reminds the slave that there will be rewards for him or her, even if the lot they have is to be exploited in this life. There should be comfort for them in knowing that Christ has their inheritance stored for them, and so regardless of what happens on this earth, there is something greater to come. Of course, it seems to work both ways, if you include v.25 as well.

What is the best parenting you have ever done? What is the best parenting that has ever been done for you?

What can you do to give you kids hope today? What can you do to obey your parents today?

What does this mean for us?

While you are not a slave, have you ever felt undervalued? Have you ever been in a poor work environment? Have you ever wanted to not do a job well because of a bad boss, or the work is less than invigorating? Many of us have found ourselves in these environments over the years and seasons of our lives. We have to be able to remind ourselves of who we are really working for, who we are actually serving, and how we can transcend this tough situation by simply focusing on how we honor God with our work. To do less than this is to dishonor the name of God, whom we serve in these situations.

Think of the worst work situation you have ever had, did you survive it? Did it break you? Could you have found a better way to serve God there? Perhaps, or perhaps not. The good news is, you could leave. The words that Paul gives to those slaves, even though they can't leave, is that God has something so much greater for you, you can handle any of this! I think that is the word for you today as well. God's got this, you can handle it!



4 Masters, be just and fair to your slaves. Remember that you also have a Master—in heaven.

Have you noticed that Pauls' greatest concern is not really with a person's relationship with another person, although there is great wisdom in what he says? Pauls' greatest concern seems to be with a person's relationship with God. With every bit of wisdom that he gives, he seems to always turn it back to how this affects the relationship people have with God. You can see the impact of Pauls' focus here in v.4. He wants to make sure that the masters don't think too highly of themselves, as they have to answer to a God as well. This is perhaps a great reminder that we are to treat others with respect, with dignity, and with mercy, as we desperately want those same things from God.

Everytime we are reminded that we are not our own, and that we belong to God, our focus changes from us to others. It is that simple. Without that reminder, we are often putting ourselves as the priority. When we are reminded of God's love for us, and His grace toward us, we have to extend that grace to others as well.

Paul gives these words as he has great concern for the church's present predicaments. He is not as con-

cerned with the future, but of how we are to live today, and how they were to live as they accessed this letter. These were real problems facing real people, just like, in many respects, the problems that we face today.

Relationships will always be tricky, and we will always need wisdom to navigate their waters carefully. Paul wants this church to be filled with people who are given to mercy, kindness, loyalty, and to care for one another. Why would he, or God for that matter, want anything different in the church where you have found a home? How can we make our churches the place where these kinds of relationships; relationships based on equality, justice, and on Christian service to one another more of the rule rather than the exception?

I will ask one more question. How can we be humbled in our understanding of who we are so that we might be able to serve in a greater capacity? We sometimes become so great at our jobs, our careers, or even our hobbies, that we can't be bothered to see how we can use those things for Christ. While no one likes to be humbled, perhaps asking the question will do us good, return our priority to Christ, and help to change our attitudes.

Have you ever been in charge of someone? How has that changed your attitude? Postively, or negatively?

What can you do today in order to make Jesus a priority in your work?



**20 Children, always obey your parents,
for this pleases the Lord.**

**21 Fathers, do not aggravate
your children, or they will become
discouraged.**

Let's jump back for a second to the section on children. Again, Paul is elevating the conversation for children in that he recognizes them first, and asks them to obey their parents as if they have a choice. This makes a difference. Any parent knows that when your child decides to do as you say, rather than being made to obey, it is a much sweeter experience for all involved. As well, Paul raises the level again by reminding the kids that to obey their parents is what pleases the Lord.

And then in v. 21, he speaks to the fathers to not aggravate their children. And this is something that I can relate to. I have aggravated my children all over the place. From not listening, to jumping to conclusions, to creating a mess by trying to make jokes that weren't funny in front of their friends. I think that I have aggravated my kids in some pretty unique and pretty discouraging ways. Some of it has been in good fun, and some of it has been because I have forgotten that my God-given duty is to raise my children with a deep understanding and desire for Jesus in their lives, which is not an easy thing to do.

As parents, we work hard so that

our kids will love the Lord, but we also know this is not something that we can do for them. We try to give them a healthy outlook on life, on faith, and culture. We try to teach them the best ways to do things, and the things they shouldn't do. We try not to aggravate them, while at the same time making sure we take our role as parents seriously, knowing there will be times that we will have to say "no" to them. A no should not be the aggravation, but sometimes it is.

What we don't want to ever do is to discourage them. I don't know a parent who works to make sure their kids are discouraged about their lives or their prospects in life. I want my kids to know that they can do anything, but probably not everything. They can go in whatever direction they want, but there are some directions that are better than others. We want their unbridled enthusiasm to lead them to great places, but we also need to help guide their path to what God has in store for them.

If you are on a parenting journey, or if you are on a child's journey, these words are great for you. Children, obey. Dad's, give them love before instruction, hope before reprimand, and show them the way forward. Oh, and lay off the Dad jokes. It's probably best for all involved.





This sermon is going to cover a great deal of ground. The texts we have today are both difficult and incendiary. We will have to push on the way that people read scripture, give them a great deal of background and context, and try to reveal what Paul is trying to do in these texts. Again, this text often makes people uncomfortable, and some have undoubtedly left the church because of them.

But these words are actually really life-giving once you understand them. They elevated the way the culture was supposed to look at those who were often treated as possessions, and they gave direction to those who often were the oppressors.

Paul wanted the church to stand out in the world, but through love.

And the truth is, he wanted the world to stand out through the incredible way that they had relationships with one another. From families to slaves, Paul was looking for ways to lift up all who were involved. And of course, this was not easy to do in the timeframe that he found himself. Nor was it easy to do as the church was still young and trying to learn what it means to be salt and light to the world and to their context.

How can we, as a church, stand out in the world because of love? How can we become that salt and light, even though we are relatively young as a church? What can we do in order to forward the relationships we have and to lift them up as God would want?

1. Here are some questions to go along with the sermon:
2. Where have you had struggles in your relationships?
3. Is there any words of wisdom that Paul gives that might help?
4. Do you know someone who needs these texts redefined for them, so they can see what Paul was really trying to say?
5. Have you known anyone who uses these texts to oppress others?
6. How can we be the kind of wives and husbands, children and workers that we should be?
7. How can we, especially we men, become the kind of Christians that lift up, rather than oppress?
8. How can we stay away from "Male-Headship" theology using these texts?
9. What is the greatest things you have learned this week?





Week 9

COLOSSIANS 4:2-18

New International Version (NIV)

2 Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. **3** Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains. **4** Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should.

5 Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. **6** Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.

7 Tychicus will give you a full report about how I am getting along. He is a beloved brother and faithful helper who serves with me in the Lord's work. **8** I have sent him to you for this very purpose—to let you know how we are doing and to encourage you. **9** I am also sending Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, one of your own people. He and Tychicus will tell you everything that's happening here.

10 Aristarchus, who is in prison with me, sends you his greetings, and so does Mark, Barnabas's cousin. As you were instructed before, make Mark welcome if he comes your way. **11** Jesus (the one we call Justus) also sends his greetings. These are the only Jewish believers among my co-workers; they are working with me here for the Kingdom of God. And what a comfort they have been!

12 Epaphras, a member of your own fellowship and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings. He always prays earnestly for you, asking God to make you strong and perfect, fully confident that you are following the whole will of God. **13** I can assure you that he prays hard for you and also for the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

14 Luke, the beloved doctor, sends his greetings, and so does Demas. **15** Please give my greetings to our brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church that meets in her house.

16 After you have read this letter, pass it on to the church at Laodicea so they can read it, too. And you should read the letter I wrote to them.

17 And say to Archippus, "Be sure to carry out the ministry the Lord gave you."

18 HERE IS MY GREETING IN MY OWN HANDWRITING—PAUL.

Remember my chains.

May God's grace be with you

4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart. 3 Pray for us, too, that God will give us many opportunities to speak about his mysterious plan concerning Christ. That is why I am here in chains.

We are coming to the end of this epistle, this letter to the young church in Colossae. They are clearly a group that cares about what Paul says to them. His admonishments also show his deep care and compassion for them. And he begins to end the letter as he began it in the first place. A command to be a praying community. Every community of Christ should be a community that values prayer. Prayers for one another, prayers for revival, prayers for a deeper experience with the Holy Spirit, prayers for healing and prayers for blessing. All of these things help to bind together the people of God

Who are you praying with today?

Paul asks them for three specific types of prayers; a watchful prayer, and thankful prayer and intercessory prayer. This first term implies some mental awareness. In other words, pray with an alert mind. Again, another way to say it is to pray with an informed mind. Paul seems to suggest that when we pray, we should be praying for real circumstances, real people, real contexts, and real situations. This means that we have to know what is happening around us and to the people in our

community. For those in Colossae, Paul wants them to pray particularly for the spread of the gospel through him. He is ever watchful to find ways to preach the gospel of Jesus into the lives of those around him. He will even witness and preach while in chains.

The second prayer is a thankful prayer. This prayer is the one that always is reminding us that we have a great deal to thank God for each and every day. We are to be praying all the time a prayer of thankfulness in order to never take for granted that which the Lord has seen fit to give to each of us. The gift of salvation is the first thing that we have to be thankful for, and everything else cascades from there.

So what are you thankful for today?

The last type of prayer that we are asked to pray is a prayer of intercession, specifically that Paul might have more opportunities to share the gospel with others who don't know Christ. He particularly hoped to proclaim what he called the "mystery of Christ." This is the idea we saw back in Chapter 1:27, that Christ would be "in you." The abiding of Christ within a person, by way of the Holy Spirit recalls the intimacy in which Christ abides in us. This language of the Divine Dance is one that is particularly hard for those who encounter



it without more context of the gospel. Paul wanted to make this manifest in people, or to show what has been hidden, and we know that in Christ,

we can see all of who God is. This is what it means that Christ was the full expression of God. (Col. 1:19).

Who are you praying with today?

What are you thankful for?

How is your prayer watchful?

And for whom are you intercessing?



4 Pray that I will proclaim this message as clearly as I should.

It is fascinating to me that Paul, probably the greatest evangelist that ever lived, would want people to pray for him that he might share the gospel more clearly! For Paul, the preaching of the gospel was only part of how the gospel is given to the world. We must live lives that also share the gospel. But in this text, he is asking that he have a clear gospel presentation so that it would become manifest, or known in people's lives. Paul was always seeking ways in which to more succinctly share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Are you looking for ways to more clearly share the gospel? If you are not a preacher, is there a way in which your life can be a witness to what Jesus has done for you?

Knowing that people are praying for you is one way to persevere in the sharing of the gospel. Believe me, even pastors need to know that people are praying for them. Paul was no exception, this verse comes after an admonition to continue to pray for him, his work, and those who would hear the gospel from him.

It is significant to note that Paul has never asked that the prison doors be opened for him, but that within whatever context he finds himself he would have the opportunity to share the gospel with anyone.

You see, Paul wants to make the

gospel known to the world, as much as you and I do today. He believes that in declaring the mystery of Jesus, the world will come to know Jesus, love Jesus, and serve Jesus. In today's world, there is a lot of talk that Christianity is no longer relevant. And while the culture and language of Christianity might be lagging behind the experience that many people are having in the world, the one thing that remains deeply relevant to everyone is the experience of love. And for a Christian, to share the love of Christ, whether in deed or in declaration, becomes their life's calling.

This might be an oversimplification, but if a church is not growing, they have ceased to share the love of Christ with the world. Because love is always relevant to those who are seeking meaning, purpose, and community. I say that this is an oversimplification, but I am not sure that it is. Regardless of church programming, aesthetic, or anything else a church has to offer, if they offer the love of Christ, people will come and learn who Jesus is.

I think Paul, one who understands this deeply, wanted to make sure that his words clearly enunciated to the world who Jesus is, how His love is available to all, and how much He is available.

Are you looking for ways to share the gospel, whether in deed or in declaration?

What is the easiest way you can show the love of Christ to people today?



5 Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone.

Paul now speaks to the people of Colossae on how they should respond to people about the gospel, but to be clear, that response comes from having people in town observe the way that they live their lives. In a way, this makes sense of all the admonitions earlier on about how they were supposed to live. They were admonished to live in a way that would help make the mystery of Christ known. And here, Paul is giving counsel that when they live a certain way, people will ask, and our responses need to be gracious and winsome, attractive and thoughtful.

Did you think the gospel was an argument to be won?

Paul seems to be saying something different here. Not to be argumentative about what we believe, but rather, to be attractive and gracious in our conversations. I love this approach so much, because everyone can be a part of this type of responsive evangelism. Paul is reminding us that evangelism is not an event or a program, but the orientation of the heart that every believer must possess. The great part of these texts is the accessibility that everyone has to be a response for the gospel. You may never preach a sermon in your life, but you can

How can you give grace in your conversation as to why you are living and loving differently than others?

Have you ever had the opportunity to share the gospel in response to specific questions that people have asked?

respond with grace and intention to the questions asked by the way that you love.

That is not to say it is easy, perhaps that is why Paul mentions it. It seems like common sense, but people seem to think that if they have the best argument they can bully people into believing in Jesus. And I can tell you, without a shadow of a doubt, that this rarely, if ever, works. I know that there are schools of evangelism who teach this, who send people out every day to “finish the work” of the gospel, but sometimes those people are so offensive in the way they have been taught to share the gospel, that people are turned off.

What we have seen over the years here at Crosswalk is that when a congregation is deeply invested in loving the world around it, has intention and purpose in their interaction with their broader community, and clearly lives out the gospel of Jesus through finding ways to tangibly give compassion to the world, the kingdom grows out of a response to that love.

Does this seem to be too simple? Could it really be that we love the world and respond with grace when they ask why? Yes. It’s that simple.



7 Tychicus will give you a full report about how I am getting along. He is a beloved brother and faithful helper who serves with me in the Lord's work. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose—to let you know how we are doing and to encourage you. 9 I am also sending Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, one of your own people. He and Tychicus will tell you everything that's happening here.

"A comparison with Paul's other letters shows that the Colossian epilogue is unusually rich in personal messages and greetings. Only the conclusion of the Roman epistle can be compared with it."

Here we begin the final section of the book of Colossians. It has been a phenomenal journey, and Paul finishes his letter, like many others, with greetings to those he knows, encouragement, and reports of the gospel work that he is doing. He does this so that a link, a connection, between the church and himself might be created and strengthened.

He reminds them that he knows them, especially through Onesimus, who is one of them. This means that even though he is far away, and in prison, he is deeply invested in their community. He is wanting them to know what he is doing, and he wants

to encourage them and stay close to them, regardless of the situation.

But one thing to note, is that Paul is never stingy or jealous in this gospel work. He is always willing to share his role and his encouragement with those who he works. Onesimus, Tychicus and more. His travel companions are his friends, and with his friends he shares this gospel work with pleasure, not wanting to take all the credit for himself. This is a great way to think about how we share the gospel.

We share the gospel together.

We do it with friends, with family, and with other co-laborers for the kingdom of God. It is not something that we seek to keep for ourselves. There is enough work to go around, and if no one is concerned about the credit they receive, then much work can be accomplished. Is it any wonder that the disciples were sent out 2 by 2, rather than as isolated people. When we share in the work of the gospel, when we work in community, we will not only have much better results, but we will be encouraged along the way and not be discouraged by what we perceive as failures.

Who are you working with to build the kingdom of God and share the gospel?

How can you encourage your fellow workers?



10 Aristarchus, who is in prison with me, sends you his greetings, and so does Mark, Barnabas's cousin. As you were instructed before, make Mark welcome if he comes your way. 11 Jesus (the one we call Justus) also sends his greetings. These are the only Jewish believers among my co-workers; they are working with me here for the Kingdom of God. And what a comfort they have been!

12 Epaphras, a member of your own fellowship and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings. He always prays earnestly for you, asking God to make you strong and perfect, fully confident that you are following the whole will of God. 13 I can assure you that he prays hard for you and also for the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Let's talk for a moment about encouragement. Romans 1:12 reminds us that Paul was deeply interested in encouraging those in Rome, and he also mentions encouragement here in Colossians and the importance that encouragement is for him and the work he is doing, as well as the encouragement we are to give one another.

It is easy to become jealous of other people working for Christ that

are seeing some results and success. In today's world, it often takes the form of jealousy between communities of Christ. What I mean is that we get jealous when another church is growing or doing well. This is unfortunate, as this is the time we should be encouraging one another and learning from one another.

Paul seems to take the tact that all growth, all encouragement is kingdom growth and kingdom encouragement. He shares his work, encourages other communities, admonishes them to keep up the good work, and is clearly excited when a community is growing in grace and sharing the gospel. I wonder if we can be that positive to the communities around us that are sharing the gospel as well.

Why do Christians get jealous of each other?

We are human, and many things come along with being human. Paul never wants to get to that place, so encouragement becomes the watchword of the day. He welcomes work that furthers the gospel, and seeks to be an encourager.

Are you an encourager today?

How can you encourage someone in their work for the kingdom today? List 3 different ways you can be an encourager.



14 Luke, the beloved doctor, sends his greetings, and so does Demas.

15 Please give my greetings to our brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church that meets in her house.

16 After you have read this letter, pass it on to the church at Laodicea so they can read it, too. And you should read the letter I wrote to them.

17 And say to Archippus, "Be sure to carry out the ministry the Lord gave you."

18 HERE IS MY GREETING IN MY OWN HANDWRITING—PAUL.

Remember my chains.

May God's grace be with you.

This letter ends with a personal touch. He signs the greeting in his own handwriting. This is a big deal, as it seems it would have been hard. Why? He spells out what he has been through in another book:

2 Corinthians 11:24 Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. 26 I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not.[c] 27 I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.

Having been through all of this, it would make his greeting that much more important, as his hands would have barely worked, and I am sure, as he mentions in other places, his

eyesight would have suffered greatly for the blows to his head. So to write a greeting in his own hands must have meant a great deal.

I rarely get handwritten notes anymore. We all receive digital communication a great deal, but when a handwritten note comes, it is a treasure. To receive this last missive from Paul, with his own signature, must have been important.

I also love that he invokes grace as a final greeting. In this way, he ends as he began. In a sense, the entire letter argues for grace, that free gift from God that requires nothing but a belief and trust in the saving work of Jesus Christ, God and Human, and his death, resurrection and ascension. This is what Paul wants us to know.

We are saved by Jesus Christ.
We are sustained by Jesus Christ.
The gospel is the story of Jesus.
And his grace is available to all.
What a powerful word that has



As we wrap up this series guide, we want you to know how much we would like to encourage you in your walk with God, but also in the gospel work that God has given you to undertake. We are not jealous of it, but want it to be even more profound and effective in the world! We pray for this everyday.

Crosswalk church will always be on a journey of discovery to have a more clear picture of Jesus, and to share that picture with the world. This is why we take scripture so seriously that we spend time working

through each text, each word, and discovering the incredible meaning that God has placed in each part of the Scripture.

If you have been experiencing this with us in real time, or it is a small group study that you have chosen to undertake, we want to make sure that you are fully supported and encouraged through this work.

Here are some final questions for your small group experience, or for you personally as this last sermon puts this series to rest.

1. How can you be an encourager today?
2. Where in your life and ministry do you need encouragement?
3. How can Crosswalk pray for you today?
4. In your group, how can you set a culture of gracious conversation that can respond to questions with a target of helping people to understand the gospel?
5. What has been the biggest epiphany for you throughout this series?
6. What was the most important text to you?
7. What did you learn about God, about Jesus, and about yourself that is worth mentioning and remembering?
8. What part of this book did you most resonate with?
9. What is another book that you would love to really delve into?





Final Thoughts.

We hope that this has been a journey of discovery for you, and a way to come closer together with the people in your immediate circle, whether that is a small group or a some friends that have decided to go on this journey together. It has been a pleasure to study with you and consistently be a source of information for which you can dive more deeply into this amazing thing we call scripture.

I am constantly amazed at the depth of meaning, the expanse of love, and the overwhelming grace that I find when I take scripture seriously enough to spend time in it. May we never use scripture inappropriately, to forward our own agenda, but to thoughtfully and carefully seek to find a more profound expression of Jesus through it.

Grace to you, and Peace.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Tim Gillespie', with a stylized, flowing script.

Pastor Tim Gillespie and the Crosswalk Team.



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