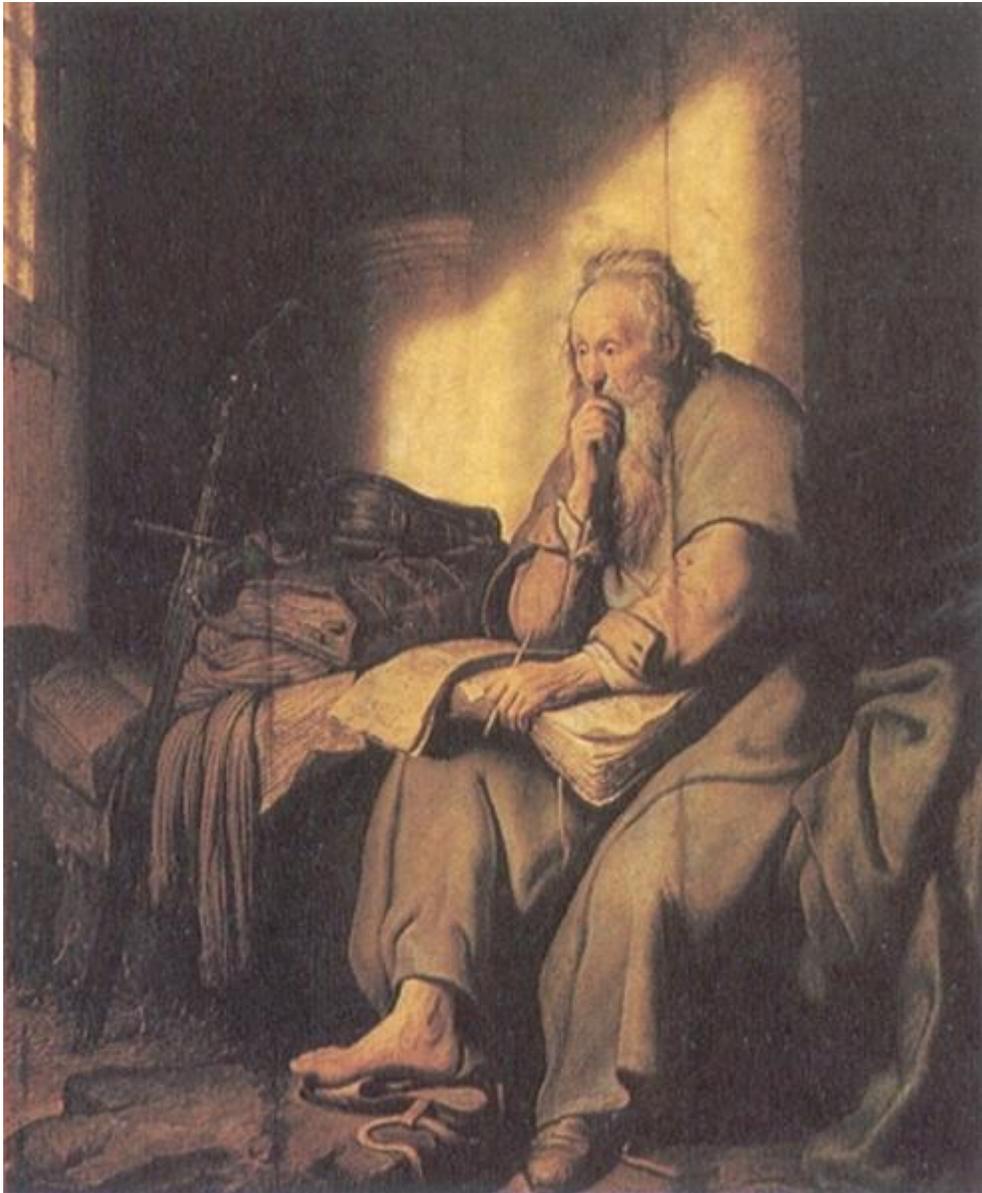


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***Paul's Letter to Philemon and
the Colossians***



Curtis Byers
2017

Painting on Front Cover

St. Paul in Prison

Rembrandt, 1627

60x73 cm, oil, panel, Baroque

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Preface

Paul's 'Prison Letters' (Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon) were written to congregations while he was in Roman custody. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul's references to the "imperial guard" (1:13) and to converts within "Caesar's household" (4:22) strongly suggest that Paul was in Rome when he wrote Philippians. There are no such references in the other three Prison Letters, although the correspondences between these three letters force the conclusion that were written in same time frame from the same imprisonment. Traditionally, Rome has also been thought to be the place of origin for these three letters. That view still has its defenders, but many scholars think it was written from an imprisonment in Ephesus. We will evaluate the available evidence, but one must be careful not to be too dogmatic about things we just do not know.

More importantly, since Colossians, the focus of our study, was written in the same time period as Ephesians and Philemon, it follows that similar themes or language in these letters can be profitably compared with each other. Consequently, this study begins with a quick overview of Philemon, and comparisons with Ephesians will be made throughout the study.

Lightfoot has been followed by modern commentators (e.g. McDonald, Porter, p.471) in his judgment that Paul's letter to the Colossians was to the least important church of all his letters. I doubt if Paul would agree. It may be that Colossae was the least important city, but no church deserves the branding as unimportant. And, as will become evident, Paul's teaching within this letter has been both enlightening and useful to Christians from the first century until now.

The *English Standard Version* (ESV; Text Edition 2011*) will be used as the basis of this study. Comparison will be made to the following translations: (listed by date of latest published revision)

KJV	<i>King James Version (1769)</i>	NASU	<i>New American Standard Bible (1995)</i>
ASV	<i>American Standard Version (1901)</i>	HCSB	<i>Holman Christian Standard Bible (2004)</i>
NJB	<i>New Jerusalem Bible (1985)</i>	NAB	<i>New American Bible (2010)</i>
NRSV	<i>New Revised Standard Ver. (1989)</i>	CEB	<i>Common English Bible (2010)</i>
REB	<i>Revised English Bible (1989)</i>	NIV	<i>New International Version (2011)</i>

May God bless our study.

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Front Cover

St. Paul in Prison

Rembrandt, 1627

60x73 cm, oil, panel, Baroque

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Christ knowledge flesh
everyone Laodicea Lord
another Jesus about Here God read known
kingdom Bondservants indeed being
world brother make body Therefore knit each
faithful evil received dwell everything greets
inheritance pray minister always Paul know put
making order whom now letter earthly Let image
Husbands glory knowing died See raised word church
hidden made among before peace just love
alive hope brothers circumcision whole
life human holy things Father one
fully death together all face walk
asceticism bearing together above heard
heaven faith servant fellow wrath
saints Grace mystery invisible according
beloved through elemental
Epaphras wisdom head hearts

The People and Places of Philemon and Colossians

Appia	AF i uh, AP fi uh
Archippus	ahr KIP uhs
Aristarchus	ar is TAHR kuhs, ehr iss TAHR kuhs
Barnabas	BAHR nuh buhs
Colossae	ko LAHS ee, koh LAHS sih
Demas	DEE muhs
Epaphras	EP uh frass
Hierapolis	high ur AHP o lis
Laodicea	lay ahd i SEE uh
Laodiceans	lay ahd i SEE uhnz
Nympha	NIM fuh
Onesimus	o NES i muhs
Philemon	fi LEE muhn
Tychicus	TIK i kuhs

References: Richard C. White, *The Vocabulary of the Church*, Macmillan, 1960
W. Murray Severance, *Pronouncing Bible Names*, Expanded Ed. B&H Publishers, 1994

Lesson 1

Letter to Philemon

The Letter to Philemon is the most personal of Paul's letters we possess. Although the content appears to deal solely with a matter between Paul and Philemon that involved Onesimus, Philemon's servant, it is instructive that the church that gathered in Philemon's house is included in the address. On its own merits, this letter deserves careful study. But our interest in the letter is primarily in its relation to the letter Paul wrote to the Colossians. As we read the text of Philemon and Colossians, we will deduce that Philemon lived in Colossae. Thus, this short letter to Philemon aids our understanding of the character of the church at Colossae.

Philemon

- 1 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved fellow worker
- 2 and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in
your house:
- 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 4 I thank my God always when I remember you⁹ in my prayers,
- 5 because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord
Jesus and for all the saints,
- 6 and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full
knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.
- 7 For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother,
because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.
- 8 Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what
is required,
- 9 yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now
a prisoner also for Christ Jesus—
- 10 I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my
imprisonment.
- 11 (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and
to me.)
- 12 I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart.
- 13 I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve
me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel,
- 14 but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your
goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord.
- 15 For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might
have him back forever,
- 16 no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved
brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh
and in the Lord.
- 17 So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.
- 18 If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my
account.

- 19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.
- 20 Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.
- 21 Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.
- 22 At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.
- 23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,
- 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.
- 25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Notes a All the pronouns ('you' and 'your') from verse 4 onward are singular, except v.22b "your people" and v.25 "your spirit".

Comments / Questions

1. This is the only letter Paul calls himself "a prisoner" in the superscription (v.1). There are four other references to his being 'a prisoner' or his 'imprisonment' (v.9, 10, 13, 23) in this short letter. Why this repeated reference?
2. The letter is addressed to Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and the church in Philemon's house.
 - a. What might be the relationship between Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus?
 - b. Any reason to think there might be other churches in Colossae?
3. Paul appears to have regularly used a secretary to write the body of his letters with him penning only the final greeting – at least that is the most natural sense of 2 Thessalonians 3:17, and is illustrated in 1 Corinthians 16:21, Colossians 4:18, and probably Galatians 6:11. So, is that the case here? Does v.19 suggest that Paul is simply writing that verse (or perhaps the remainder of the letter), or has he written the entire letter with his own hand?
4. The circumstances that gave rise to this letter are ambiguous. All we can be certain of is the following:
 - Onesimus is a slave (= 'bondservant') of Philemon. The name *Onesimus* means "beneficial, useful" (hence the play on words in v.11) and was a common name for a slave.
 - Onesimus has been with Paul and becomes a Christian because of Paul's teaching/influence (v.10, 16).
 - Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon with a heartfelt request on Onesimus' behalf.
 - Paul is careful not to demand that Philemon honor his request, but Paul is hopeful that he will.
 - Paul pledges to repay Philemon of any monies that Onesimus *might* owe him.

Three critical questions emerge from these statements. What possibilities exist for each one?

- a. Why, or how is it, that Onesimus is with Paul?

- b. What is the request that Paul makes of Philemon?

- c. Does Onesimus owe any money (or its equivalent) to Philemon?

Any way to determine which of the various possibilities are correct?

5. Given the apparent personal nature of the letter, why does Paul include the entire church that met in Philemon's house in his address? Letters were customarily read aloud by the messenger to the recipients. If that was the case with this letter, what would be the impact?

6. We only know the circumstances of Paul's imprisonments from *Acts*, and there are only two imprisonments mentioned in *Acts* that are of sufficient length for Paul to have written letters: his Caesarean and Roman imprisonments.
 - a. We will review these imprisonments in more detail in Lesson 3, but at this point simply note those associates who are with him and who send greetings. Should we assume that the sending of greetings imply that these associates are known to Philemon or the church in Colossae?

 - b. What does Paul's request that Philemon prepare him a room suggest about Paul's expectations? Is this surprising? Does the *Acts* account around his Caesarean or Roman imprisonment give any indication of him wanting/expecting to return to Asia Minor?

7. Pliny the Younger (AD 61 – c.113) wrote a letter to a friend on behalf of his friend's freedman. This letter is often cited as a parallel to Paul's letter to Philemon, but the differences are as important as the similarities. Although none of circumstances behind this letter can be assumed to be behind Paul's letter, it does, however, illustrate the role a mediator could play in a dispute. Read the letter below and note the similarities and differences with Paul's letter to Philemon.

Pliny's Letter to Sabinianus

To Sabinianus

Your freedman, whom you lately mentioned to me with displeasure, has been with me, and threw himself at my feet with as much submission as he could have fallen at yours. He earnestly requested me with many tears, and even with all the eloquence of silent sorrow, to intercede for him; in short, he convinced me by his whole behaviour that he sincerely repents of his fault. I am persuaded he is thoroughly reformed, because he seems deeply sensible of his guilt. I know you are angry with him, and I know, too, it is not without reason; but clemency can never exert itself more laudably than when there is the most cause for resentment. You once had an affection for this man, and, I hope, will have again; meanwhile, let me only prevail with you to pardon him. If he should incur your displeasure hereafter, you will have so much the stronger plea in excuse for your anger as you shew yourself more merciful to him now. Concede something to his youth, to his tears, and to your own natural mildness of temper: do not make him uneasy any longer, and I will add, too, do not make yourself so; for a man of your kindness of heart cannot be angry without feeling great uneasiness. I am afraid, were I to join my entreaties with his, I should seem rather to compel than request you to forgive him. Yet I will not scruple even to write mine with his; and in so much the stronger terms as I have very sharply and severely reproved him, positively threatening never to interpose again in his behalf. But though it was proper to say this to him, in order to make him more fearful of offending, I do not say so to you. I may perhaps, again have occasion to entreat you upon his account, and again obtain your forgiveness; supposing, I mean, his fault should be such as may become me to intercede for, and you to pardon. Farewell.

Translated by William Melmoth (Harvard Classics Series)

<http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/Halsall/ancient/pliny-letters.asp#GenPart XII>

Philemon, Onesimus, and Roman Slavery

Paul's letter to Philemon is not a treatise on the institution of slavery, but rather an attempt by Paul to persuade Philemon to grant his request and for Philemon and Onesimus to be reconciled. Nevertheless, both abolitionists and slavery advocates through the centuries have tried to use this short letter to support their cause. The crux of the debate centers on Paul's remarks in verses 15b-16 ("*that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother*") and in verse 21 ("*Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will even do more than I say.*"). Does the first passage mean Paul wants Philemon to free Onesimus ("*no longer as a slave*") or that Paul wants Philemon to regard Onesimus not *merely* as a slave? Even if it is granted that this passage is ambiguous, many believe the second passage clearly expresses Paul wish that Onesimus be freed. Yet, others do not think it is clear at all, thinking Paul could have in mind other things of which we are unaware. And so the debate goes on.

Slavery has existed in many cultures throughout time and, unfortunately, continues to be practiced in many countries even today. But slavery in the Roman Empire was an integral element of its society. It has been conservatively estimated that one-third the population of Rome and other large cities were slaves. It is difficult, however, to understand the social context of first century Roman slavery since many moderns see slavery through the lens of the slavery practiced in 17th-19th century America. Consider these features of slavery in the early Roman Empire:

- Race played no role. Slaves, as well as free persons, were of every race.
- Slaves came from several sources:
 - The chief means of acquiring slaves, at least until the first century, were captives of wars or pirating.
 - With the peace established by Augustus, the primary source of slaves was breeding; children of slaves were born slaves. 'Discarded' (exposed) children could be rescued to become slaves.
 - Criminals could be enslaved.
 - Debtors could be enslaved in lieu of payment of debt.
 - Free persons could voluntarily submit to slavery to better themselves.
- Slaves performed every occupation alongside free persons, with two exceptions. Work in the mines was reserved for slaves or criminals and slaves could not serve in the military.
- Slaves were legally considered property, and masters had great freedom in their treatment of slaves. There were voices within that society that argued for humane treatment of slaves, but they were not necessarily heeded. As a rule, slaves in mines or agricultural fields were treated harsher than household slaves who were considered

members of the household. By the second century, laws were in place to restrain harsh treatment of slaves.

- Slaves could own property (even other slaves!) and could perhaps purchase their own freedom.
- Slave couples were not granted the legal status of marriage, but could cohabit. Masters, though, could sell a man slave but retain his 'wife' and children, or vice versa.
- Slaves of high status (i.e. slaves of men having high status) were often given great responsibility and the corresponding authority.
- Slaves were regularly manumitted. In the first century, it has been estimated that 50 percent of male slaves were freed by age 30, and probably a higher percentage of females.
- Freed slaves became freedmen, a lower class of free persons. Although freed, they still had obligations to serve their former master.
- Freed slaves of Roman citizens, and their children, became Roman citizens. Many have speculated that this is how Paul was a Roman citizen – an ancestor was enslaved and subsequently freed.
- Consequently, some slaves had upward mobility which would have been impossible for poor peasants, even though free.

The New Testament shows familiarity with the slavery of that day (Mt 18:23f; 24:45f; Lk 15:22; 17:7; 1 Cor 7:21; 1 Tim 1:10; Rev 18:13). Slaves are regularly told to serve their masters well (Eph 6:5f; Col 3:22f; 1 Pet 2:18f). In addition to Philemon, other first century Christians had slaves. For example, various 'households' that are mentioned would likely include slaves (e.g. Acts 11:14; Rom 16:10f; 1 Cor 1:16). The very fact that Paul includes in his letters instructions to masters is evidence of Christian slave holders (Eph 6:9; Col 4:1; 1 Tim 6:1). NT writers often find it useful to use language of slavery as a metaphor for our relationship in Christ (Rom 6:22; 1 Cor 6:19-20; 7:22-23; 1 Pet 2:16). Paul uses it of himself (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Tit 1:2).

Slavery was just part of the fabric of Roman life, but, undoubtedly, Christianity has weakened and eliminated slavery wherever it has gain hold of men's hearts.

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Lesson 2

Colossians 1:1-2; 4:7-18

The context of ancient letters is often given in the opening and closing sections of the letter, so we will begin by studying these sections of Paul's letter to the Colossians.

Opening: Colossians 1:1-2

- 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother^a,
- 2 To the saints^b and faithful brothers^c in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father^d.

Notes a REB "colleague"
b NJB "God's holy people"; REB "God's people"; NAB "holy ones"
c NRSV, CEB, NIV adds "and sisters"
d KJV adds "and the Lord Jesus Christ". In all Paul's other letters, when he says peace and grace is from God the Father, Paul always adds "and the Lord Jesus Christ." At some point, a copyist apparently added by reflex that phrase to this occurrence.

Comments / Questions

1. Apart from his letters to the Philippians and the Thessalonians, Paul's letters to the churches (and even his personal letters to Timothy and Titus) always include, as here, his description of himself as an "apostle" with the accompanying statement that his apostleship is from God. Why?
2. Often in writing Christians in a city, Paul addresses them as a "church" (e.g. 1 & 2 Cor, 1 & 2 Thess). Since Paul does not mention the church, might that suggest there are multiple churches in Colossae? (refer to Question 1 in Lesson 1) Or, is it simply a variation without significance?
3. Notice how Paul speaks of the Christians in Colossae as being "in Christ." This is typical of how Paul thought. Christ is the *reason* we are related to each other, i.e., the bond of our relationship, or perhaps we should see him as the *realm* of our co-existence.

Closing: Colossians 4:7-18

- 7 Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister^a and fellow servant^b in the Lord.
- 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are^c and that he may encourage your hearts,
- 9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful^d and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.
- 10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas^e (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome^f him),
- 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision^g among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.

- 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant^h of Christ Jesusⁱ, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature^j and fully assured in all the will of God^k.
- 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you^l and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.
- 14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.
- 15 Give my greetings to the brothers^m at Laodicea, and to Nymphaⁿ and the church in her^o house.
- 16 And when this letter^p has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter^p ^qfrom Laodicea^f.
- 17 And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry^s that you have received in the Lord."
- 18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand^t. Remember my chains^u. Grace be with you.^v

- Notes
- a NJB, REB "trustworthy helper"
 - b NASU "bond-servant"; HCSB, NAB, CEB "slave"
 - c KJV "that he might know your estate"
 - d NJB, NAB "trustworthy"
 - e KJV "sister's son to Barnabas"; NASU "Barnabas' cousin Mark (about...)"
 - f KJV, ASV "receive"
 - g KJV, ASV sim. "Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only..."; REB "Jewish Christians"; CEB "Jewish converts"; NIV "Jews"
 - h NASU "bondslave"; HCSB, NAB "slave"
 - i NASU "Jesus Christ"; REB "Christ"; NAB "Christ [Jesus]"
 - j KJV, ASV, NJB sim., NAB "perfect"
 - k NRSV, HCSB "in everything that God wills"
 - l KJV "he hath a great zeal for you"; NASU "he has a great concern for you"
 - m NRSV, CEB, NIV adds "and sisters"; REB "Christians"
 - n KJV "Nymphas"
 - o KJV "his"; ASV "their"
 - p KJV, ASV "epistle"
 - q NASU inserts "that is coming"
 - r NJB "get the letter from Laodicea"; REB "my letter to Laodicea"
 - s NRSV "complete the task"
 - t CEB "personally"
 - u REB, CEB sim. "I am in prison"; NASU, HCSB "imprisonment"
 - v KJV adds "Amen."

Comments / Questions

1. Note Paul's circumstances at the time of the writing of this letter.
 - a. Paul is in Roman custody. Twice in this letter, Paul mentions his being in custody: 4:3 ("*on account of which I am in prison*") and 4:18 ("*Remember my chains*").
 - b. Paul specifically sends Tychicus to inform the saints at Colossae and, also, those at Ephesus (in very similar words – Eph 6:21) of his condition and activities. Presumably, Tychicus is the bearer of the letters to both churches, and even possibly the letter to Philemon. As such, Tychicus would also be the one to read the letters to the congregations.

Tychicus is "of Asia" (Acts 20:4) and accompanied Paul from Macedonia to Asia on the return part of his 3rd Missionary Journey. Paul (presumably later) possibly intends to send Tychicus to Titus at Crete (Tit 3:12), and later sends him to Ephesus again (2 Tim 4:12).

- c. Paul also mentions Onesimus (= Philemon's slave, presumably) as one who can tell them of his affairs. Based on Paul's remark that Onesimus "is one of" the Colossians, it is generally concluded that Philemon lived in Colossae.

Does Paul seem to have considerable freedom while in custody?

2. Paul typically sends greetings on behalf of his associates and extends greetings to those he personally knows among the recipients. In this case, Paul sends greetings on behalf of five of his associates, and only extends greetings to two people by name: Nympha and Archippus.
 - a. Does Nympha (only mentioned here in the NT) live in Colossae or Laodicea? Is there more than one church in Laodicea?
 - b. Where does Archippus live (cf. Phm 2)? Does Paul's command that he 'fulfill his ministry' suggest (1) that Archippus is an evangelist (cf. 2 Tim 4:5), and (2) that Archippus may not be doing what he should?
3. For each of the following associates of Paul, review the information given in the NT concerning them.
 - *Aristarchus* Acts 19:29 (a Thessalonian who accompanied Paul in Ephesus; dragged into the theater during Ephesian riot with Gaius); 20:4 (one of Paul's companions from Macedonia to Asia on the return part of his 3rd Missionary Journey); 27:2 (accompanies Paul to Rome – perhaps intending to debark in Asia or Macedonia); Phm 25 ('fellow worker' of Paul who sends greeting to Philemon).
 - *Mark* Acts 12:12 (John Mark – 'Marcus' is a Latin praenomen – son of Mary (otherwise unknown)); 12:25 (accompanies Barnabas and Paul from Jerusalem to Antioch); 15:37 (source of dispute between Paul and Barnabas); Phm 24 (with Paul and Sends greeting to Philemon); 2 Tim 4:11 (Paul asks Timothy to bring Mark with him when he visits); 1 Pet 5:13 (with Peter and sends greetings).
 - *Justus* Two other men named Justus in the NT (Acts 1:23; 18:7): one a Galilean Jew, the other a Corinthian Gentile.
 - *Epaphras* A Colossian, he is mentioned in the body of the letter as the one who took the gospel to Colossae (1:7). He is now with Paul in Rome (also, Phm 23).
 - *Luke* Author of Luke and Acts (by tradition) and, apparently, a regular traveling companion of Paul (the "we" sections of Acts). Only here is he identified as a "physician." He is now in Rome (also Phm 24). Later he will be with Paul when he writes 2 Timothy (4:11).
 - *Demas* 2 Tim 4:10 (Paul reports to Timothy that Demas left him due to his love of the world)
4. Laodicea was a nearby city (about 10 miles northwest of Colossae). Apparently, Paul wrote a letter to the saints there at the same time he wrote to the Colossians. Paul wanted both groups to read both letters.

Lesson 3

The Background and Setting of Colossians

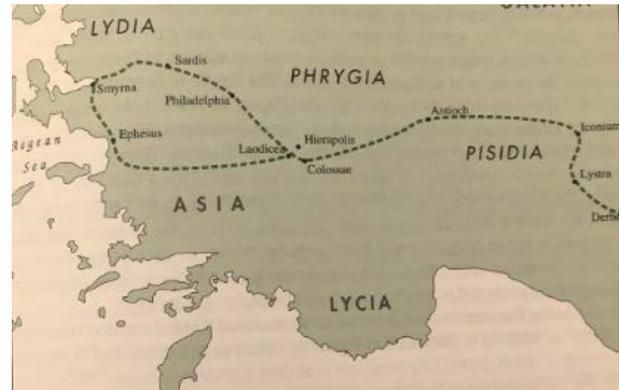
The City of Colossae At the time of Paul's letter, Colossae was part of a tri-city area along the Lycus River; the other two cities were Laodicea and Hierapolis (which are both mentioned in the letter – 2:1; 4:13-16). Colossae was by far the oldest of the three and played a leading role in the history of this region. This region was part of the Hittite Empire until its decline around 1200 BC when it became the southwest part of the then dominant kingdom of Phrygia. Under Cyrus the Great, it was merged into the Persian Empire in the middle of the 6th century BC. Subsequently, it became part of Alexander the Great's Greek Empire (334 BC) and then, upon his death (323 BC), part of the Seleucid monarchy. It was during this time that Laodicea and Hierapolis were founded. The kingdom of Pergamum (including the Lycus Valley) briefly asserts itself and gains independence until Antiochus III regains control. To bring stability to the region, Josephus reports that Antiochus sent 2,000 Jewish families to the area. But once Rome and Antiochus clashed, Pergamum aligned itself with Rome. Consequently, when Rome defeated Antiochus and imposed on him the Peace of Apamea in 188 BC, Rome restored to Pergamum its territories. Shortly, the last king of Pergamum, Attalus, died without heirs and he bequeathed his kingdom to Rome in 133 BC. Four years later, Rome organized the province of Asia.



During the time of Persian rule, ancient historians (Herodotus and Xenophon) report that Colossae was a large city as evidenced that both Xerxes and Cyrus could find provisions there for their armies while encamped there. Its wealth was, in part, based on its strategic location along the major road from the Aegean Coast to the east (see map at lower right).



By the time of the first century, Laodicea (and perhaps Hierapolis) surpassed Colossae in importance. Rome centered their government operations for the region in Laodicea. Around 60, the three cities were destroyed by an earthquake(s). It appears that Laodicea was able to quickly rebuild. The rebuilding of Colossae seems to have occurred, but the details are uncertain. The primary lack in our information is that, although the location of Colossae was found in 1835, it has yet to be excavated like Laodicea and Hierapolis.



The Gospel in Asia On his Second Journey, Paul had a desire to take the gospel to Asia, but he was "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6). But on his Third

Journey, Paul went to Ephesus where he labored for (more than?) two years (Acts 19:8,10). Epaphras, an associate of Paul, was the one to first take the gospel to Colossae (Col 1:7). This is consistent with Acts 19:10 "so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Further, it appears that Paul had not visited Colossae prior to writing Colossians, but he does anticipate visiting there once he is released from custody (Phm 22).

Roman Custody Although the historical record regarding Roman custodies is incomplete, we do know that there were several reasons one might be held in custody: protection, remand, awaiting sentence, awaiting execution, coercion, and sometimes punishment. From a third-century Roman jurist we understand that there were three principal categories of Roman custody:

- 1) Prison – most severe form for the worst offenders,
- 2) Military Custody – primarily used to ensure prisoners would appear for trial, etc., and
- 3) Free Custody – charge of the prisoner was given to an individual.

For both prison and military custody, a prisoner could be physically chained (to guard(s) or some structure). But, at times, Roman writers refer to 'chains' metaphorically to stand for confinement.

Paul's Custodies Acts only records four Roman custodies Paul endured: Philippi (16:19ff), Jerusalem (21:27ff), Caesarea (23:23ff), and Rome (28:16ff). But there must have been other custodies since when Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians 11:23 that he had been in "far more imprisonments" than others, Acts only records the Philippian imprisonment up to that time.

Two other custodies have been proposed:

- 1) Ephesian Custody during Third Journey – proponents cite 1 Cor 15:32 ("*fought with beasts at Ephesus*"), 2 Cor 1:8 ("*affliction in Asia*"), and Rom 16:3-4 (since Aquila and Priscilla was with Paul in Ephesus on Third Journey, 1 Cor 16:19).
- 2) A Second Roman Custody – proponents cite the difficulty of placing the Pastoral letters within the framework of Acts (which ends during Paul's first custody in Rome), which would be resolved if Paul was released for a period and then rearrested and put to death under Nero (according to Eusebius citing Origen).

The Biblical text and the traditions are not conclusive whether either of these imprisonments occurred.

Paul's Prison Letters Based on comments within the letters, four of Paul's letters have been generally grouped as 'prison letters': Ephesians (3:1, 13; 4:1; 6:20), Philippians (1:7, 13, 14, 17, 30), Colossians (4:3, 18), and Philemon (1, 9, 10, 13). Of the four custodies recorded in Acts, only the Caesarean and Roman custodies were of sufficient length for Paul to have composed letters.

Philippians contains several statements that strongly suggest that Paul was in Rome at the time he wrote that letter: "*the whole praetorium* (lit.)" (1:13), he is facing the possibility of death (1:20ff; 2:24; which is particularly persuasive since Paul, as a Roman citizen, could always appeal to Rome had he been imprisoned elsewhere); and "*Caesar's household*" (4:22).

Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were written at the same time, thus from the same imprisonment. Early traditions favor Rome as the place of writing and most scholars conclude the same. Several, however, believe Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus. The persuasive point for them is that they believe it is more reasonable that Onesimus would flee to Ephesus than to Rome since Ephesus was close. (Is it not just as reasonable that he would more likely to flee to Rome since it was far away? And, Luke, according to Acts, is not in Ephesus when Paul was supposedly in prison there.) Personally, I am not convinced that there was an Ephesian imprisonment. And, although I see good arguments in favor of Caesarea being the place of writing, I am going to proceed with the hypothesis that they were written while Paul was in Rome.

Lesson 4

Colossians 1:3-14

Colossians 1:3-14

- 3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,
- 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints^a,
- 5 because of the hope laid up^b for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel^c,
- 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among^d you, since the day you heard it^e and understood the grace of God in truth,
- 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant^f. He is a faithful^g minister of Christ on your^h behalf
- 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spiritⁱ.
- 9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge^j of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding^k,
- 10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.
- 11 May you be strengthened with all^l power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,
- 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you^m to share in the inheritance of the saintsⁿ in light.
- 13 He has delivered^o us from the domain^p of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom^q of his beloved Son^r,
- 14 in whom we have ^sredemption^t, the forgiveness of ^ssins.

- Notes*
- a* REB, CEB, NIV "God's people"; NJB "God's holy people"; NAB "holy ones"
- b* NJB, REB, NIV "stored up"; HCSB, NAB, CEB "reserved"
- c* KJV, ASV "the word of truth of the gospel"; REB "message of the true gospel"; CEB "true message, the good news"; NIV "true message of the gospel"
- d* KJV, ASV, NASU "in"
- e* "it" is supplied by the translator (also KJV, NRSV, NASU, HCSB, NAB, NIV). However, both verbs ('heard' and 'understood') could refer to the grace of God (ASV, NJB, REB, CEB).
- f* HCSB, CEB "slave"; NASU "bond-servant"
- g* NJB, NAB "trustworthy"; REB "trusted"
- h* ASV, NJB sim., REB, NASU, NIV "our". There is regular confusion between the Greek pronouns ἡμῶν ("our") and ὑμῶν ("your"). Besides having a similar appearance, both had the same pronunciation in later Hellenistic Greek. Although "our" has a better textual basis, the standard NA and UBS texts use "your". [Bruce, *Colossians*, fn 7, p. 40]
- i* REB "the love the Spirit has awaken in you"
- j* CEB "insight"
- k* KJV, ASV, NJB, REB, HCSB, CEB "wisdom and spiritual understanding"; NIV "through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives"
- l* NAB "every"
- m* KJV, ASV, NASU, NIV "us". Similar possible confusion between ἡμᾶς ("us") and ὑμᾶς ("you") [see *Note g* above]. NA and UBS select "you" (although the textual basis is indecisive). If so, Gentile Christians may be in view. [Bruce, *Colossians*, fn 27, p.45]
- n* REB "God's people"; NAB "holy ones"; CEB "God's holy people"; NIV "holy people"
- o* NRSV, NJB, REB, HCSB, CEB "rescued"

- p ASV, NRSV "power"; NJB "ruling force"; CEB "control"
- q CEB "domain"
- r ASV, NJB (lit.) "Son of his love"; NJB "Son that he loves"; HCSB "Son He loves"; CEB, NIV "Son he loves"
- s ASV inserts "our"
- t KJV adds "through his blood"; NJB; CEB sim. "our freedom"; REB "our release is secured"

Comments / Questions

1. Paul regularly includes a Thanksgiving Prayer at the beginning of his letters (exceptions: 2 Cor, Gal, Titus). The common letter of the day would normally include a brief health wish in the form of a prayer (see 3 John 2 for an excellent example), but Paul greatly expands on this form and will often touch on themes that will be addressed in the body of the letter.
2. Although Paul usually includes others in the opening prescript, his letters usually are written in the first-person singular ("I") starting with the Thanksgiving. In this case, Paul uses the first-person plural ("we") throughout the Thanksgiving before reverting to the first-person singular in 1:23. Whether Timothy is joining Paul in expressing thanks or this is an example of an authorial 'we' is impossible to determine. Unlike the letters to the Thessalonians where Timothy and Silas were known by the recipients (the only other time "we" is used in the Thanksgiving), we have no knowledge of whether the Colossians knew Timothy.
3. Paul's thanksgiving begins in v.3 ("*We always thank God...*"), but it is difficult to know where it ends. Some suggest it ends in v.8 (Bruce, O'Brien, Pao, Patzia, Thompson, Weaver, Wright), others think it extends to include Paul's petitionary prayer up to v.12 (Wall) or v.14 (Gupta, Witherington), and still others think it includes Paul portrayal of Christ through v. 23 (Dunn, Garland). For convenience, this lesson takes the middle view – through v.14.
4. As a first step in studying this passage, briefly answer the following questions:

To whom is Paul's prayer of thanksgiving addressed? (This is a constant in Paul's prayers.)

For whom is Paul thankful?

Why is he thankful for them? (Note this is the exact same basis for his thanksgiving in Philemon and Ephesians.)

What is the petition Paul asks in his prayer? (v.9)

What does Paul hope will be the result of God granting his petition? (v. 10)

5. Carefully read these verses and list both the positive statements that Paul makes concerning the Colossians' status and the aspirations Paul has for them.

6. Do these verses give any indication of a problem among the Christians at Colossae?
7. It seems that Epaphras was the one who originally took the gospel to Colossae.
 - a. When and where did Epaphras likely learn the gospel himself?
 - b. Would you agree that Epaphras has recently joined Paul bringing him information about the church at Colossae?
 - c. By the way, Epaphras is a shortened form of Epaphroditus. Any reason to think that this Epaphras is the Epaphroditus mentioned in Philippians 2:25; 4:18?
8. Paul's encouragement to them to thank God uses an interesting expression for what God has done for the Colossians: v.12: "*who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*" How has God "*qualified*" them?

Who are the "*saints*" (v.12, lit. 'holy ones') with whom we have been qualified to share in their inheritance?

9. For any Jew, the idea of 'deliverance' (rescue) and 'redemption' were rooted deep in their memory. Both at the Exodus and at the Return from Exile, God was said to have delivered and to have redeemed his people. Read Exodus 6:6-8; Isaiah 42:7, 16; 49:9; 62:12.

But a very helpful parallel to v.12-14 can be found in Paul's defense before Agrippa (Acts 26:12-18, esp. v. 18). Note the similarities.

Redemption

Looking at Luke's record of those who spoke of redemption is a helpful way of understanding the Jewish expectations:

*And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and **redeemed** his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, ..." (1:67-69)*

*And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, ... And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the **redemption** of Jerusalem. (2:36-38)*

Jesus speaking of the Destruction of Jerusalem: "*Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your **redemption** is drawing near.*" (21:28)

Cleopas, following the resurrection: "*But we had hoped that he was the one to **redeem** Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.*" (24:21)

“The Kingdom of His Beloved Son”

Given the frequency that Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God as recorded in the Gospels, one might reasonably expect to find references to the kingdom frequently in the remainder of the NT writings. That is not the case. For example, Paul only mentions the kingdom about one-seventh (1/7th) as frequently as Matthew (considering the length of their writings).

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Paul and other NT writers minimized, replaced, or misunderstood Jesus' teaching of the kingdom. Individual words cannot totally define or encompass grand truths. For example, God is both Father and King. To say that God is our Father teaches us truths about God that cannot be taught when saying God is our King. The opposite is also true. We need both terms for a more complete understanding.

Yet, Paul proclaims a new idea concerning the kingdom that is only hinted by Jesus (Lk 22:29-30; Jn 18:36): *the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Christ!* Paul uses the expression 'kingdom of God' (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Col 4:11; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5) more frequently than the 'kingdom of Christ' (1 Cor 15:24; Eph 5:5; Col 1:13; 2 Tim 4:1; 4:18 (probably)), but the fact that he speaks of both in similar ways unmistakably serves to elevate Christ.

Of the places where Paul speaks of the 'kingdom of Christ', surely this passage in Colossians 1:13-14 is the most powerful:

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Paul pits Jesus against Satan. The emphasis is that the 'power' of Jesus is greater than the 'power' of Satan. He can hold and protect those entrusted to him against Satan (but note it is God who places those in the kingdom of Christ). In Jesus, there is redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and Satan cannot steal them back.

For Paul to be in “the kingdom of his Beloved Son” is the same as being “in Christ” or being “a member of his body”. They all say the same thing with different connotations. They speak of those who are like Christ, who serve Christ, who follow Christ, who practices the way of Christ (righteousness), and who are blessed by Christ. In short, they speak of *Christians*.

And, in this passage, Paul uses the kingdom in the past tense. That is, we are now presently in the kingdom of Christ. Paul like Jesus and other NT writers speak of the kingdom as something now present and, also, as something yet to be obtained (Gal 5:21). This duality, sometimes spoken of as a ‘tension’, is common with other NT truths. For example, the NT speaks of us being saved now and as being saved in the future. The same occurs for words like eternal life, redemption, etc.

So the blessings we now have in Christ's kingdom will be so more abundantly real once Jesus delivers the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24).

Lesson 5

Colossians 1:15-23

Colossians 1:5-20 is probably the best-known passage within the book of Colossians, and a primary passage in the New Testament that speaks of Jesus' nature and roles.

Colossians 1:15-20

- 15 He is the image of the invisible^a God, the firstborn^b of all creation^c.
- 16 For by^d him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible^e, whether thrones or dominions or rulers^f or authorities^g—all things^h were created throughⁱ him and for him.
- 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together^j.
- 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning^k, the firstborn from the dead^l, that in everything he might be preeminent^m.
- 19 For in him all the fullness of Godⁿ was pleased to dwell^o,
- 20 and through him ^pto reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his^q cross.

- Notes
- a NJB "unseen"
 - b REB "primacy over"; CEB "first over"
 - c KJV "every creature"
 - d ASV, NJB, NRSV, REB, NAB, NIV "in"
 - e REB "also the invisible orders of thrones, ..."
 - f KJV, ASV, NAB "principalities"
 - g KJV, ASV, NJB, NRSV, REB, NAB "powers"
 - h REB "whole universe"
 - i KJV "by"
 - j KJV, ASV "consist"
 - k REB "its origin"
 - l REB "the first to return from the dead"; CEB "the first over the dead"
 - m NRSV, NASU, HCSB, CEB "have first place"; NJB, REB sim., NIV sim. "be supreme"
 - n NAB omits "of God"
 - o KJV "it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell" (sim. – ASV, NJB, NRSV, REB, NASU, HCSB, NIV)
 - p NRSV inserts "God was pleased"
 - q NJB "by his death on"

Comments / Questions

1. This passage speaks of the three relationships that Jesus maintains. For each relationship, what are the relations that Paul identify:
 - 1) His Relationship to God
 - 2) His Relationship to the Creation
 - 3) His Relationship to the Church

What are the key words in this passage?

2. John 1 and Hebrews 1 forms a triad with Colossians 1 in that they each highlight the same three relationships: (†) Relationship to God, (††) Relationship to Creation, and (†††) Relationship to Church.

Jesus Christ		
John 1:1-5, 14-18	Colossians 1:15-20	Hebrews 1:1-4
†† All Things made through Him.	† He is the Image of God.	God Spoke: - By Prophets.
††† In Him was Life.	†† Firstborn of Creation: - By Him and For Him All Created.	† - By His Son.
†† He became Flesh.	- Through Him All Hold Together.	†† Heir of All Things
† We saw His Glory from the Father.	††† He is Preeminent: - Head of the body. - The Beginning. - The Firstborn of the Dead.	†† World Created through Him.
††† From Him We received Grace.	† Fullness of God dwelt in Him.	† Radiance of God's Glory; Exact Imprint of God's Nature.
	††† All Reconciled through Him; making Peace by Blood of the Cross.	†† Upholds Universe by Word of His Power.
		††† Made Purification of Sin; Sat Down at Right Hand of God.

3. Looking closer at some of these relationships, answer briefly the following basic questions:
- What is the point of saying the Jesus is the "*image of the invisible God*"?
 - Based on the language alone, in what two ways might Jesus be the "*firstborn of all creation*"? (Both need not be true.)
 - Prepositions: All things were created "*by him*" (other versions say "*in him ...*"; any difference?), "*through him*", and "*for him*". What is the connotation of each?
 - What is another way of saying that "*in Him all things hold together*"?
 - In what two ways might Jesus be "*the firstborn from the dead*"?
 - What does it mean to reconcile all things "*in heaven*" unto himself?
4. Paul uses the metaphor of a body in describing Christ's relationship to the church: Christ "*is head of the body*". What does being "*head*" signify about Christ? One scholar wrote: "The title indicates His position of authority as Lord (Col. 1:18; cf. 3:15; Eph. 5:23), but at the same time it means that He is the source of the spiritual life which flows through the body and nourishes the members (Eph. 3:15f.; Col. 2:19)" [Marshall, *The Work of Christ*, (Paternoster Press, 1969), p.86]. Some dispute the dual reference to both *authority* and *source* and argue for one or the other. What do you think?

[*Note*: This argument takes on more heat when the husband is said to be "*head*" of the wife (Eph. 5:23). Egalitarians argue that it only means '*source*' (as the head of a river is its source).]

5. Compare this passage to Ephesians 1:19-23. In Colossians, Christ is superior to every power ("thrones...dominions...rulers... authorities") since the creation. How is Christ relationship to such powers describe in Ephesians?

Colossians 1:21-23

- 21 And you, who once were alienated^a and hostile^b in mind, doing evil deeds^c,
- 22 he^d has now reconciled^e in his^f body of flesh^g by his death, in order to present^h you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,
- 23 if indeedⁱ you continue^m in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope ofⁿ the gospel^o that you heard, which has been proclaimed^p in all creation^q under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became^r a minister^s.

- Notes
- a NJB, NRSV "estranged"
 - b KJV, ASV, REB "enemies"
 - c NJB "hostile intent through your evil behavior"; REB, CEB sim. "as your evil deeds showed"; HCSB, NAB sim., NIV sim. "because of your evil deeds"
 - d REB "God"
 - e KJV "yet now hath he reconciled" is part of v.21
 - f REB "Christ's"
 - g REB adds "and blood"; HCSB, CEB, NIV "physical body"
 - h REB "to bring him into is presence"
 - i NRSV, NAB "provided that"
 - m NJB, REB, NAB "persevere"
 - n NJB, NRSV "hope promised by"
 - o CEB "good news"
 - p KJV, ASV, REB, CEB "preached"
 - q KJV, NJB, NRSV, NAB, NIV "every creature"
 - r KJV "am made", NASU "was made"
 - s NJB, NRSV, CEB, NIV "servant"

Comments / Questions

1. Paul expands his comments about the reconciliation in Christ by building upon what he said in v.20.
 - a. How did Christ reconcile the Colossians?
 - b. For what purpose?
2. V.23 gives an important "IF". The Colossians will only be presented by Christ if they "*continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel*".
 - a. To shift from the gospel seems clear, but what does "*not shifting from the hope of the gospel*" mean"?
 - b. This is the second time Paul specifically mentions that the Colossians have "*heard*" of the hope within the gospel. (1:5; 2:23)
3. Paul, by the side, comments that the gospel has been preached "*in all creation*" (KJV "*to every creature*"). What does that mean?

Lesson 6

Colossians 1:24 – 2:5

Colossians 1:24 – 2:5

- 24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings^a for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up^b what is ^clacking^d in Christ's afflictions^e for the sake of his body, that is, the church,
- 25 of which I became^f a minister^g according to the stewardship^h from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully knownⁱ,
- 26 the mystery^j hidden for ages^k and generations but now revealed to his saints^l.
- 27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery^j, which is Christ ^minⁿ you, the hope of glory.
- 28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone^o and teaching everyone^o with all wisdom, that we may present everyone^o mature^p in Christ.
- 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works^q within me.
- 2:1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face,
- 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the ^sknowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,
- 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
- 4 I say this in order that no one may delude^v you with plausible^w arguments^x.
- 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order^y and the firmness^z of your faith in Christ.

- Notes
- a NJB, CEB sim. "It makes me happy to be suffering"
 - b NRSV, HCSB, CEB "completing"; NASU "I do my share in filling up"
 - c NIV inserts "still"
 - d CEB "missing"
 - e NJB "in my own body to make up all the hardship that still have to be undergone by Christ"; REB "completing what still remain for Christ to suffer in my own person"
 - f ASV "was made"
 - g NJB, NRSV, REB, CEB, NIV "servant"
 - h KJV, ASV "dispensation"; NRSV, CEB, NIV "commission"; HCSB "administration"
 - i KJV, ASV "to fulfill the word of God"; REB "to put God's word into full effect"; CEB, NJB sim. "to complete God's word"; NIV "to present to you the word of God in its fullness"
 - j REB "secret purpose"; CEB "secret plan"
 - k NASU "from the past ages and ..."
 - l NJB, CEB "his holy people"; REB "God's people"; NAB "his holy ones"; NIV "Lord's people"
 - m CEB inserts "living"
 - n NJB "among"
 - o KJV, ASV, NASU "every man"
 - p NJB "perfect"
 - q NRSV "inspires"
 - r KJV, ASV "my face in the flesh"; REB "not set eyes on me"; NASU "not personally seen my face"; HCSB "in person"; CEB, NIV sim. "not known me personally"
 - s NASU inserts "true"
 - t REB "secret"; CEB "secret plan"
 - u KJV in lieu of "which is Christ" has "and of the Father, and of Christ"
 - v NAB, NIV "deceive"

- w NJB, REB, NAB "specious"; NASU, HCSB "persuasive"; CEB "convincing"; NIV "fine sounding"
- x KJV "enticing words"; ASV "persuasiveness of speech"
- y NRSV "morale"; REB "unbroken ranks"
- z REB "solid front"; HCSB "strength"

Comments / Questions

1. The structure of v.24-29 can be seen in the following chiasm: (Note: A chiasm is a series of parallel sentences in reverse order. Thus, **A** statements are parallel, **B** statements are parallel, etc.)

A "Rejoice in my sufferings for your sake..."

B "To make the word of God fully known..."

C "the mystery...make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery..."

B "Him we proclaim, warning..."

A "For this I toil struggling with all his energy..."

The middle idea of a chiasm (**C** in this instance) is the focus of the passage.

2. Only Paul uses the term "mystery" in the NT (except for 3 uses by John in Revelation), and he uses it with different senses. For example, in 1 Corinthians 15 he speaks of the mystery of the resurrection and in 1 Timothy 3:16 it refers broadly to his incarnation, his ministry, and his ascension. But in Ephesians and Colossians it has a narrower meaning although expressed slightly different in each letter.
 - a. Paul is most explicit in Ephesians 3. What is the "mystery" in this passage? (Eph 3:6)
 - b. Yet, in Colossians, what is the "mystery"? (Col 1:27; 2:2; 4:3)
 - c. Are these two descriptions of the mystery compatible? In other words, are they saying the same thing?
 - d. By the way, why does Paul call these truths a "mystery"? (Eph 3:3-5; Col 1:26)
3. Paul often spoke of his sufferings (1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 11:23-28) that the Lord foretold that he would endure (Acts 9:15-16).
 - a. What was Paul's attitude toward his sufferings? Rom 5:3; 2 Cor 7:4
 - b. With whom did Paul share in his sufferings? Rom 8:17-18; 2 Cor 1:5-8; Phil 3:10-11
 - c. In surveying the above passages, on whose behalf did Paul suffer?

- d. In this passage, Paul seems to go a step beyond his other statements. What does Paul mean by "*in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church*"?

Were Christ's afflictions deficient ("*lacking*")?

Could this simply be another way of Paul saying that he shared the sufferings of Christ?

The same two terms '*lacking*' and '*fill up*' (= '*supply*') are used by Paul to speak of that which was done for him. Read 1 Corinthians 16:17-18 and Philippians 2:29-30. Is Paul condemning the Corinthians or Philippians? If not, how does this help us to understand what means about his afflictions as compared to Christ's afflictions?

4. In 1:28, Paul 'proclaims' Christ by both 'warning' and 'teaching' everyone.
- What is Paul's goal in proclaiming Christ?
 - How is a similar thought expressed in Ephesians 4:11-14?
5. Does 2:1 suggest that there are *none* (essentially) at Colossae who have personally met Paul or that there are only *some* there who have not met him?
6. In 2:4 we have the first hint of a possible concern Paul has for the Colossians.
- What, do you suppose, could they be 'deluded' about?
 - How were they to be 'deluded'?
 - Has this 'delusion' already taken place?

Lesson 7

Colossians 2:6-15

Colossians 2:6-15

- 6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the^a Lord, so walk^b in him,
7 rooted and ^cbuilt up in^d him and established^e in the^f faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.
- 8 See to it^g that no one takes you captive^h by philosophy and emptyⁱ deceit^j, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits^k of the world^l, and not according to Christ.
- 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity^m dwells bodily,
10 and you have been filledⁿ in^o him, who is the head of all rule^p and authority^q.
- 11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision^r made without hands^s, by^t putting off the ^ubody of the flesh^v, by^w the circumcision of Christ,
12 having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working^x of God, who raised him from the dead.
- 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses^y and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses^z,
- 14 by canceling^A the record of debt^B that stood against us^C with its legal demands^D. This he set aside^E, nailing it to the^F cross.
- 15 He disarmed^G the rulers^H and authorities^I and put them to open shame^J, by triumphing over them^K in him^L.

- Notes
- a NJB sim., REB, NIV "as"
 - b NJB, NIV sim. "now live your lives"
 - c NASU inserts "now"
 - d NJB "rooted in him and built on him"
 - e REB "grows strong"; NIV "strengthened"
 - f ASV "your"
 - g KJV "Beware"; ASV "Take heed"; NEB "Make sure"; REB "Be on your guard"; HCSB "Be careful"
 - h KJV, ASV sim. "spoil you"; CEB "enslaves you"
 - i KJV, ASV "vain"
 - j REB, NIV sim. "hollow and delusive speculations"
 - k KJV, ASV "rudiments"; NJB "principles"; HCSB "elemental forces"; NAB "elemental powers"; NIV "spiritual forces"
 - l NRSV, REB "universe"
 - m KJV, ASV, REB "Godhead"; NJB "divinity"; HCSB "God's nature"
 - n KJV, NASU sim. "are complete"; NJB "find your fulfilment"; REB, NIV sim. "brought to fulfilment"; NAB "your share in this fullness"
 - o HCSB "by"
 - p KJV, ASV, NAB "principality"; NRSV "every ruler"
 - q KJV, ASV, NAB "power"
 - r NRSV "spiritual circumcision" (omits "made without hands")
 - s REB "not in a physical sense"
 - t KJV, ASV, NASU "in"
 - u KJV inserts "sins of the"
 - v NAB "carnal body"
 - w ASV, NRSV "in"
 - x KJV "operation"; NRSV, NAB, CEB "power"; REB "active power"
 - y KJV "sins"; REB "because of your sins"

- Z REB, NIV "sins"; NASU, NAB "transgressions"
- A KJV, ASV "blotting out"; NRSV "erasing"
- B KJV "handwriting of ordinances"; ASV "bond written in ordinances"; NASU "certificate of debt"
- C KJV, ASV, NASU sim. "which was contrary to us"
- D HCSB "with its obligations"; NAB "with its legal claims"; CEB "with its requirements"; NJB "He has wiped out the record of debt to the Law"; NIV "having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness"
- E KJV, NASU sim., HCSB sim. "took it out of the way"; NJB "destroyed it"
- F KJV "his"
- G KJV "spoiled"
- H KJV, ASV "principalities"
- I KJV, ASV "powers"
- J NRSV, REB "made a public spectacle of them"
- K REB "leading them as captives in his triumphal procession"
- L KJV, ASV, NRSV, REB sim., NAB "it"; NIV "by the cross"

Comments / Questions

1. Paul, as he often does, draws implications from them "receiving Christ." The primary implication is that they are now "to walk in him." But what three things are necessary for them to be able to walk properly?
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)
2. Paul again expresses his concern. Being in Christ implies how they ought to live, but Paul warns them not to heed teachings that would draw them away.
 - a. He does not delineate the particular teachings in this passage (that will come later), but he does tell us the source of this false teaching. According to v.8, where does the false teaching originate?
 - b. What is the probable scenario behind Paul's warning: "See to it that no one takes you captive"? Is this teaching just something that exists "out there" in their society, or are there actual people who are trying to convince the Colossians of its superiority?
 - c. To Paul, there is a choice the Colossians must make: Christ or this "philosophy". Are they mutually exclusive?
3. To reinforce the point that Christ is sufficient, as opposed to human philosophies, Paul in v.9-14 highlights three things that God has done for the Colossians "in him" (Christ).
 - 1) The fullness of deity dwells bodily in Christ with the consequent of them having been filled in him.
 - 2) They have been circumcised by the circumcision of Christ when buried with him in baptism and then raised with him.
 - 3) They are freed from their sin since God cancelled their debt by the cross and thereby disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame.

4. Each of the three points listed in Comment 3 above raises at least one question.
 - 1) In 1:19, Paul has already made the point that the fulness of God dwelled in Christ. Why does he expand that to say that the fulness of God dwells in Christ "*bodily*"?

Paul expands his comment to say that the Colossians were "*filled in him (Christ)*" (v.10). What were they filled with?

- 2) Grammatically, the "*circumcision of Christ*" could mean either a) that Christ himself was circumcised (probably meaning in his death), or b) that Christ circumcised others (in their baptism). Could either make sense in this passage? Which do you think Paul means?
 - 3) Paul observes that we are "*dead in our trespasses*" and uses the metaphor '*record of debt*' to refer to our indebtedness to sin and its consequent, death. In forgiving us our trespasses he thereby '*cancelled*' the '*record of debt*'. So, to be clear, what exactly was nailed to the cross (another metaphor)?
5. By the way, who was it that forgave us our sins and disarmed the rulers and authorities? God or Jesus?
6. Review Paul's letter to this point. Is Paul addressing Jewish or Gentile Christians? Or both? What are the indicators?
7. As we have noted, both Colossians and Ephesians were written at the same time. This would be a good time to read the first two chapters of Ephesians. List the similarities you see in the two letters to this point.

Lesson 8**Colossians 2:16-23**

To this point, Paul has issued two warnings: not to be deluded with "*plausible arguments*" (2:4) and not to be taken "*captive by philosophy and empty deceit*" (2:8), but he has not specified (probably intentionally) what the arguments were for or what the philosophy entailed. In this section, Paul fills in some details that constitute what is conventionally called the 'Colossian heresy'.

Colossians 2:16-23

- 16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on^a you in questions of food^b and drink^c, or with regard to a festival^d or a new moon or a Sabbath^e.
- 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance^f belongs to Christ^g.
- 18 Let no one disqualify^h you, insisting on asceticismⁱ and worship of angels^j, going on in detail about^k visions^l, puffed up without reason by his sensuous^m mindⁿ,
- 19 and not holding fast to^o the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from^p God^q.
- 20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits^r of the world, why, as if you were still alive^s in the world, do you submit to regulations—
- 21 "Do not handle, Do not taste^t, Do not touch"
- 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used^u)—according to human precepts^v and teachings^w?
- 23 These have indeed an appearance^x of wisdom^y in promoting self-made religion^z and asceticism^A and severity to^B the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence^C of the flesh^D.

- Notes
- a NJB "criticize"; NRSV "condemn"; REB "take you to task"
 - b KJV, ASV "meat"
 - c NJB, REB, CDB sim., NIV "what you eat or drink"
 - d KJV "holyday"; ASV "feast day"; NJB "'annual festivals"; NIV "religious festival"
 - e KJV "the sabbath days"; ASV "a sabbath day"; NRSV "sabbaths"; NAB "sabbath"
 - f KJV, ASV, CEB "body"; NJB, REB, NAB, NIV "reality"
 - g HCSB "Messiah"
 - h KJV "beguile"; ASV, CEB "rob you of your prize"; NJB, NASU sim. "not cheated of your prize"
 - i KJV, ASV "voluntary humility"; NRSV, NASU, NAB "self-abasement"; REB "self-mortification"
 - j NJB "by anyone who chooses to grovel to angels and worship them"
 - k NJB, NAB sim. "pinning every hope on"; NRSV "dwelling on"
 - l KJV "things which he hath not seen"; ASV, NIV sim. "things he hath seen"; HCSB, REB sim. "claiming access to a visionary realm"
 - m KJV, ASV, NAB "fleshly"; NIV "unspiritual"
 - n NJB, NRSV "by a human way of thinking"; CEB "selfish way of thinking"
 - o NIV, CEB sim. "lost connection with"
 - p NJB "given by"
 - q KJV, ASV "increaseth with increase of God"; REB "grows according to God's design"
 - r KJV, ASV "rudiments"; NJB "principles; NASU "elementary principles"; HCSB, NAB sim. "elemental forces"; NIV "elemental spiritual forces"
 - s NJB, REB, NASU, NAB, CEB, NIV "living"
 - t NJB "eat that"
 - u KJV, ASV "with the using"
 - v KJV, NJB, NASU, HCSB sim., NIV sim. "commandments"; REB "rules"
 - w KJV, ASV, NUB, HCSB "doctrines"; REB "regulations"

- x REB "air"; HCSB "reputation"; NAB "semblance"
- y NJB "what seems to be good sense"
- z KJV, ASV "will worship"; NRSV "self-imposed piety"; REB "forced piety"; NAB "rigor of devotion"; NIV "self-imposed worship"
- A KJV, ASV, NJB, HCSB "humility"; NASU, NAB "self-abasement"; NIV "false humility"
- B KJV "neglecting of"
- C NAB "gratification"
- D NRSV "self-indulgence"; REB "sensuality"; CEB "selfish immoral behavior"

Comments / Questions

1. Paul gives two "*Let no one ...*" warnings; the first that no one "*pass judgement*" on them (v.16), and the second that no one "*disqualify*" them (v.18; especially since it was the Father who "*qualified*" them, 1:12).
 - a. Within each warning, Paul lists the components of the teaching that were confronting the Colossians:
 - 1) v.16 Questions regarding food, drink, festivals, a new moon or a Sabbath,
 - 2) v.18 Insistence on asceticism, the worship of angels, and visions.
 - b. How do Paul's responses show the shortcomings of these teachings?
 - 1) v.17
 - 2) v.19
2. It is commonplace for us to understand the OT provisions as a "shadow" of Christ; we see this as part of the typology of Scripture. But this idea is only used by Paul here and twice by the writer of Hebrews (8:5; 10:1). Paul may have borrowed this metaphor from Greek thought (think Plato and his *Allegory of a Cave*).
 - a. What is the implication of the Jewish-like practices being a 'shadow' and Christ being the 'substance'?
 - b. Compare this idea to the statement in Matthew 5:17 where Jesus said concerning the Law and the Prophets that he came "*not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*" Different way of saying the same thing?
3. The ESV translation "*insisting on asceticism*" (v.18) reflects one view (which may be better represented by the REB: "by the decision of people who go in for self-mortification"). Other (most?) translations go in the direction of the NRSV "*insisting on self-abasement.*"
4. Paul's reference to the "*worship of angels*" has generated multiple questions to which a wide range of answers have been proposed. The expression could mean:
 - 1) worship given to angels, or
 - 2) the worship given by angels.

In the first instance, these opponents would be encouraging something that is not proper; going beyond the high regard Jews had for angels as mediators of the Law (Gal 3:19). In the second case, the opponents are perhaps claiming the special privilege of seeing angels in their visions worshipping God.

5. By placing the words *"Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch"* in quotes (which are generally seen as food regulations), the ESV suggests these are the actual watchwords used by the false teachers in Colossae. Have some of the Colossians fallen for such talk?

6. In reviewing this section, how would you answer the questions:
 - 1) What does not promote real spiritual growth?

 - 2) Where does real growth originate?

 - 3) What should be the implication of 'dying with Christ'?

The Colossian Heresy*

Paul, in verses 16-23 of chapter 2, lists some particular teachings he wants the saints at Colossae to avoid, and to understand that those who teach such things do not have superior insights. While these false teachings were to some extent based on Judaism, they were not pure Judaism (i.e., based on the OT or even the teachings of the Pharisees). They had been mingled with "philosophy", "human traditions", and "elemental spirits of the world" (2:8, 20, 22).

Because those who espouse these teachings are "puffed up" (2:18), claim to be wise (2:23), and promoted asceticism (2:18, 21, 23), many have seen connections to Gnosticism that flourished later in Asia Minor and elsewhere, and which presented a strong challenge to Christians in the second and third centuries. This would also explain why Paul focuses much of attention on the person of Christ since gnostic views would demand that Christ was something less than God.

It would be helpful if we could identify the source of the teaching. In other words, is there an answer to this question: *Did any religious group in Asia Minor during the first century hold views regarding food & drink, festivals, new moons, the Sabbath, as well as, teachings that promoted asceticism, the worship of angels, and visions?*

Many proposals have been made, but no census has been formed. That alone suggests that the only realistic answer to the question is: *We do not know*. That being said, we do know that Asia Minor was home to a wide variety of religious views and practices. Various Jewish groups, in particular, are known to have absorbed teachings and practices from a diversity of their Greek neighbors.

Whatever the case, Paul condemns all such speculation; Christ, who is the express image of God, is all sufficient and it is in him that the Colossians are able to enjoy the many benefits they do.

* *This is the conventional designation of the false teaching threatening the Colossian saints, but the word "heresy" may be misleading. Later in the second century and following, the term heresy was used to identify the well-defined teaching of influential Christians that deviated from the accepted (orthodox) teaching. In this case, we are not certain how well defined the false teaching in Colossians was and, it certainly seems, that those expounding it were not Christians nor was it derived from Christian beliefs.*

Lesson 9

Colossians 3:1-11

Colossians 3:1-11

- 1 If then you have been raised with Christ^a, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
- 2 Set your minds^b on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.
- 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
- 4 When Christ who is your life appears^c, then you also will appear^c with him in glory.
- 5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality^d, impurity^e, passion^f, evil desire, and covetousness^g, which is idolatry.
- 6 On account of these the wrath^h of God is comingⁱ.
- 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.
- 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath^m, malice, slanderⁿ, and obscene talk^o from your mouth.
- 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off^p the old self with its practices
- 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator^q.
- 11 Here there is not Greek^r and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian,^s Scythian, slave,^t free; but Christ is all, and in all^u.

- Notes
- a HCSB "Messiah" (also in v.1b 3, 4, but not v.11)
 - b KJV "affection"; NJB "thoughts"; NIV "hearts"
 - c NJB, REB, NASU, HCSB, CEB "is revealed ... be revealed"
 - d KJV, ASV NRSV, REB "fornication"; NASU, NAB "immorality"
 - e KJV, ASV "uncleanness"
 - f HCSB, CEB, NIV "lust"
 - g NJB, NRSV, REB, NASU, HCSB, NAB, CEB, NIV "greed"
 - h NJB, REB "retribution"
 - i Also NIV, but KJV adds "on the children of disobedience" (sim. ASV, NJB, NRSV, REB?, NASU, HCSB, NAB in [], CEB), compare Eph.5:6
 - m NJB "hot temper"; REB "bad temper"; NAB "fury"; NIV "rage"
 - n KJV "blasphemy"; ASV "railing"
 - o KJV, REB sim., HCSB sim. "filthy communication"; ASV "shameful speaking"; NJB "abusive language and dirty talk"; NRSV, NASU sim. "abusive language"
 - p NJB, NRSV "stripped"; REB "discarded"
 - q REB "being renewed in the image of its Creator and brought to know God"
 - r NIV "Gentile"
 - s NJB replaces ",," with "and"
 - t NJB, NRSV, REB, NASU, HCSB, CEB sim., NIV sim. replaces ",," with "and"
 - u NJB "There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything"; CEB "but Christ is all things and in all people"

Comments / Questions

1. In 2:20, Paul writes "If with Christ you died...". Now, by continuance, he writes "If then you have been raised with Christ..." (3:1). Throughout this section, Paul contrasts the things to which we have died and the things which should characterize our new life.

2. Paul also uses the image of us being "*raised*" with Christ in Romans 6:4 and Ephesians 2:6. Look at those passages. Is Paul making the same point there as here?
3. Is "*seek(ing) the things that are above*" (v.1) the same thing as "*set(ting) your minds on things that are above*" (v.2)?
4. What is suggested by saying that our "*life is hidden with Christ in God*" and then that it will "*appear*" when Christ appears?
5. Paul gives two lists of vices: v.5 and v.8. They are to be "*put to death*" and "*put...all away*", respectively. Why two lists instead of one? How would one characterize each list?
6. How is covetousness idolatry?
7. What is suggested by "*the wrath of God*"? Does it mean that God is angry? Find other NT references concerning God's wrath.
8. Paul uses an interesting phrase to describe the growth of the "*new self*": "*which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*" Compare the translation of the REB (Note q). So, what does that mean?
9. Verse 11 sounds like:

Galatians 3:28 "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*" and

1 Corinthians 12:13 "*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*"

Is Paul making the same point in all three passages?

Lesson 10**Colossians 3:12-17****Colossians 3:12-17**

- 12 Put on^a then, as God's chosen ones^b, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts^c, kindness^d, humility, meekness, and patience^e,
- 13 bearing^f with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.
- 14 And above all these^g put on^h loveⁱ, which binds everything together in perfect harmony^j.
- 15 And let the peace of Christ^k rule^l in your hearts^m, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.
- 16 Let the wordⁿ of Christ dwell^o in you richly, teaching and admonishing^q one another in all wisdom^r, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual^s songs^t, with thankfulness^u in your hearts to God.
- 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through^v him.

- Notes**
- a NJB, NRSV sim., NIV sim. "you are to be clothed"
 - b KJV, ASV sim. "the elect of God"
 - c KJV "bowels of compassion"
 - d NJB "generosity"
 - e KJV, ASV "longsuffering"
 - f REB, CEB "be tolerant"
 - g NJB "over all these clothes"; NIV "over all these virtues"
 - h NRSV "clothe yourselves with"
 - i KJV "charity"
 - j NASU, HCSB, CEB, NIV "unity"; NJB "put on love, the perfect bond"
 - k HCSB "Messiah" (also in v.16)
 - l NJB "reign"
 - m HCSB, CEB "control your hearts"
 - n REB "gospel"
 - o CEB "live"
 - p REB, HCSB, NIV "among"; NASU "within"; NJB "find a home with"
KJV inserts "in all wisdom", associating it with the first phrase instead of the second
 - q NJB "advise"; REB "instruct"
 - r "in all wisdom" could modify "dwell in you richly" (KJV)
 - s NJB "inspired"; NIV "songs from the Spirit"
 - t "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" could be associated with the "teaching and admonishing", i.e. "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, ..." (KJV, ASV, NASU, NIV), or with singing as in ESV (NJB, NRSV, REB, HCSB, NAB, CEB).
 - u KJV, ASV "grace"
 - v KJV "by"

Comments / Questions

1. In 3:1-11, Paul insists that the Colossians "*put to death*" the things of the world (v.5) and then says that having "*put off the old self*" they should "*put on the new self*" (v.9-10). The imagery is that of putting on a set of clothes. Beginning in v. 12, what are they specifically to "*put on*"?
- | | |
|----|----|
| 1) | 5) |
| 2) | 6) |
| 3) | 7) |
| 4) | 8) |

2. It is not uncommon for Paul to identify those characteristics that Christians should possess. Compare these two passages and note the similarities and differences.
 - a. Galatians 5:22-23, "the fruits of the Spirit"
 - b. Ephesians 4:1-2
3. All these qualities that a Christian is to possess have already been displayed to us in God or Jesus. We are simply to emulate them. Paul makes that point specifically with respect to forgiveness: "as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." Explain: in what ways has the Lord forgiven us that serves as example to us in our forgiving?
4. At the top of the list ("above all these"), the Christian is to "put on love." It is clearly one of Paul's favorite words (used by him over 90 times in his letters – according to my Bible software). Why is it first in importance, and how does that relate to Paul's further description of it as that "which binds everything together in perfect harmony"?
5. The common theme of v. 15-17 is thankfulness. For what are we to be thankful, and to whom do we express our thanks?
6. There are many parallel passages between Colossians and Ephesians, but probably none more so than these:

Colossians 3:16-17

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

Ephesians 5:18-21

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

- a. Any real difference between the "word of Christ" dwelling in you and being "filled with the Spirit"? Why then the difference?
- b. Read the textual *Note t* above. Regardless of the translation, is it still true that one way to teach and admonish each other is through singing?
- c. There seems to be some distinction between "psalms", "hymns", and "spiritual songs", but the distinction is not clear. Psalms probably relates to the OT Psalms, hymns are expressions of praise to God or Jesus (= "Lord"?), and spiritual songs are probably best understood as "songs from the Spirit" (NIV; see 1 Cor 14:15).
- d. In Colossians we are to "do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" while in Ephesians we are to give "thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." What is the significance of doing things "in the name of" Jesus?

Lesson 11

Colossians 3:18 – 4:1

This section of Paul's instructions, along with similar passages in the NT, are referred to as 'household codes.' Paul gives instructions to six groups of people: wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants, and masters. At the end of this lesson, this passage is shown in parallel with Ephesians 5 and 6 (which also gives instructions to all six groups) and 1 Peter 2 and 3 (which only gives instructions to three of the groups). Besides these, similar instructions to (young) wives and servants are given by Paul in 1 Timothy 6:1-2 and Titus 2: 4-5, 9-10.

Colossians 3:18 – 4:1

- 18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord^a.
- 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh^b with them.
- 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord^c.
- 21 Fathers^d, do not provoke^e your children, lest they become discouraged^f.
- 22 Bondservants^g, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service^h, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearingⁱ the Lord^j.
- 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,
- 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward^k. You are serving^l the Lord Christ^m.
- 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partialityⁿ.

- 1 Masters, treat your bondservants^o justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

- Notes
- a REB "that is your Christian duty"
 - b NJB "sharp"
 - c REB "that is the Christian way"
 - d NJB "Parents"
 - e NJB "irritate"; REB, NASU, HCSB "exasperate"
 - f NJV, NRSV, REB, NASU, HCSB "lose heart"
 - g KJV, ASV "servants"; NJB, NRSV, REB, NASU, HCSB, NAB, CEB, NIV "slaves"
 - h HCSB, NAB sim., CEB sim. "not only when you are being watched"
 - i NJB "out of respect for"; REB, NIV "out of reverence for"
 - j KJV "God"; NJB "Master"
 - k NJB "will repay you by making you his heirs"
 - l NAB "Be slaves of"
 - m NJB "Christ the Lord"
 - n KJV, ASV "respect of persons"; NJB, REB, HCSB, NIV "favoritism"; CEB "discrimination"
 - o KJV, ASV "servants"; NJB, NRSV, REB, NASU, HCSB, NAB, CEB, NIV "slaves"

Comments / Questions

1. Comparing this passage in Colossians to the parallel passage in Ephesians and 1 Peter, the first thing that is noticeable is the relative brevity of the Colossians' instructions, except the instructions to servants. Of course, we cannot read Paul's mind in this matter, but why might Paul have given more attention to servants in this letter to the Colossians?

2. The instructions themselves ("*Wives submit to husbands...*", "*Husbands love your wives...*", etc.) are consistent with other teaching by NT writers. It is the reasons that Paul gives that are particularly interesting.

- a. What is the point of Paul saying "*as is fitting in the Lord*" in his instructions to wives?

Is this different to Paul's command in Ephesians 5:22 "*as to the Lord*"?

- b. In Colossians, Paul does not give a reason why husbands are to love their wives, but note the extended reason he gives in Ephesians by drawing a parallel between a husband and his wife with Christ and the Church.

- c. Compare the reasons in Colossians and Ephesians why children are to "*obey their parents.*"

Is obeying your parents "*in the Lord*" (Ephesians) narrower than obeying them "*in everything*" (Colossians)?

- d. Compare the instructions to fathers in Colossians and Ephesians. What is the second command to fathers given in Ephesians?

- e. Although the words are slightly different, the meaning of Paul's instructions in Colossians and Ephesians to servants are the same. But, what additional warning does Paul give in Colossians that is not in Ephesians?

- f. Interestingly, Ephesians add the warning (which is essentially the same given to servants in Colossians) to the master.

3. Any reason to believe these instructions are any less authoritative for us as they were to the Colossians (or the Ephesians)?

"Mutual Submission"

"Mutual submission" is a label given to a common teaching today that is based on Ephesians 5:21. There, in concluding his thought on 'being filled with the Spirit', Paul writes "*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" This 'mutual submission' is then the suggested lens through which we are to read Ephesians 5:22ff. So, according to this teaching, not only is the wife to submit to the husband, but the husband is also to submit to wife. Not unsurprisingly, feminist theologians are passionate promoters of this view (but, of course, some male theologians also teach it).

However, to be fair with the text, this also means that parents are to submit (obey) their children and that masters are to submit to their servants. The only way one can defend either of those conclusions is to redefine the word 'submit' to mean something like 'having love for' or 'be humble towards'. In other words, to make these verses make the same point of passages like Philippians 2:3 "*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*" But that is not what the word means. Consistently in the NT, 'submit' carries the idea of submitting to authority.

Paul's point seems clear: when one has authority over us, we are to be submissive to that authority. In some instances, we may be the parent, in others the servant. But, whatever the relationship, we are to be conduct ourselves as Christ would have us.

Ephesians 5 & 6

²²Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ... ²⁸In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ... ³³However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

¹Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²"Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), ³"that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

⁴Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

⁵Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, ⁶not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, ⁷rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

⁹Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

Colossians 3 & 4

¹⁸Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

¹⁹Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.

²⁰Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

²²Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

¹Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

1 Peter 3

¹Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, ²when they see your respectful and pure conduct. ³Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— ⁴but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. ⁵For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, ⁶as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

⁷Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

1 Peter 2

¹⁸Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

Lesson 12

Colossians 4:2-6

Colossians 4:2-6

- 2 Continue steadfastly^a in prayer, being watchful in it^b with thanksgiving.
- 3 At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word^c, to declare the mystery^d of Christ^e, on account of which I am in prison^f—
- 4 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.
- 5 Walk in wisdom^g toward outsiders, making the best use of^h the timeⁱ.
- 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt^j, so that you may know how you ought to answer^k each person.

- Notes*
- a NJB, REB sim., NAB sim. "Be persevering"; NRSV, NASU, HCSB, NIV "Devote yourselves to"
 - b NJB "as you stay awake to pray"; NRSV, REB sim., NASU, HCSB sim. "keeping alert in it"; CEB "and guard your prayers"
 - c KJV "of utterance"; NJB "for us to announce the message"; REB "gospel"
 - d REB "secret"; CEB "secret plan"
 - e HCSB "Messiah"
 - f KJV, ASV "bonds"; NJB, CEB, NIV "chains"
 - g NJB "Act wisely"
 - h KJV, ASV "redeeming"
 - i REB, NASU sim., NAB sim., CEB sim., NIV sim. "but use your opportunities to the full"
 - j NJB "with a favour of wit"; REB "never insipid"; CEB "and appealing"
 - k REB, NASU, NAB, CEB "respond to"

Comments / Questions

1. Constancy in prayer is a common theme in Paul's thought.
 - a. Paul often notes the frequency of his prayers: Colossians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 3:10; 5:17; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; 2 Tim 1:3; Philemon 1:4.
 - b. Paul encourages the same constancy in all Christians: Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6; 1 Timothy 2:8 (also note 1 Tim 5:5).
 - c. How is steadfastness in prayer a way of being "watchful"?
2. Ephesians 6:18-20 parallels v.2-4: "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak."
 - a. Compare both passages and how they each help to explain the other.
 - b. One difference is that in Ephesians the prayers are to be accompanied by "supplication" and in Colossians they are to be "with thanksgiving". What's the difference?

3. At the beginning of this letter, Paul emphasized that he prayed for the Colossians (1:3, 9) while now at the end he asks that they pray for him.
 - a. This is a pattern in some other letters of Paul: Romans 1:9-10/15:30; Ephesians 1:16/6:18-19; 1 Thessalonians 1:2/5:25; 2 Thessalonians 1:11/3:1; Philemon 1:4/1:22.
 - b. What two things does Paul ask they pray for?
 - 1)
 - 2)
4. In v.5-6, Paul redirects his attention toward unbelievers.
 - a. There are two primary points that he makes:
 - 1) They are to "*walk in wisdom toward outsiders.*" How does this relate to "*making the best use of the time*"?
 - 2) Paul stresses that their speech should "*always be gracious, seasoned with salt.*" How does this accomplish the purpose ("*so*") of knowing how they "*ought to answer each person*"?

Is this the same point that Peter makes? (cf. 1 Peter 3:14-16)

- b. Note other passages where Paul addresses our conduct toward outsiders: Romans 12:18; 1 Corinthians 14:16-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:12; 1 Timothy 3:7.

Based on the few historical records available, most scholars believe that Colossae was slow to rebuild following the earthquake and probably never regained its status. On the other hand, Laodicea and Hierapolis, both richer, rebuilt quickly. This might explain, in part, why Colossae is not included in the list of the seven churches in Asia that were addressed by John in Revelation. Laodicea is included (Rev 3:14-22), listed last since it appears the churches are listed in the order in which the letters were delivered (starting in Ephesus and proceeding clockwise (on the map) throughout Asia). Interestingly, John notes the pride that the Laodiceans took in their wealth.

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COLOSSIANS: A Structural Outline (ESV)

Colossians 1

1 Paul,
 an apostle
 of Christ Jesus
 by the will of God,
and
Timothy
 our brother,
2 To the saints
 and
 faithful brothers
 in Christ
 at Colossae:
Grace to you
and
peace from God
 our Father.
3 We always thank God,
 the Father
 of our Lord Jesus Christ,
 when we pray for you,
4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus
 and
 of the love that you have for all the saints,
5 because of the hope laid up for you
 in heaven.

Of this you have heard
before
in the word of the truth,
the gospel,
6 which has come to you,
as indeed in the whole world
it is bearing fruit
and
increasing—as it also does among you,
since the day you heard it
and
understood the grace of God in truth,
7 just as you learned it
from Epaphras
our beloved fellow servant.
He is a faithful minister
of Christ
on your behalf
8 and
has made known to us your love in the Spirit.
9 And so,
from the day we heard,
we have not ceased to pray for you,
asking that you may be filled
with the knowledge of his will
in all spiritual wisdom
and
understanding,

10 so as to walk in a manner
worthy of the Lord,
fully pleasing to him,
bearing fruit in every good work
and
increasing in the knowledge of God.

11 May you be strengthened
with all power,
according to his glorious might,
for all endurance
and
patience with joy,

12 giving thanks to the Father,
who has qualified you
to share in the inheritance of the saints
in light.

13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness
and
transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

14 in whom we have redemption,
the forgiveness
of sins.

15 He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation.

16 For by him all things were created,
in heaven
and
on earth,

visible
and
invisible,

whether thrones
or dominions
or rulers
or authorities—

all things were created
through him
and
for him.

17 And
he is before all things,
and
in him all things hold together.

18 And
he is the head of the body,
the church.
He is the beginning,
the firstborn from the dead,
that in everything he might be preminent.

19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

20 and
through him to reconcile
to himself
all things,
whether on earth
or
in heaven,

making peace by the blood of his cross.

21 And

you,

who once were alienated

and

hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh

by his death,

in order to present you holy

and

blameless

and

above reproach before him,

23 if indeed

you continue in the faith,

stable

and

steadfast,

not shifting from the hope of the gospel

that you heard,

which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven,

and

of which I,

Paul, became a minister.

24 Now

I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake,

and, in my flesh

I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body,

that is, the church,

25 of which

I became a minister

according to the stewardship

from God

that was given to me for you,

to make the word of God fully known,

26

the mystery hidden for ages

and

generations

but now revealed

to his saints.

27 To them

God chose to make known

how great

among the Gentiles

are the riches of the glory of this mystery,

which is Christ in you,

the hope of glory.

28 Him we proclaim,

warning everyone

and

teaching everyone

with all wisdom,

that we

may present everyone mature in Christ.

29 For this I toil,

struggling

with all his energy

that he powerfully works within me.

Colossians 2

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

just as you were taught,
abounding in thanksgiving.

8 See to it that

no one takes you captive by philosophy
and
empty deceit,

according to human tradition,
according to the elemental spirits of the world,
and
not according to Christ.

9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,

10 and

you have been filled in him,

who is the head of all rule
and
authority.

11 In him also

you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands,
by putting off the body of the flesh,
by the circumcision of Christ,

12 having been buried with him

in baptism,

in which

you were also raised with him

through faith

in the powerful working of God,

who raised him from the dead.

13 And

you, who were dead in your trespasses

and
the uncircumcision of your flesh,
God made alive together with him,
having forgiven us all our trespasses,
14 by canceling the record of debt
that stood against us with its legal demands.
This he set aside,
nailing it to the cross.

15 He disarmed the rulers
and
authorities
and
put them to open shame,
by triumphing over them
in him.

16 Therefore
let no one pass judgment on you
in questions of food
and
drink,
or
with regard to a festival
or
a new moon
or
a Sabbath.

17 These are a shadow of the things to come,
but the substance belongs to Christ.

18 Let no one disqualify you,
insisting on asceticism
and
worship of angels,
going on in detail about visions,
puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,
19 and
not holding fast to the Head,
from whom the whole body,
nourished
and
knit together through its joints
and
ligaments,
grows with a growth
that is from God.

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world,
why, as if you were still alive in the world,
do you submit to regulations—

21 "Do not handle,
Do not taste,
Do not touch"

22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—
according to human precepts
and
teachings?

23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom
in promoting self-made religion
and

asceticism

and

severity to the body,

but

they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Colossians 3

- 1 If then you have been raised with Christ,
seek the things that are above,
where Christ is,
seated at the right hand of God.
- 2 Set your minds on things that are above,
not on things that are on earth.
- 3 For you have died,
and
your life is hidden with Christ in God.
- 4 When Christ who is your life appears,
then you also will appear
with him
in glory.
- 5 Put to death therefore
what is earthly in you: sexual immorality,
impurity,
passion,
evil desire,
and
covetousness,
which is idolatry.
- 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

7 In these you too once walked,
when you were living in them.

8 But now you must put them all away: anger,
wrath,
malice,
slander,
and
obscene talk from your mouth.

9 Do not lie to one another,
seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices

10 and
have put on the new self,
which is being renewed
in knowledge
after the image of its creator.

11 Here there is not Greek
and
Jew,
circumcised
and
uncircumcised,
barbarian,
Scythian,
slave,
free;

but Christ is all,
and
in all.

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones,

holy

and

beloved,

compassionate hearts,

kindness,

humility,

meekness,

and

patience,

13 bearing with one another

and,

if one has a complaint against another,

forgiving each other;

as the Lord has forgiven you,

so you also must forgive.

14 And above all these

put on

love,

which binds everything

together

in perfect harmony.

15 And

let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,

to which indeed you were called in one body.

And

be thankful.

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,

teaching

and
admonishing one another
in all wisdom,
singing psalms
and
hymns
and
spiritual songs,
with thankfulness in your hearts
to God.

17 And
whatever you do,
in word
or
deed,
do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father
through him.

18 Wives, submit to your husbands,
as is fitting in the Lord.

19 Husbands, love your wives,
and
do not be harsh with them.

20 Children, obey your parents in everything,
for this pleases the Lord.

21 Fathers, do not provoke your children,
lest they become discouraged.

22 Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters,
not by way of eye-service,

as people-pleasers,
but with sincerity of heart,
fearing the Lord.

23 Whatever you do,

work heartily,
as for the Lord
and
not for men,

24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance
as your reward.

You are serving the Lord Christ.

25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong
he has done,
and
there is no partiality.

Colossians 4

1 Masters, treat your bondservants
justly
and
fairly,
knowing that you also have a Master
in heaven.

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

3 At the same time,
pray also for us,
that God may open to us

a door for the word,
to declare the mystery of Christ,
on account of which I am in prison—

4 that I may make it clear,

which is how I ought to speak.

5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders,
making the best use of the time.

6 Let your speech always be gracious,
seasoned with salt,

so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

7 Tychicus will tell you all about my activities.

He is a beloved brother

and

faithful minister

and

fellow servant in the Lord.

8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose,

that you may know how we are

and

that he may encourage your hearts,

9 and with him

Onesimus, our faithful

and

beloved brother,

who is one of you.

They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you,

and

Mark the cousin of Barnabas

(concerning whom you have received instructions

—if he comes to you, welcome him),

11 and

Jesus who is called Justus.

These are the only men

of the circumcision

among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God,

and

they have been a comfort to me.

12 Epaphras, who is one of you,

a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you,

always struggling on your behalf

in his prayers,

that you may stand mature

and

fully assured in all the will of God.

13 For I bear him witness

that he has worked hard for you

and

for those in Laodicea

and

in Hierapolis.

14 Luke the beloved physician greets you,

as does Demas.

15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea,

and

to Nympha

and

the church in her house.

16 And
when this letter has been read among you,
have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans;
and
see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.

17 And
say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."

18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

Remember my chains.

Grace be with you.