

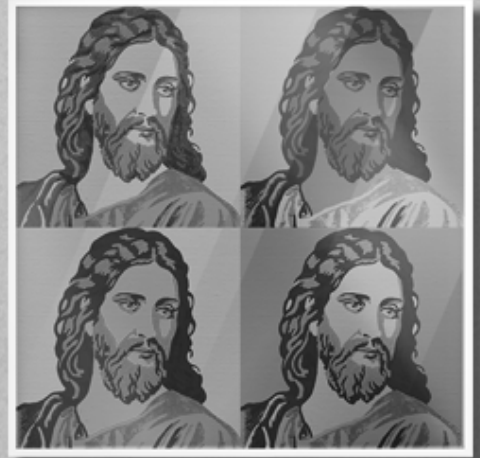
BAND OF BROTHERS

# No Other Jesus

A STUDY IN THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

Rediscovering the Sufficiency and Superiority of Christ

SUMMER 2025



## The Book of Colossians

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

**2** To the saints and faithful brothers<sup>[a]</sup> in Christ at Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

### Thanksgiving and Prayer

**3** We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, **4** 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.<sup>[b]</sup> He is a faithful minister of Christ on your<sup>[c]</sup> 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

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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; <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; <sup>12</sup> giving thanks<sup>[d]</sup> to the Father, who has qualified you<sup>[e]</sup> to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. <sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

## The Preeminence of Christ

<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by<sup>[f]</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> 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<sup>[g]</sup> under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

## Paul's Ministry to the Church

<sup>24</sup> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in

according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,<sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.<sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

### Footnotes

- a) Colossians 1:2 Or *brothers and sisters*. In New Testament usage, depending on the context, the plural Greek word *adelphoi* (translated “brothers”) may refer either to *brothers* or to *brothers and sisters*
- b) Colossians 1:7 For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *sundoulos*, see Preface
- c) Colossians 1:7 Some manuscripts *our*
- d) Colossians 1:12 Or *patience, with joy giving thanks*
- e) Colossians 1:12 Some manuscripts *us*
- f) Colossians 1:16 That is, by means of; or *in*
- g) Colossians 1:23 Or *to every creature*

**2** 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, <sup>2</sup> 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, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. <sup>4</sup> I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. <sup>5</sup> 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.

### **Alive in Christ**

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

<sup>8</sup> See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits<sup>[a]</sup> of the world, and not according to Christ. <sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. <sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities<sup>[b]</sup> and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.<sup>[c]</sup>

Let No One Disqualify You

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. <sup>18</sup> Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions,<sup>[d]</sup> puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, <sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> 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—  
<sup>21</sup> “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”  
<sup>22</sup> (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? <sup>23</sup> 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.

Footnotes

- a) Colossians 2:8 Or *elementary principles*; also verse 20
- b) Colossians 2:15 Probably demonic rulers and authorities
- c) Colossians 2:15 Or *in it* (that is, the cross)
- d) Colossians 2:18 Or *about the things he has seen*

**Put On the New Self**

**3** If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your<sup>[a]</sup> life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

<sup>5</sup> Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:<sup>[b]</sup> sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> On account of these the wrath of God is coming.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>7</sup> In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup> But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self<sup>[d]</sup> with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

<sup>11</sup> Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave,<sup>[e]</sup> free; but Christ is all, and in all.

<sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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.

Rules for Christian Households

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

Footnotes

- a) Colossians 3:4 Some manuscripts *our*
- b) Colossians 3:5 Greek *therefore your members that are on the earth*
- c) Colossians 3:6 Some manuscripts add *upon the sons of disobedience*
- d) Colossians 3:9 Greek *man*; also as supplied in verse 10
- e) Colossians 3:11 For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface; likewise for *Bondservants* in verse 22
- f) Colossians 3:22 Or *your masters according to the flesh*

4 Masters, treat your bondservants<sup>[a]</sup> justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Further Instructions

<sup>2</sup> Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. <sup>3</sup> 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— <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

<sup>5</sup> Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. <sup>6</sup> Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Final Greetings

<sup>7</sup> Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant<sup>[b]</sup> in the Lord. <sup>8</sup> I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, <sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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), <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. <sup>14</sup> Luke the beloved physician greets



you, as does Demas. <sup>15</sup> Give my greetings to the brothers<sup>[c]</sup> at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."

<sup>18</sup> I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

### Footnotes

- a) Colossians 4:1 For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface; likewise for *servant* in verse 12
- b) Colossians 4:7 For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *sundoulos*, see Preface
- c) Colossians 4:15 Or *brothers and sisters*



## A Letter of Love

<sup>1</sup> *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,*

<sup>2</sup> *To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:*

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father. – Colossians 1:1-2 ESV*

The ancient city of Colossae achieved its early prominence and prosperity due to its location along a major trade route that ran through the Lycus River Valley in the Roman province of Asia Minor (in what is today modern-day Turkey). But in time, the nearby and newer city of Laodicea replaced Colossae as the economic engine of the region. While the Colossians had made a name for themselves through the manufacture of the much-coveted, crimson-colored wool cloth known as *colossinum*, the once-thriving metropolis became little more than a small village. It was in this environment that a small congregation of believers sprung up.

The founding of the Colossian church is unclear. At the time Paul wrote his letter, he had not been to the city of Colossae, but his missionary journeys had taken him to nearby Ephesus where he had spent an extended period of time spreading the gospel message and making converts. According to Acts 19:10, “This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” It could be that one of the new converts from Ephesus took the good news of Jesus Christ to Colossae or a visitor from Colossae had been in Ephesus to hear the preaching of Paul. But whatever the case, the gospel made its way to the Colossians, and, in time, a small congregation had been formed.

Because of its location along a major trade route, the city of Colossae had a population comprised of Greek colonists and native Phrygians. There would have also been a fairly large number of Jews living in the area because Antiochus the Great (223-187 B.C.) had relocated hundreds of Jewish families from Mesopotamia to this region. So, this local congregation was likely a diverse mixture of ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. This hybrid blend of diverse backgrounds, along with the influence of false teachers, was causing a great deal of confusion among the church’s young congregation.

It appears that Paul had received word of the situation in Colossae from Epaphras, a resident of the city. Whether Epaphras visited Paul while he was under house arrest in Rome is unclear, but the fellow minister of the gospel had somehow gotten word to the apostle about the state of affairs in his home city. According to verses 7-8 of chapter one, Epaphras had been instrumental in the spread of the gospel to his fellow Colossians.

*You learned the gospel from Epaphras, our dear fellow slave—a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf—who also told us of your love in the Spirit. – Colossians 1:7-8 NLT*

But Epaphras had shared with Paul his concern for the spiritual well-being of the church. Without proper leadership and instruction, the fledgling congregation had found itself struggling to resist the temptation to syncretize their old religious ideologies with their new faith in Christ. And some of the Jewish converts were attempting to add their own blend of Judaistic ritualism and traditionalism. To top it all off, there were those who had infiltrated the church, posing as doctrinal experts and propagating a dangerous brand of false teaching that stood in direct opposition to the teachings of Paul and the other apostles. This is what led Paul to open his letter with a statement that established his apostolic credentials.

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God... – Colossians 1:1 ESV*

While Paul had not been one of the original 12 disciples of Jesus Christ, he had received his apostolic commission directly from the Lord Himself. Early on in his life, Paul had been a member of the Pharisees, a powerful and highly influential sect of Judaism. At one point, he described himself as the poster boy for religious extremism and dedication.

*“I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.” – Philippians 3:5-6 NLT*

He was an up-and-coming member of the Pharisees who had been given a commission by the high priest to persecute and arrest members of “the way,” the name given to the cult of followers who worshiped the dead Rabbi, Jesus. As a devout Pharisee, Paul had been a zealous adherent to and defender of the Jewish faith, and he was determined to eradicate the memory of Jesus and eliminate every one of His followers. He would later describe to the Jews how he had been given a commission to hunt down and destroy Christians.

*“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, and I was brought up and educated here in Jerusalem under Gamaliel. As his student, I was carefully trained in our Jewish laws and customs. I became very zealous to honor God in everything I did, just like all of you today. And I persecuted the followers of the Way, hounding some to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them in prison. The high priest and the whole council of elders can testify that this is so. For I received letters from them to our Jewish brothers in Damascus, authorizing me to bring the followers of the Way from there to Jerusalem, in chains, to be punished.” – Acts 22:3-5 NLT*

But something remarkable had taken place as Paul made his way to Damascus. He had come face to face with the resurrected Jesus. A blinding light had stopped Paul in his tracks and a

voice had spoken to him, saying, “I am Jesus the Nazarene, the one you are persecuting” (Acts 22:8 NLT). Unable to see but fully capable of hearing, Paul heard Jesus give him instructions to visit a man named Ananias, who would give him further instructions. And Ananias opened Paul’s eyes and revealed to him his new mission:

*“The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and hear him speak. For you are to be his witness, telling everyone what you have seen and heard. What are you waiting for? Get up and be baptized. Have your sins washed away by calling on the name of the Lord.” – Acts 22:14-16 NLT*

This “Damascus Road experience” transformed Paul’s life. He went from persecutor to proclaimer of the gospel. And he was appointed an official apostle or messenger of Jesus Christ, with specific instructions to take the good news of salvation to the Gentiles. And Paul wanted the believers in Colossae to understand that he had divine authority to address the situation taking place within their local congregation. Paul spent a great deal of time defending his rights to speak on behalf of Christ because there were those who attacked his apostolic credentials. But Paul pushed back on these critics, declaring his God-given authority to proclaim the gospel.

*“I was not appointed by any group of people or any human authority, but by Jesus Christ himself and by God the Father, who raised Jesus from the dead.” – Galatians 1:1 NLT*

So many of the churches that Paul helped establish were being targeted by men who claimed to be speaking for God but who were teaching false doctrines and leading the people away from the simplicity and integrity of the gospel. Many of these men were eloquent and influential speakers who derided Paul’s ministry and portrayed him as a charlatan. But Paul refused to let them destroy what God had built.

*“But I will continue doing what I have always done. This will undercut those who are looking for an opportunity to boast that their work is just like ours. These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ.” – 2 Corinthians 11:12-13 NLT*

So, as Paul wrote the believers in Colossae, he opened his letter with a declaration of his apostleship. He wanted them to know that what he was about to tell them was divinely inspired and not just the thoughts of a man they had never met. He was about to divulge to them the will of God concerning their situation, and it would pay for them to listen. And Paul let them know that he was not alone in his concern for them. His protégé and fellow minister of the gospel, Timothy, stood with him in his message of encouragement and admonition.

Paul refers to his audience as “saints,” using a Greek term (*hagios*), which means “those set apart to God.” He wanted to remind them that they had been consecrated by God for His use. They belonged to Him and had an obligation to live their lives in keeping with His will and according to His Word. They were not free to establish their own model for righteous living or to create their own system of religious rituals or creeds. They had been set apart by God and

were to dedicate their lives *to* God. And the rest of his letter will address the specifics of their situation and the measures they must take to ensure that they continue to live faithful lives marked by God's grace and peace.

## Faith, Hope, and Love

<sup>3</sup> We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup> since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, <sup>5</sup> because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, <sup>6</sup> 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, <sup>7</sup> just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf <sup>8</sup> and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. – Colossians 1:3-8 ESV

Paul describes the believers in Colossae using three of his favorite terms: Faith, hope, and love. He mentions their faith in Christ and their love for all the saints. And he indicates that these two qualities are based on the hope that is laid up for them in heaven. Because they have a secure hope in the future salvation promised to them because of their faith in Jesus Christ, they are able to love others as they have been loved. This triad of Christian character traits was near and dear to Paul's heart. In fact, in his great "love chapter," 1 Corinthians 13, Paul summarizes his statements on love by writing, "Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13 NLT).

For Paul, faith, hope, and love were the non-negotiable essentials of the Christian experience. In writing to the church in Corinth, he expressed his admiration for them and his belief that they had been blessed by God with every spiritual gift.

*God has enriched your church in every way—with all of your eloquent words and all of your knowledge. This confirms that what I told you about Christ is true. Now you have every spiritual gift you need as you eagerly wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. – 1 Corinthians 1:5-7 NLT*

And yet, despite their giftedness, the Corinthians were a divided church, bickering over who had the most impressive of the spiritual gifts. They had missed the whole point and were allowing the gifts that God had given them to create a hierarchy of spiritual elitism marked by pride and arrogance.

So, as Paul wrote to the fledgling church in Colossae, he emphasized the three characteristics that were essential to living the Christian life and honoring the name of Christ: Faith, hope, and love. Paul had used the same trinity of godly qualities when addressing the believers in Thessalonica.

*We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your **work of faith** and **labor of love** and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ. – 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 ESV*

In Paul's theology, faith was an ongoing experience, not a one-time, once-for-all action that ushered in one's salvation. While faith was essential for experiencing God's saving grace as

expressed through Christ's sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross, it did not stop at the point of salvation. Faith was to be a dynamic and ever-increasing quality in the life of the believer. Paul told the Corinthians believers that "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7 ESV). He commended the believers in Thessalonica for their ever-expanding faith.

*We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because **your faith is growing abundantly**, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. – 2 Thessalonians 1:3 ESV*

When speaking of his own life, Paul stated, "the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20 ESV). He no longer relied upon his own strength and his capacity to produce good works in the flesh but, instead, he relied upon the sanctifying work of Christ – by faith. He truly believed what he wrote to the church in Philippi: "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6 ESV).

And for Paul, love was the greatest proof of a truly transformed life. According to the author of Hebrews, without faith, it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). But Paul would qualify that statement by adding, "if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:1 ESV). Love for others provides demonstrable proof that we have been loved by God and had our hearts transformed by the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit. As James so eloquently put it, faith that produces no tangible evidence is not really faith at all.

*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. – James 2:14-17 ESV*

James was not inferring that we are saved by works, but he was emphasizing that saving faith produces godly fruit, such as love for those in need. The apostle John would echo that sentiment.

*If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. – 1 John 4:20 ESV*

And according to Paul, both faith and love are founded upon the hope of our future glorification, promised to us by God and provided for us by the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus was intended to provide us with proof that there is life after death. This world is not all there is. That is why Paul told the Corinthians, "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4 ESV).



And Paul went on to stress the essential nature of Christ's resurrection. If He is not risen from the dead, then our faith has no meaning whatsoever. It's little more than a pipe dream.

*But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. – 1 Corinthians 15:13-14 ESV*

*And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. – 1 Corinthians 15:17-19 ESV*

Ultimately, our faith is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ because it is His resurrection that assures us of our future hope of glorification. And Paul went on to assure the Corinthians of the unwavering reliability of God's plan for our future glorification.

*...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:*

*"Death is swallowed up in victory."*

*"O death, where is your victory?"*

*O death, where is your sting?" – 1 Corinthians 15:52-55 ESV*

We live by faith in the present because we have hope for the future. The God who will fulfill all that He has promised regarding the hereafter is fully capable of meeting all our needs in the here-and-now. And because we rest in His unfailing love for us, we are able to express that same love to all those around us, including our enemies.

And Paul commends the Colossian believers because the gospel continues to bear fruit in their lives.

*...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... – Colossians 1:6 ESV*

Their faith, hope, and love were anything but static. Each was increasing daily and being manifested in their lives for the world to see. The missionary work of Epaphras had been productive, resulting in their salvation and ongoing sanctification. Paul wanted the Colossians to know how proud he was of their perseverance and determination to continue to pursue faith, hope, and love – even in the midst of the difficulties and distractions of life in a fallen world.



## A Powerful Prayer for God's People

*<sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> 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; <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. <sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. – Colossians 1:9-14 ESV*

Paul's response upon hearing of the Colossians' ongoing display of faith, hope, and love was to let them know that this was an answer to his prayers for them. He states that he and Timothy had regularly and zealously prayed that God would fill them with "the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Colossians 1:9 ESV).

The prayers of Paul, many of which are recorded in his letters, reveal a shepherd's heart for his dispersed and ever-increasing flock. These prayers provide a rare glimpse into the approach to ministry and discipleship of this great 1st-Century apostle, missionary, and church planter. Paul had a passion for the gospel and a love for people that revealed itself in how he prayed for them. While it's likely that he received many personal requests from Christians he met along the way during his many journeys, his recorded prayers are more universal in nature and deal with the spiritual needs of the congregations to which he wrote. There is little doubt that he faithfully lifted up to the Lord the personal requests of individual believers, but his real passion for people went way beyond the surface needs, wants, and desires they may have had. While he took their physical needs seriously and cared deeply about their health and well-being, his primary concern was for their spiritual lives and their relationship with God.

In the opening lines of his letter to the believers in Colossae, Paul encourages them by informing them that they have been in his prayers – constantly. He tells them that he and Timothy have not ceased to pray for them. What a blessing it is to hear that someone has been praying for you. What an encouragement to know that someone cares enough about you to lift you up before the throne of God. Next, Paul reveals to them the content of his prayers. This is where it gets interesting and revealing.

Paul says that his request to God for them was that they would have a knowledge or awareness of His will. But he is doing much more than just asking. Paul is begging. The Greek word, *proseuchomai*, carries much more force behind it than our English word for prayer. It means "to pray earnestly for" and reflects Paul's strong desire for God to provide the believers in Colossae with knowledge of His will for them. Not only that, he wants God to *fill them* with that knowledge.

Once again, the original Greek language is much more rich and forceful in its meaning. When Paul asks God to fill them, he means “to fill to the top: so that nothing shall be wanting to full measure, fill to the brim.” In other words, he is asking God to fill them so fully that there isn’t room for anything else – including their own wills. For the believer, knowing the will of God is essential. It is what directs our actions and influences our attitudes. It is what gives us direction in our lives. As we live in this world, we are constantly influenced by our own sin nature and the world around us. We face persistent temptation to control our lives according to our own will.

Paul warned the believers in Rome, “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12:2 NLT). So, there is a sense in which we have to turn our attention from the things of this world and concentrate on God’s will as revealed in His Word. God is out to transform us by influencing our thinking and altering our behavior – from the inside out.

But Paul goes on to qualify his request. He says that he is asking that they be filled with a knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. In other words, God’s will must be spiritually discerned because it is not of this world. In fact, the wisdom of God will often, if not always, stand in conflict with the ways of this world. It will make no sense from a human perspective. It will appear illogical. To know God’s will requires spiritual wisdom and understanding, which can only be provided by the Spirit of God. Paul told the believers in Corinth, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14 ESV). Then he reminded them, “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16 ESV). We have the mind of Christ because we have the Spirit of Christ living within us. We are spiritual creatures with a God-given capacity to understand and know His will. And Paul’s prayer was that his brothers and sisters in Christ be filled to overflowing with that knowledge.

But for Paul, to be aware of and filled with the knowledge of God was not enough. Knowing the will of God is useless if it is not put into action. That is why Paul states that his prayers for them had an objective. He wanted them “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” (Colossians 1:10 ESV). The knowledge of God should produce obedience to God. Knowing His will should produce a desire to live it out in daily life.

While the Greek word, *peripateō*, can be translated as “walk,” it can also convey the idea of conducting one’s life. Paul is expressing his prayerful desire that the Colossians live their daily lives in submission to and in keeping with God’s will. Doing so will please the Father, produce a life of spiritual fruitfulness, and result in an even greater awareness of His will. Paul wanted them to know that, as they expended energy in doing God’s will, they would tap into an inexhaustible supply of power based on His “glorious might” (Colossians 1:11 ESV). Rather than growing weak or weary, they would find themselves with an overabundance of endurance and patience even amid the trials of life. God would supply them with strength for the task and they would respond with joyful thanksgiving.

Paul desperately desired for the Colossian believers to understand the magnitude of the gift they had received upon placing their faith in Jesus. Something truly remarkable had taken place when they accepted the free gift of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone. They had been immediately “delivered...from the domain of darkness and transferred...to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13 ESV). As a result, they shared in the inheritance of the saints in light. They had a permanent place reserved for them in God’s eternal kingdom. The apostle Peter expressed it this way:

*All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. – 1 Peter 1:3-5 NLT*

The author of Hebrews also wrote of this inheritance of the saints. In his great “Hall of Faith,” he mentions such Old Testament luminaries as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah, and describes how they were distinguished by their faith in God.

*All these people died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it. They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth. Obviously people who say such things are looking forward to a country they can call their own. If they had longed for the country they came from, they could have gone back. But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. – Hebrews 11:13-16 NLT*

And when Paul tells the Colossians that God has “delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13 ESV), he is letting them know that they are as good as there. The promises of God are so sure and certain that the Colossians can live in perfect peace in the here-and-now because their hereafter has been guaranteed by God. They were already citizens of that eternal kingdom, even while living their lives here on earth.

And Paul lets them know that this kingdom to come belongs to Jesus Christ, the one who made possible their redemption and forgiveness from sin. Jesus was not only their Savior but their coming King. Their redemption and justification would one day result in their glorification. And Paul’s ongoing prayer for them was that they might continue to grow in their knowledge of the full scope of God’s grand redemptive plan for them.

This prayer of Paul is a great example of how we should be praying for one another. There is nothing wrong with praying for someone’s physical healing, for their marriage, their financial needs, or any other concern they may have. But how much more important it is to desire that

they grow in their knowledge of God's will. One of the problems believers face is trying to understand what it is we're supposed to do in life. We need to know how we are to use our time, talents, and resources. We need to know what it is that God is trying to teach us through the trials and troubles we face in life. How would God have us respond to the situations and circumstances in which we find ourselves? It is not difficult to discern *our* will. That comes easy. But knowing the will of God takes intention. It requires listening to the Spirit of God and patiently waiting to hear God speak. What greater prayer could anyone pray for a friend or family member than that God would fill them with a knowledge of His will – his good, pleasing, and perfect will?

## He Has No Equal

*<sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. – Colossians 1:15-20 ESV*

As far as Paul was concerned, one of the most non-negotiable aspects of God's will that the Colossians needed to understand concerned the preeminence of Christ. Evidently, Epaphras had informed Paul that the doctrine of Christ was under direct assault by men claiming to have apostolic authority. These unnamed individuals were teaching false doctrines concerning Christ that had left the Colossian congregation confused and dangerously close to diminishing the fruitfulness for which Paul had so graciously complimented them.

To redirect the focus of his letter to Christ, Paul adeptly and somewhat abruptly shifts the emphasis from God the Father to Jesus Christ the son.

*For he [God] has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. – Colossians 1:13-14 NLT*

Following this reminder of Christ's substitutionary death on the cross and its eternal implications for their redemption and justification, Paul states, "Christ is the visible image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15 NLT). In coming to earth and taking on human flesh, Jesus, the Son of God and second person of the Trinity made God both visible and knowable. He became the visible image of the invisible God on earth.

In his gospel account, the apostle John elaborates on this unique aspect of Christ's earthly ministry.

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14 ESV*

And John boldly proclaims that Jesus was more than just another messenger from God. He was God Himself.

*No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is Himself God and is at the Father's side, has made Him known. – John 1:18 BSB*

The author of Hebrews expands on the God-reflecting nature of Jesus and further solidifies the doctrine of His divinity.

*The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven. This shows that the Son is far greater than the angels, just as the name God gave him is greater than their names. – Hebrews 1:3-4 NLT*

For Paul and these other authors of the New Testament, the divinity of Jesus was an essential doctrine that must be defended at all costs because it was the hinge upon which the door of salvation swung. If Jesus was not divine, then His death on the cross would prove to be ineffective. His sinlessness was the key to His death's effectiveness.

*...we have an advocate before the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He Himself is the atoning sacrifice for our sins... – 1 John 2:1-2 BSB*

*But you know that Christ appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. – 1 John 3:5 BSB*

And what makes this atoning work of Jesus even more significant is the fact that, as God, He was the Creator laying down His life for those whom He created. Paul further enhances Christ's divine credentials by stressing His eternality and the essential role He played in the creation story.

*...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. – Colossians 1:16 ESV*

And, once again, the apostle John provides ample support for Paul's claim.

*He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made, and without Him nothing was made that has been made. – John 1:2-3 BSB*

Paul would present this same message concerning Christ's role in the creation account when writing to the believers in Corinth.

*...there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we exist. – 1 Corinthians 8:6 BSB*

As the Creator-God, Jesus was responsible for all that existed, including the believers in Colossae. He was not just a Messiah who came to save them, but He was the God who had created them. He was responsible for their very existence as well as their salvation. He had formed them and forgiven them. He had breathed in them the breath of life and had become



for them the means for experiencing new life. And by His divine power, Jesus would hold them safe and secure to the end.

*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. – Colossians 1:17 ESV*

Paul is going out of his way to stress the unique nature of Christ. He was adamant that the believers in Colossae grasp and appreciate the significance of Jesus' life-giving and life-transforming role as the Son of God. Jesus had been so much more than a teacher, Rabbi, healer, and miracle worker. He was supreme in all things. He had no equal and there was no one who could replicate His accomplishments or diminish His one-of-a-kind status as the sovereign Savior of the world. That is why Paul stresses the headship of Christ over the church, and promotes His well-deserved position as the preeminent one.

*And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. – Colossians 1:18 ESV*

Paul's point seems to be that the church would not exist without Christ. Had He not died and risen again, there would be no church because there would be no Christ-followers. He was not a martyred teacher who had managed to cultivate a faithful host of committed followers who continued to propagate His teachings. He was the "firstborn from the dead" who, through His death and resurrection, made possible the spiritual transformation of countless men and women.

There were those who were teaching that the resurrection of Jesus was a fable or myth and downplaying its importance to the Christian faith. Paul addressed the misguided musings of these dangerous "false teachers" sovereign in his first letter to the church in Corinth.

*Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. – 1 Corinthians 15:12-14 ESV*

Christ's resurrection made possible the redemption of condemned humanity and guarantees the future resurrection and glorification of all those who accept His free gift of salvation. Again, Christ was more than a gifted teacher with a message of life transformation based on behavior modification. He had not modeled a new way of living, but died so that sinful men and women might receive new lives and new natures that emulated His.

Paul emphatically states that Jesus is preeminent and one-of-a-kind. He has no equal. Jesus was the sole means by which God chose to redeem fallen humanity. That's why Paul claims, "God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ" (Colossians 1:19 NLT), and no one else. And it was only through Christ that "God reconciled everything to himself" (Colossians 1:20 NLT). No one else could take credit for the role that Jesus had played in God's grand redemptive plan. God

used Jesus to reconcile sinful humanity to Himself, and anyone who diminished Jesus' role as Savior or presented another means of salvation was to be avoided at all costs.

*You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ. Let God's curse fall on anyone, including us or even an angel from heaven, who preaches a different kind of Good News than the one we preached to you. – Galatians 1:6-8 NLT*

*You happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you believed. – 2 Corinthians 11:4 NLT*

It seems quite obvious that Paul held strong views concerning this topic. He was obsessed with defending the doctrine of Christ at all costs. He would not tolerate anyone who attempted to diminish Christ's divinity or who tried to devalue His role as the God/man who, through His life, death, and resurrection made it possible for sinful men to be made right with a holy God.

## The Reality and Reliability of Reconciliation.

*<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> 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. – Colossians 1:21-23 ESV*

Paul knew it was essential that the Colossian believers fully understood who Jesus was and what He had done for them. Their concept of Jesus was far too limited and had allowed false ideas about His identity and accomplishments to filter into their beliefs about Him. After Jesus resurrected from the dead and ascended into heaven, there was growing speculation as to His true identity and its implications for mankind. In His absence, His disciples continued to spread the news concerning the coming kingdom of God and the sole means of gaining entrance into it: By placing one's faith in Jesus Christ.

But there were others who had begun to formulate their own concepts concerning Jesus and the implications of His life and death. The disciples had clearly spread the news that Jesus had risen from the dead and had returned to His Father's side in heaven. Paul had boldly proclaimed the nature of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection to the believers in Corinth.

*I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. – 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 NLT*

But there were those who had begun to refute the disciples' teaching concerning resurrection, declaring it improbable and even unnecessary. That's what led Paul to warn the Corinthians about this dangerous heresy.

*...if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. – 1 Corinthians 15:16-19 NLT*

There were others who had begun to spread the idea that Jesus had not been a real, flesh-and-blood human. Because these people deemed the flesh to be inherently evil, they could not accept the idea of deity taking on humanity. So, they rationalized it away by claiming that Jesus had only *appeared* to have a human body. So, His "death" was just a fiction. This heresy was later deemed *Docetism*, which comes from the Greek word *dokein*, which means "to seem." But by voiding the humanity of Jesus, these false teachers were actually eliminating the heart of the

gospel message. Without the humanity of Jesus there is no gospel. That is why the apostles boldly preached the reality of Jesus' humanity.

***He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.** – 1 Peter 2:24 NLT*

The doctrine of the bodily death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus became the litmus test for determining the veracity of those claiming to be teachers.

*Dear friends, do not believe everyone who claims to speak by the Spirit. You must test them to see if the spirit they have comes from God. For there are many false prophets in the world. This is how we know if they have the Spirit of God: If a person claiming to be a prophet acknowledges that **Jesus Christ came in a real body**, that person has the Spirit of God. But if someone claims to be a prophet and does not acknowledge the truth about Jesus, that person is not from God. Such a person has the spirit of the Antichrist, which you heard is coming into the world and indeed is already here.* – 1 John 4:1-3 NLT

So, as Paul continues the introduction of his letter to the Colossian believers, he stresses the humanity of Jesus, reminding them that they had been “reconciled in his body of flesh by his death” (Colossians 1:22 ESV). For Paul, that point was essential, because it explained how sinful human beings could be made right with a holy and righteous God. He even stressed the nature of their pre-conversion state, describing them as “alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds” (Colossians 1:21 ESV). This concept of alienation and hostility was a common theme for Paul. He repeatedly stressed the formerly hopeless and helpless condition of those who now enjoyed a right standing with God. He wanted them to consider the almost incomprehensible scope of Christ's sacrificial death and all that it had accomplished on their behalf.

*...since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son. So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.* – Romans 5:9-11 NLT

The physical death of Jesus made possible their spiritual transformation from enemies of God to friends of God. They had been reconciled to a righteous God by the undeserved death of His righteous and sinless Son. Paul reminded the believers in Rome of the remarkable nature of Jesus' selfless sacrifice of His own life.

*The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And **in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins.*** – Romans 8:3 NLT

And Paul told the believers in Colossae that, because Jesus had died in their place, He had been able to present them to God the Father as “holy and blameless and above reproach” (Colossians 1:22 ESV). Jesus had taken upon Himself the penalty for their sins and, in exchange, had placed upon them His own unblemished righteousness. Paul fully understood the significance of this “great exchange,” and boldly proclaimed His appreciation for it and his unwavering dependence upon it.

*I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God’s way of making us right with himself depends on faith.* – Philippians 3:9 NLT

For Paul, belief in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was essential for living the Christian life. He called the Colossians to reject any false teaching that might undermine their faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ and urged them to remain committed to the good news just as they had heard it from Epaphras.

*...you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don’t drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News.* – Colossians 1:23 NLT

Paul knew that false teachers would be a constant problem in the church. Each generation of believers would face a new wave of plausible but unreliable doctrines concerning the saving work of Jesus. He also knew that immature and poorly informed Christians would be easy targets for false teaching, ending up “tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching” and tricked by “lies so clever they sound like the truth” (Ephesians 4:14 NLT). For Paul, the best defense against false teaching was the truth. And he declared his firm commitment to continue doing what he had always done: Preach the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ to any and all who would listen.

*The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God’s servant to proclaim it.* – Colossians 1:23 NLT

Paul wanted the Colossians to know that they had been reconciled to God through the physical death of Jesus Christ. He had been a real man who lived a real life and died a real death on the cross – in their place. And by placing their faith in the substitutionary death of Jesus, they had been made right with God. Formerly enemies of God, they now enjoyed a new status as His sons and co-heirs. And no false teacher or faulty doctrine could take that away from them.



## The Mysterious Ministry of Spiritual Maturity.

*<sup>24</sup> 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, <sup>25</sup> 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, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. – Colossians 1:24-29 ESV*

As a faithful minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, there were times when Paul found his ministry to be difficult, but he was pleased to be able to suffer on behalf of His Lord and Savior. He viewed the trials and tribulations that accompanied his mission to be in keeping with the suffering experienced by Christ as He carried out His own earthly mission. Paul was well-acquainted with suffering. In fact, he wrote his letter to the Colossians while under house arrest in Rome, awaiting trial before the Emperor. He was able to share with the believers in Corinth a long and far from exhaustive list of painful encounters he had endured as a messenger of the gospel.

*I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. – 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 NLT*

But Paul wasn't complaining about his lot in life. No, far from it. He was expressing his right to be treated as a legitimate spokesman for Jesus Christ. Like His Savior, Paul had faced a barrage of persecutions and personal attacks and, on top of all that, he had been forced to carry "the daily burden of my concern for all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:28 NLT). He was a faithful shepherd and caretaker for the flock of Jesus Christ who took his role seriously and faced persecution joyfully.

*"I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake..." – Colossians 1:24 ESV*

Paul saw his sufferings as an opportunity to experience in some small measure “Christ’s afflictions” (Colossians 1:24 ESV). He was eternally grateful for the pain that Jesus endured on his behalf so that he might be freed “from this life that is dominated by sin and death” (Romans 7:24 NLT). And Paul was more than willing to suffer “for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Colossians 1:24 ESV). It was the least he could do.

Paul understood that he had been made a minister of the gospel and given the responsibility of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ to the Gentile world. His job, while far from easy, was accompanied by great joy because he was able to witness firsthand the transformative nature of the message of salvation. Paul states that his message to the Gentiles was a mystery to God’s chosen people, the Israelites. The people of Israel had no concept that their long-awaited Messiah would be the Savior of the entire world, not just their own people. Even the disciples of Jesus found it difficult to watch Him minister to Samaritans, Syrophoenicians, and even Romans. They had no category in their concept of the Messiah that accommodated a ministry to the Gentiles and yet, Jesus had told them, “I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd” (John 10:14-16 NLT).

This mystery had remained hidden for generations and had not been revealed until after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Even on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, they began to minister to those who had gathered in Jerusalem for the annual feast. The crowd was made up of “Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5 ESV). Luke goes on to describe them as “Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians” (Acts 2:9-11 ESV).

The crowd consisted of native Jews as well as converts to Judaism from a wide range of nations and ethnic groups. And when they heard the gospel message presented by Peter, they responded en masse.

*So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. – Acts 2:41 ESV*

Many of those individuals who made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost would return to their native countries, carrying the gospel message with them. And the apostle Paul would later join their forces and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ throughout the Gentile world. On his missionary journeys, he would encounter converts to Christianity who had heard the message of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone from their converted friends and neighbors. As Paul later told the believers in Ephesus, the mystery of Gentiles being grafted into the family tree of Abraham had been revealed and was making an impact on the world.



*God gave me the special responsibility of extending his grace to you Gentiles. As I briefly wrote earlier, God himself revealed his mysterious plan to me. As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ. God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets. – Ephesians 3:2-5 NLT*

God had always intended to redeem people from every tribe, nation, and tongue. His Son would be the Messiah of Israel, but as God had promised Abraham, his offspring would prove to be a blessing to the “nations.”

*“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and **in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**” – Genesis 12:2-3 ESV*

Jesus, a son of Abraham, had been the fulfillment of that promise. Paul made that point perfectly clear to the Gentile believers in Galatia.

*Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. – Galatians 3:9-11 ESV*

It was through Christ, a Jew, that “the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:14 ESV). And Paul was proudly declaring that message of hope to the Gentile world and gladly enduring suffering in order to do so. It was his privilege and honor. Jesus had died to make salvation possible, so the least Paul could do was suffer to make it available and accessible. And Paul wanted the Colossian believers to know that their hope was based on the reality of Christ’s presence within them. He had died, been raised to life, and now was seated at the right hand of God the Father. But following His ascension, Jesus had sent the Spirit of God to indwell His followers. In that sense, Jesus would not only be with them, but in them.

*“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you.” – John 14:16-17 NLT*

Paul’s life mission was to proclaim this life-altering mystery of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:28 ESV). And he did so, “struggling with all his energy,” knowing that “he powerfully works within me” (Colossians 1:29 ESV). And Paul’s ministry and message were comprised of both warnings and teachings. There were dangers to be avoided and lessons to be learned. There were false teachers who could undermine the hope of the gospel and there were constant temptations that could derail and diminish the witness of God’s people. Paul’s

goal for the Colossian believers was nothing less than spiritual maturity. He would not settle for mediocrity or partial transformation. Since glorification was the ultimate goal of salvation, Paul remained committed to the ongoing sanctification of all those under his care. His lifelong objective was to one day be able to “present everyone mature in Christ” (Colossians 1:28 ESV). That lofty goal will never be achieved in the believer’s lifetime, but we have a firm promise from God that it will take place one day.

*Dear friends, we are already God’s children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure. – 1 John 3:2-3 NLT*

According to Paul, it is inevitable and unavoidable because it is the work of God.

*And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. – Philippians 1:6 NLT*

## Rooted, Built Up, and Established

<sup>1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> 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, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. <sup>4</sup> I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. – Colossians 2:1-7 ESV

In verse 29 of chapter one, Paul speaks of his ongoing “struggle” to proclaim the true gospel of Jesus Christ. The Greek word *agōnizomai* carries the idea of strenuous effort driven by intense zeal. Paul was obsessed with the idea of spiritual formation and expressed his own desire to do whatever was necessary so that every believer achieved full spiritual maturity.

*...we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ. – Colossians 1:28 NLT*

He poured out every ounce of his being to accomplish that goal. Here in chapter two, he uses the root word *agōn* to describe the ongoing “conflict” in which he finds himself engaged, and he confesses that his efforts are on behalf of all those congregations living in the Lycus Valley. The errant teachings concerning Christ had impacted not only the church in Colossae but the one in Laodicea as well. Likely, the nearby community of Hierapolis had also come under the influence of teachers making false claims that denied either the deity or humanity of Jesus.

The members of these three congregations had never met Paul face to face because, at the time he wrote this letter, he had not yet set foot in the Lycus Valley. His knowledge of their situation had come to him through Epaphras and others. But like a true shepherd, Paul expressed his loving concern for these distant flocks, declaring his intense desire “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” (Colossians 2:2 ESV).

Paul was the consummate encourager. Yes, he often displayed a blunt, in-your-face style of confrontational leadership that could be withering in its intensity. Still, his ultimate goal was correction, which led to further spiritual growth. Even in these verses, Paul displays the loving concern of a pastor who longs to see his congregants experience the full measure of their salvation. For Paul, coming to faith in Christ was not a one-time event but an ongoing experience that included the believer's initial reconciliation to God and their ongoing sanctification and ultimate glorification.

The apostle Peter described this full-orbed approach in his first letter, encouraging his readers to “crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation” (1 Peter 2:2 NLT). Paul warned Timothy that “in the last times some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons” (1 Timothy 4:1 NLT). In a second letter to Timothy, Paul reiterated his concern about the danger of a feeble and stagnant faith.

*For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths. – 2 Timothy 4:3-4 NLT*

That’s why Paul told Timothy, “Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching” (2 Timothy 4:2 NLT). And Paul practiced what he preached. He patiently corrected, rebuked, and encouraged the church in Colossae so that they might stand firm against the faith-deflating lies of the false teachers.

Throughout his ministry, Paul strived to keep Jesus Christ as the central focus of all his teachings. In his first letter to the church in Corinth, he referred to the doctrine of Jesus as the foundation upon which every other doctrine or teaching must rest.

*I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ. – 1 Corinthians 3:10-11 NLT*

The *teachings* of Jesus were not the foundation; it was Jesus Himself. The deity, humanity, sacrificial death, Spirit-empowered resurrection, and promised return of Jesus formed the firm foundation on which every believer’s faith must rest and remain. But Paul had been forced to confront the Corinthian believers about their propensity to embrace false doctrines about Jesus.

*I am afraid, however, that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may be led astray from your simple and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims a Jesus other than the One we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit than the One you received, or a different gospel than the one you accepted, you put up with it way too easily. – 2 Corinthians 11:3-4 BSB*

Paul did not want the believers in Colossae to make the same mistake, so he reminded them that in Jesus, “lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3 NLT). Anyone preaching a non-deified Jesus was proclaiming a lie and disseminating foolishness rather than wisdom. Anyone who refuted Jesus’ humanity and discounted His sacrificial death on the cross was to be viewed as a liar and not as a messenger from God.

But Paul realized that many of these false teachers were highly persuasive, using well-crafted and lofty-sounding arguments that seemed to make sense. To make matters worse, these men were operating within the context of the local church in Colossae, while Paul was hundreds of miles away in Rome. He had been placed under house arrest by the emperor and denied the freedom to travel. So, while the false teachers mingled with the flock in Colossae, Paul was restricted to writing a letter. But he reminded them, “Though I am far away from you, my heart is with you” (Colossians 2:5 NLT). They were out of sight but not out of mind. And Paul expressed his joy when Epaphras informed him of their firm commitment to the faith – even in the face of false teaching.

So, Paul exhorts them to remain steadfast and unwavering in their faith. Despite everything happening around them, they had all the truth they needed to survive and thrive. A new version of the gospel was unnecessary, and a different take on Jesus was not required. The key to their survival was not some new doctrine or novel take on Jesus’s identity but a continuing faith in the One who had made their salvation possible. Paul pleads with them to stay the course.

*...as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him... – Colossians 2:6 ESV*

They had received Jesus by faith, and they needed to continue living their lives according to faith. Once again, Paul insists that faith is not a static, one-time act that results in salvation but an ongoing lifestyle of complete dependence upon the saving work of Jesus. True saving faith results in our ongoing transformation into His likeness, which will ultimately result in a future state of sinless perfection that will take place upon His return. Paul firmly believed that his faith in Christ was active and alive, determining every facet of his earthly existence. That is why he told the Galatian believers, “The life I live in the body, *I live by faith in the Son of God*, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Galatians 2:20 BSB).

The author of Hebrews describes faith as “the **assurance** of things hoped for, the **conviction** of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1 ESV). Faith is not wishful thinking or some baseless, unfounded desire for that which has no substance or chance of fulfillment. He uses two powerful words to describe the nature of faith. The first is *hypostasis*, which means “confidence or assurance.” It carries the idea of something being substantive, real, and having actual existence. The second word is *elegchos*, which means “proof.” Our faith is based on the belief that God’s promises are real, even when invisible to the human eye. Our faith is based on the trustworthiness of God, not our ability to see or touch what was promised. The Old Testament saints listed in chapter 11 of Hebrews displayed faith because they “died still believing what God had promised them. They did not receive what was promised, but they saw it all from a distance and welcomed it” (Hebrews 11:13 NLT). Christians don’t operate by the old adage “Seeing is believing.” Instead, they live by faith. As Paul said, “We walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7 ESV).

In his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul reminded them that God had promised them new bodies – “a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2

Corinthians 5:1 ESV). In their earthly lives, they struggled with pain, sorrow, and affliction. But God promised they would one day put on their “heavenly dwelling” and experience new life in His eternal kingdom. Then he assured them: “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, **for we walk by faith, not by sight**” (2 Corinthians 5:5-7 ESV).

That is why Paul called the Colossians to remain focused on Jesus, “rooted and built up in him and established in the faith” (Colossians 2:7 ESV). They were to keep their eyes fixed on “the founder and perfecter of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2 ESV). Paul did not want them to get distracted or dissuaded from the truth regarding Jesus. They were to remain “rooted” in their faith. Like a healthy, fruitful plant, they were to sink their roots deep into the promises found in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Rootedness results in fruitfulness or, as Paul puts it, being “built up.” Paul uses a word associated with architecture, portraying the steady, sound construction of a structure built on a solid foundation. Finally, Paul uses the term “established” to describe the final outcome of our faith. The Greek word means “to make good the promises by the event.” It conveys the idea of the promise being fulfilled. The assurance and conviction of our faith will become reality.

Faith has an *object*: Jesus Christ. But faith also has an objective: our future glorification. That is why Paul wanted them to remain firm in their faith. Saving faith is an enduring faith that focuses on the unwavering promises of God despite the vicissitudes and difficulties of this life. The apostle John provides us with a timeless word of encouragement that points us to the day when all the promises of God will be established.

*Dear friends, we are already God’s children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. And all who have this eager expectation will keep themselves pure, just as he is pure. – 1 John 3:2-3 NLT*

## The Sufficiency of the Gospel

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. <sup>11</sup> 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, <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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, <sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. – Colossians 2:8-15 ESV

Paul now warms to his primary task: warning the Colossian believers about the dangers of the doctrinal heresy threatening their congregation. He has established the preeminence of Christ and emphasized the foundational nature of His divinity and humanity. Now Paul presents a stinging indictment of the false teachers, labeling their rhetoric concerning Jesus as nothing more than a purely human-inspired philosophy based on tradition and filled with empty deceit. Paul's use of the term "philosophy" was not meant to refer to an academic or scientific study of thought but the teaching of "certain Jewish Christian ascetics, which busied itself with refined and speculative inquiries into the nature and classes of angels, into the ritual of the Mosaic law and the regulations of Jewish tradition respecting practical life" (The Online Bible: Outline of Biblical Usage).

Paul emphasized that the teaching infiltrating the Colossian church was purely speculative and not based on divine revelation. It was not according to or in keeping with the prophetic pronouncement concerning Christ in the Old Testament. Nor was it in line with Christ's teachings concerning Himself. No, these men propagated false doctrines based on "the elemental spirits of the world" (Colossians 2:8 ESV). The word translated as "spirits" is στοιχεῖον (*stoicheion*), which might be better translated as "principles." Paul seems to be juxtaposing Christ-centered teaching with worldly and man-centered teaching. According to Paul, the elemental or fundamental theories of a non-Christian, fallen world were insufficient to explain or guide the Christian life. The false teachers were attempting to use human reasoning to explain spiritual truths.

Paul addressed this lack of spiritual discernment in his first letter to the churches in Corinth. He informed his audience that the gospel's message was impossible to discern without assistance from the Holy Spirit.

*When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit, using the Spirit's words to explain*

*spiritual truths. But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it, for only those who are spiritual can understand what the Spirit means. Those who are spiritual can evaluate all things, but they themselves cannot be evaluated by others. For,*

*"Who can know the Lord's thoughts?  
Who knows enough to teach him?"*

*But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ. – 1 Corinthians 2:13-16  
NLT*

Paul explained that "the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18 ESV). He followed up this statement by quoting Isaiah 29:14.

*For it is written,*

*"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."*

Then Paul excoriated the false teachers and religious traditionalists of his day, exposing them as frauds and fools who pridefully rejected the message of the gospel.

*Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. – 1 Corinthians 1:20-25 ESV*

Some found the apostles' teaching concerning Christ to be illogical and unacceptable. They found the idea that Jesus was the embodiment of divinity and humanity untenable and indefensible. For others, the belief in Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection was little more than wishful thinking or a fairy tale. But Paul refers to his teaching concerning Christ as the power and wisdom of God.

Paul considered the false teachers' denial of Christ's divinity a particularly egregious sin. That's why he unapologetically stated, "In Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body" (Colossians 2:9 ESV). This was a foundational truth concerning the doctrine of salvation, and without it, the validity of Christ's substitutionary death was rendered impotent. The sinlessness of Christ was based on His divinity. He was the unblemished God/man who was "tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15 ESV).



*For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ. – 2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT*

To deny Jesus' deity was to invalidate His entire ministry. He was the sinless and fully righteous Son of God who took on human flesh so that He might do what no man had ever been able to do before. Jesus fully obeyed every one of the commands of God found in the Mosaic Law.

*For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh... – Romans 8:3 ESV*

The deity and humanity of Christ were both non-negotiable aspects of His character. Jesus was fully divine and entirely human. He was not a phantom or a god masquerading as a man. Some taught that Jesus only *appeared* to be human, and this erroneous teaching led to a distorted understanding of Jesus' death on the cross. If He wasn't truly human, then His death was little more than theater — a clever form of play-acting that accomplished nothing. It would mean the substitutionary nature of His death was invalid. Not only that, if Jesus didn't die, then there was no resurrection, and if there was no resurrection, then mankind has no hope.

*...if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. – 1 Corinthians 15:17-19 NLT*

Paul assures the Colossians believers that the resurrection of Jesus was real and that its implications for their lives were substantial.

*...you were raised to new life because you trusted the mighty power of God, who raised Christ from the dead. – Colossians 2:12 NLT*

He wanted them to understand that they needed nothing more than Christ. Despite the claims of the false teachers, the believers in Colossae were not missing anything from their spiritual experience. They had been filled with the fullness of Christ. The Spirit of Christ indwelt them, making the nature of Christ available to them. The righteousness of Christ had been imputed to them. Unlike the Judaizers, who taught that Gentiles needed to be circumcised to be fully saved, Paul emphasized a spiritual form of circumcision.

*When you came to Christ, you were "circumcised," but not by a physical procedure. Christ performed a spiritual circumcision—the cutting away of your sinful nature. – Colossians 2:11 NLT*

This was the same thought Paul had shared with the believers in Rome.

*For you are not a true Jew just because you were born of Jewish parents or because you have gone through the ceremony of circumcision. No, a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit. And a person with a changed heart seeks praise from God, not from people. – Romans 2:28-29 NLT*

Paul reminded the Colossians that, before encountering Christ, they had been spiritually dead because their “sinful nature was not yet cut away” (Colossians 2:13 NLT). But that problem had been taken care of by God.

*God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. – Colossians 2:13-14 NLT*

In doing so, God “disarmed the rulers and authorities” (Colossians 2:15 ESV). This is most likely a reference to “the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12 ESV). Paul describes them as “the cosmic powers over this present darkness” (Ephesians 6:12 ESV). In conquering sin and death on the cross, God effectively silenced Satan and his minions, voiding the accusations of guilt and shame they level against God’s people. In Revelation 12:10, Satan is described as the accuser of the brethren, “who accuses them day and night before our God.” But, because of the atoning nature of the cross, Satan’s accusations carry no weight. His weapons lack any power against the children of God. But, just as Paul warned the believers in Ephesus, the Colossians were to “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11 ESV).

The false teachers were attempting to undermine the effectiveness of Christ’s death and resurrection by questioning its validity. These godless men were acting as pawns of the enemy by sowing doubts among the believers in Colossae. But Paul exposed their so-called truths as nothing more than cleverly disguised lies meant to deceive and destroy the faith of God’s people.

For Paul, the gospel was enough. No new teaching was required, and the power of the cross required no additional enhancements or improvements. As Paul told the believers in Corinth, the gospel’s message required no help from human reasoning and cleverly crafted rhetoric.

*When I first came to you, dear brothers and sisters, I didn’t use lofty words and impressive wisdom to tell you God’s secret plan. For I decided that while I was with you I would forget everything except Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified.*

*Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God. – 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, 4-5 NLT*

## The Subtle Allure of Self-Made Religion

*<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> 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.*

*<sup>20</sup> 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— <sup>21</sup> “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” <sup>22</sup> (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? <sup>23</sup> 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 2:16-23 ESV*

Far too often, well-meaning but misguided individuals attempt to turn faith in Christ into a lengthy list of dos and don'ts intended to regulate behavior. They take James' simple premise that faith without works is a dead faith (James 2:17) and twist it into a legalistic and guilt-inducing set of rules and regulations designed to determine righteousness. Unable or unwilling to accept that a believer's right standing with God is based on grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, these purveyors of self-righteousness attempt to earn favor with God through rituals, rites, and fervent religious rule-keeping.

Entire denominations have been formed based on a doctrine that teaches that righteousness must be achieved the old-fashioned way: Through hard work and merit. Essentially, their teaching is based on the old maxim: There's no such thing as a free lunch. Some seem to have founded their works-based concept of salvation on the oft-quoted but non-biblical statement: God helps those who help themselves.

Humanity's pervasive pride problem lies at the core of this brand of false teaching, and it has been around since the fall. Ever since Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, mankind has been attempting to assuage its guilt and amend its broken relationship with God through human effort. Over the centuries, countless religions have sprung up, each promoting its own unique set of rules and rituals for keeping its particular deity pleased and in a generous mood. While diverse in their doctrines and dogma, each of these religions shares one thing in common: A works-based form of righteousness. The adherents to these religions live under the repressive pressure of a performance-based system that demands constant and unwavering compliance to a set of rigid and unrelenting standards.

Paul and his fellow apostles had to constantly deal with the problem of legalism infiltrating the churches to whom they ministered. It was only natural for those who had converted to Christianity from pagan religions to carry the baggage of their former faith system into their relationship with Christ. They were accustomed to practicing a religion that was based on rule-

keeping and rife with prohibitions of all kinds. So, they were naturally attracted to any form of teaching that provided them with a list of rules to follow and activities to avoid. This made them particularly susceptible to the teachings of a group that later became known as the Judaizers.

The word “Judaizer” first appeared in Paul’s letter to the believers in Galatia. Paul describes an encounter he had with his fellow apostle, Peter. It seems that Peter had been freely associating with Gentile believers in Antioch until a group of Jewish believers from Jerusalem showed up. Paul states that “when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party” (Galatians 2:12 ESV). The presence of these Jewish Christians from Jerusalem caused Peter to avoid the Gentile converts because they were uncircumcised and, therefore, ceremonially unclean. The Jewish Christians were demanding that all converts to Christianity submit to all the requirements of the Mosaic Law, including circumcision. Essentially, they were teaching that the Gentiles were not truly saved because they were living in violation of the law. But Paul, a Jew, and a former Pharisee would have none of it.

*“...when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles **to live like Jews?**” – Galatians 2:14 ESV*

The Greek word is *ioudaikōs*, and it means “after the manner of the Jews.” Paul was appalled that Peter was demanding that Gentile Christians be required to “Judaize” or live according to Jewish commands and customs. The doctrine of the Judaizers was a mixture of grace (through Christ) and works (through the keeping of the Law). The Jews who had shown up in Antioch were teaching, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1 ESV). And this forced Paul and Barnabas to travel all the way back to Jerusalem to appear before the apostles and the elders. The matter for discussion was the teaching of the Judaizers, and Paul pulled no punches in confronting this dangerous heresy.

*“Brothers, you all know that God chose me from among you some time ago to preach to the Gentiles so that they could hear the Good News and believe. God knows people’s hearts, and he confirmed that he accepts Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he cleansed their hearts through faith. So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear? We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.” – Acts 15:7-11 NLT*

According to verse 16 of Colossians 2, this was the very same teaching that had infiltrated the church in Colossae. Paul lists a variety of different topics that have a decidedly Jewish feel to them: Teachings concerning the consumption of food and drink, rules concerning feasts and new moon celebrations, and the keeping of the sabbath. Someone had obviously been teaching the Gentile members of the local congregation that there was more to their newfound faith in Christ than just belief. They were going to have to alter their behavior to accommodate a whole host of religious rules and rituals.

But Paul strongly refuted the idea of adding anything to their faith Christ alone.

*“...these rules are only shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ himself is that reality.” – Colossians 2:17 NLT*

As a Jew, Paul knew that these things had been designed by God to serve a vital but temporary purpose. Paul assured the believers in Galatia that the law had been given by God but that it had fulfilled its primary purpose. Now that Jesus had come, adherence to the law was no longer required to attain a right standing with God.

*Before the way of faith in Christ was available to us, we were placed under guard by the law. We were kept in protective custody, so to speak, until the way of faith was revealed.*

*Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian. – Galatians 3:23-25 NLT*

And Paul wanted the believers in Colossae to understand that they were not subject to anyone's teaching regarding additional requirements or rules concerning salvation.

*Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. – Colossians 2:18 NLT*

Their right standing with God was not based on what they did or didn't do. It was based on the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Upon placing their faith in Christ, they had been imputed His righteousness. What was true for Paul was true for them.

*I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith. – Philippians 3:9 NLT*

Paul was a staunch defender of the faith, who was willing to hold all those who taught a different gospel or a different Jesus accountable for their actions. And he declared that those who were attempting to mislead the believers in Colossae of being “puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind” (Colossians 2:18 ESV).

Not only that, Paul insists that their errant teaching separated them from Christ and His church. Their false doctrines concerning salvation actually made them an enemy of the gospel. They were doing more harm than good and diminishing the unity of the body that Christ's death had made possible.

Paul reminded his brothers and sisters in Christ, “You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world?” (Colossians 2:20 NLT). They were becoming distracted by rules that declared, “Don't

handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!" (Colossians 2:21 NLT). But these kinds of prohibitions were man-made and destined to fail. Laws can regulate human behavior but are incapable of changing the heart.

*These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires. – Colossians 2:23 NLT*

Paul revealed the true purpose of the law to the believers in Galatia.

*Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. But the law was designed to last only until the coming of the child who was promised. – Galatians 3:19 NLT*

And Paul went on to point out that the law was never meant to provide salvation. It declared the kind of righteousness God required and revealed mankind's incapacity to live up to God's holy standards. And Paul makes it painfully clear that rule-keeping had never been the means by which man could be saved.

*If the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying it. But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ. – Galatians 3:21-22 NLT*

## A Future-Focused Faith

*<sup>1</sup> If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. – Colossians 3:1-4 ESV*

Paul's opening statement in chapter three is meant to convey an assumption that Paul has made regarding the members of the Colossian church. He is not questioning their salvation, but instead, he is stating that because they are believers, they must have a completely different perspective about life. The opening verse might be better translated, "Since you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above..."

Their new relationship with God the Father, made possible by the atoning work of Jesus Christ, should give them an eternal, rather than temporal, outlook on life. Their hearts and minds should be focused on all that the death and resurrection of Jesus accomplished on their behalf. They were no longer of this world. In fact, what Paul wrote to the believers in Philippi was true for them as well: "...we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior" (Philippians 3:20 NLT).

Paul was constantly encouraging Gentile believers to embrace their new identity as citizens of God's eternal kingdom.

*So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. – Ephesians 2:19 NLT*

No matter what their ethnic identity may have been, they were now members of God's family and shared in the glorious inheritance reserved for all His children.

*So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. – Romans 8:15-17 NLT*

But Paul knew that the Colossian believers were struggling to accept and adapt to their new identities in Christ. Because of their earth-bound existence, they were prone to view life through the lens of the here-and-now. They were stuck on an earthly plane and having a difficult time visualizing the spiritual benefits of their relationship with Christ. But Paul reminded them that their Lord and Savior was no longer on earth but was "seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1 ESV).

Paul's mention of Jesus' presence at His Father's side was intended to remind them that this present world was not their final destination. Peter would have told them that they were nothing more than "temporary residents and foreigners" (1 Peter 2:11 NLT) in this world. According to what Jesus told His disciples; God had a far better destiny in store for His children.

*"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." – John 14:2-3 ESV*

Peter described this place as "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (1 Peter 1:4 ESV). And the apostle John recorded in the book of Revelation the vision he received of this future residence for God's people.

*And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." – Revelation 22:2-4 ESV*

So, when Paul writes, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2 ESV), he is attempting to focus their attention on the glorious future God has in store for them. They were not to confuse this present world and their current lives with the coming Kingdom of God. And like the apostle John, Paul wanted his readers to reject the temptation to live as if this world was their home.

*Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever. – 1 John 2:15-17 NLT*

Paul knew how difficult it was to live in this world while maintaining a healthy distance from all its temptations and allures. That's why he emphasized having a "heavenly" perspective that focused on the reality of things to come. In a sense, Paul is describing the life of faith. As the author of Hebrews describes it, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1 ESV). Faith is living with a future-focused perspective that believes in and waits on the final fulfillment of all the promises that God has made.

*And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope*



*when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently).* – Romans 8:23-25 NLT

Paul constantly repeated this refrain to the various flocks to whom God had made him a shepherd. He told the Corinthians Christians:

*So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.* – 2 Corinthians 4:18 NLT

*So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.* – 2 Corinthians 5:6-7 NLT

And Paul reminded the Colossians believers: “your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3 ESV). This rather enigmatic statement carries a profound truth that Paul thoroughly embraced and constantly taught. In his letter to the church in Rome, he expounded upon the profound nature of our union with Christ.

*...have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.*

*Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was. We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with him.* – Romans 6:3-8 NLT

Christ didn't save the Colossian believers and then abandon them to fend for themselves. They were united with Him in His death and His resurrection. His death broke the chains of sin that had once held them captive and trapped in a life of slavery. They had died with Christ and were now united to Him in His resurrected state. That is why Paul could so boldly and joyfully state, “My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20 NLT).

Paul states that the Christian's life is “hidden with Christ in God.” The Greek word is κρύπτω (*kryptō*), and it conveys the idea of concealment. He is trying to let the Colossian believers know that their lives are being preserved by Christ in heaven. They were to live their lives as if they were already seated by His side in heaven. Their destiny was assured, and while they were temporarily stuck on earth, they could live as if they were already citizens of God's eternal kingdom. From a faith-based perspective, they were as good as there. Their sins were forgiven,

their future resurrection was assured, and their eternal state was fully secure. All because of the matchless love of God in Christ.

*...God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. – Ephesians 2:4-6 NLT*

## Live Like Who You Are

<sup>5</sup> Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> On account of these the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup> But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. <sup>11</sup> Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. – Colossians 3:5-11 ESV

How were the believers in Colossae supposed to set their minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth? Was Paul suggesting that they be so heavenly-minded that they were no earthly good? Paul has just challenged them to adopt a Christ-focused perspective that highlights the eternal aspect of their relationship with Him. Christ is seated at the right hand of His Father in heaven, and one day He will return. His presence at His Father's side demonstrates that He successfully completed His initial earthly mission. The apostle Peter spoke of Jesus' exaltation when he addressed the crowds at Pentecost.

*“God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God’s right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us...”* – Acts 2:32-33 NLT

Jesus' death was efficacious or effective. It accomplished the will of His heavenly Father and requires no supplemental aids or add-ons to increase its efficacy. And Paul assured the believers in Rome that, because Jesus died and rose again, they would enjoy eternal life with Him.

*We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.* – Romans 6:9-11 NLT

Paul picks up the same theme with the believers in Colossae. He wants them to live according to their new status as spiritually transformed and adopted children of God. Jesus didn't die so that they might have their best life now but so that they might enjoy glorified life forever. But Paul knew that this future-focused mindset was difficult to maintain while living in the present. That's why he provides them with some practical guidance for navigating life in a fallen world. He is expanding the theme he began back in chapter two.

*Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith...* – Colossians 2:6-7 ESV

For Paul, it was always about faith. He firmly believed and persistently taught that faith was the means by which we are saved and sanctified. And Jesus Christ is to be the sole focus of that faith. It is through Christ that we have access to the Father. It is because of Christ that we have the assurance of eternal life. It is thanks to Christ that we have the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God. And look closely at what Paul told the Roman believers: “consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God **through Christ Jesus**” (Romans 6:11 NLT).

Their union with Christ equipped them with unprecedented power to live godly lives – even in the ungodly environment of Rome. And the same thing was true for the Colossian Christians. Paul has already told them, “You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world...” (Colossians 2:20 NLT).

Paul was constantly admonishing believers for their tendency to regress in their faith. They seemed to have no problem believing that Jesus could save them but they had difficulty trusting that He could keep them saved. So, they kept reverting to their old lifestyles based on human effort and self-righteousness.

*So now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world? – Galatians 4:9 NLT*

Paul was calling for complete separation from and dependence upon the things of this world. If Jesus was to be the believer’s sole source of salvation and sustenance, why were they continually turning to the world for satisfaction, fulfillment, significance, and hope? Their actions were in direct conflict with their calling and expressed commitment to Jesus Christ. Their behavior was not accurately reflecting their belief in a transformed life. That is why Paul demands that they do an about-face, turning their backs on their former way of life and seeking things above.

*So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don’t be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. – Colossians 3:5 NLT*

Paul was well aware of the fact that his flock in Colossae was struggling with the ongoing presence of their sinful natures. And Paul was not exempt from this internal battle between godliness and wickedness. In his letter to the Romans, he divulged his own struggle with indwelling sin.

*I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love God’s law with all my heart. But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? – Romans 7:21-24 NLT*

But Paul answered his own pleading question, joyfully declaring, “Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:25 NLT). The solution to the problem of indwelling sin is Jesus. Because of Jesus, we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to say no to sin and yes to God. His divine presence provides us with all we need to put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within us. That is why Paul told the Galatian church, “So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves” (Galatians 5:16 NLT). Then he went on to say, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there” (Galatians 5:24 NLT).

Because of their relationship with Christ, their former sinful habits had been nailed to the cross with Him. But every believer knows how easy it is to breathe life into those old, dead habits and “resurrect” them once again. So, Paul demands that they “put to death” those things. But how? Is he suggesting that this is an ongoing, daily action? Is it the fate of every Christian to live their entire earthly life in a daily struggle to put to death sin? The answer is found in the grammar of Paul’s statement. When he states, “put to death,” he uses the Aorist Active Imperative (AAM) tense. The action described by the verb indicates that it is a past event. It has already taken place. Paul is stating that our old sinful habits have already been put to death – on the cross. So, we must constantly return them to their rightful place – on the cross. Our present action is based on a past reality.

The action Paul is commanding is to be the natural result of belief. If we truly believe that Jesus “canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14 NLT), then we should confidently return those sinful habits right where they belong: to the cross. They are dead to us. They no longer possess power over us. But Paul has to remind the Colossians that their new life in Christ was meant to reflect a new way of living.

*You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. –*  
Colossians 3:7-8 NLT

They had been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. They were now clothed in His righteousness. But metaphorically, they were constantly going back to the closet of sin and picking out old, soiled garments to wear. That’s why Paul had to remind them that they had “put off the old self with its practices” (Colossians 3:9 ESV) and had “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Colossians 3:10 ESV). But that past action required constant repeating in the present. They were guilty of reaching back into the closet and selecting one of their old, comfortably fitting sins to wear out in public.

Paul is describing the ongoing nature of sanctification or spiritual growth. The Christian life is not meant to be static or stagnant. Once saved, always saved doesn’t mean that there is no ongoing transformation that takes place in the believer’s life. Peter indicates that believers are to “grow into a full experience of salvation” (1 Peter 2:2 NLT). Paul told the Ephesians that they were to be “growing in every way more and more like Christ” (Ephesians 4:15 NLT).

Growth in Christlikeness is non-optional for the believer. One of the primary roles of the Holy Spirit is to assist Christians in their knowledge of Christ and their ongoing transformation into His likeness. And this transformation is for all believers, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background. Each is to individually experience the Spirit's transformative power so that, together, we might reflect that nature of Christ and bring glory to God the Father.

*...you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. – 1 Peter 2:5 ESV*

## Addition by Subtraction

<sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. – Colossians 3:12-17 ESV

In verse 5, Paul tells the Colossians to **put to death** (*nekroō*) five things: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness. Now, in verse 12, he tells them to **put on** (*endyō*) five things: compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. The first list represents-\* the traits that characterized their old natures before salvation. It was not intended to be an exhaustive list, and Paul did not suggest that each Colossian believer had been guilty of committing all these vices. He was simply pointing out the kinds of immoral behaviors that characterized their lives before coming to faith in Christ.

The first list seems to stress sins that are self-centered and focused on satisfying sexual passions or ungodly desires.

**Sexual immorality** (*porneia*) is a rather broad term that can refer to illicit sexual intercourse but was also used to cover such things as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, and intercourse with animals

**Impurity** (*akatharsia*) refers to uncleanness in any form but in a moral sense: the impurity of lustful, luxurious, and profligate living.

**Passion** (*pathos*) was a word the Greeks used that had both positive and negative characteristics. But its presence on this list suggests that Paul refers to depraved or vile passions.

**Evil desire** (*epithymian kaken*) is a craving for something forbidden. It is a legitimate longing that chooses an illegitimate object as its focus.

**Greed** (*pleonexian*) is the desire to acquire more by fraudulent means. It is a form of dissatisfaction that constantly craves more, even at the expense of others.

Not only are these traits earthly and immoral, but they are also self-centered and completely devoid of concern for others. They represent a blatant disregard for God and a disdain for other people, which puts them at odds with the command of God that Jesus labeled as the greatest.

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” – Matthew 22:37-39 ESV*

Paul’s first list describes the me-focused state of fallen humanity. All those who have failed to experience a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ are incapable of loving God and others because their sinful natures are driven by an uncontrollable and insatiable love of self. Even followers of Christ must recognize that the sinful characteristics that marked their pre-salvation state have not all been eradicated. The old sin nature remains and must be dealt with decisively and repeatedly.

“The Christian must kill self-centeredness; he must regard as dead all private desires and ambitions. There must be in his life a radical transformation of the will, and a radical shift of the centre. Everything which would keep him from fully obeying God and fully surrendering to Christ must be surgically excised.” – William Barclay, *The Letter to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*. Daily Study Bible series

But there is more to the process than simply eliminating past bad habits. In a sense, Paul is telling the Colossians, “out with the old, in with the new.” They must replace the traits that characterized their former lives with godly alternatives, and Paul provides them with a list of five non-optional qualities that should mark their lives as God’s chosen people.

**Compassionate hearts** (*splagchnon oiktirmos*) can be literally translated as “bowels of mercy.” In the ancient world, compassion was associated with the bowels, but in our modern context, we associate that characteristic with the heart. It expresses a deep concern and care for those who are suffering.

**Kindness** (*chrēstotēs*) is a form of moral goodness that expresses itself in acts of selfless sacrifice for others.

**Humility** (*tapeinophrosynē*) refers to a humbleness of mind or holding a humble opinion of oneself. Paul expressed it this way: “In humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3 ESV).

**Meekness** (*praotēs*) is another relational word that conveys the idea of gentleness toward others. It is the opposite of arrogance or self-assertiveness.

**Patience** (*makrothymia*) is “slowness in avenging wrongs.” It refers to one who willingly endures injustice and ill-treatment for the sake of others.

All of these traits are other-focused. They are relational in nature and intended to put the needs of others first. Paul also provided concrete examples of what these godly characteristics should look like in everyday life.



*Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. – Colossians 3:13 NLT*

Notice his emphasis on others. The Christian life is not intended to be a solo sport but a team activity where brothers and sisters in Christ are expected to operate in a spirit of unity and cooperation so that, together, they reflect His goodness and glory. Paul was writing to a diverse congregation made up of Gentiles and Jews, the rich and the poor, slaves and freemen. But they were all one in Christ, and, as Paul told the congregation in Ephesus, their ability to achieve unity in the face of diversity was a reflection of God's work among them.

*So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. **Together**, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. We are carefully joined **together** in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord. – Ephesians 2:19-21 NLT*

For Paul, the most convincing proof of the Colossians' Spirit-empowered transformation was their love for one another. Rather than reverting back to their former self-centered and selfish behavior, they were to love as they had been loved (1 John 4:19). God had sent His Son as a tangible expression of His love for them, and He ordained that His Son would sacrifice His life on a cross in their place. That selfless act of love was to be emulated and passed on from one believer to another.

*Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. – Colossians 3:14 NLT*

Love was to be the glue that binds the body of Christ together. But it must be a selfless, lay-it-all-on-the-line kind of love that expects nothing in return. Jesus had clarified to His disciples the kind of love He expected them to have for one another.

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." – John 13:34-35 ESV*

Paul is passing on that command to his flock in Colossae. He wants them to know that their lives are to be marked by love. Not only that, but they are to be a people characterized by peace.

*...let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. – Colossians 3:15 NLT*

The Colossian believers were surrounded by a constant state of turmoil that produced a sense of anxiety in them. False teachers caused them to question their faith. Daily battles with old habits tempted them to doubt their salvation. Infighting and disunity plagued their fellowship.

But Paul called them to live in peace—a particular kind of peace that comes from Christ Himself. Paul seems to be recalling the words that Jesus spoke to His disciples not long before His death.

*“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” – John 14:27 ESV*

Jesus spoke these words in conjunction with His promise to send the Holy Spirit. One of the primary functions of the Spirit of God would be to bring peace to the hearts of Christ’s followers after His departure. The Spirit’s presence within them would provide a sense of continuity and a calming assurance that they had not been abandoned. Christ was still with them in the form of the Holy Spirit.

Paul wants the Colossians to know that the Spirit is an ever-present reality in their lives, and intended to be the source of peace and tranquility, even amid turmoil and distress. They are to be constantly thankful for the peace-producing presence of the Spirit of God. They are also to keep their hearts and minds focused on the truth regarding Jesus Christ.

*Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. – Colossians 3:16 NLT*

That message needed no additions or addendums. The good news regarding Jesus required no “new” editions or updates. They were to teach it, sing about it, rest confidently on it, and constantly express their thanks to God for it.

Every aspect of their lives was to reflect their new relationship with Jesus Christ and their Spirit-empowered capacity to live godly lives in an ungodly world. There was to be no compartmentalization or secular/sacred split. No area of life was off limits to the transformative work of the Spirit. That is why Paul closed out this section of his letter with a powerful call for them to allow the Spirit to radically transform all they said and did.

*...whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. – Colossians 1:17 ESV*

## Let's Get Practical

*<sup>18</sup> Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. <sup>19</sup> Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. <sup>20</sup> Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup> For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.*

*<sup>1</sup> Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. – Colossians 3:18-4:1 ESV*

Paul now takes those other-oriented, selfless, and love-motivated character traits and applies them to everyday life. And since he was writing to believers living in Colossae, he customized his words for their particular context. He wanted them to know what seeking and setting their minds on things that are above would look like on a daily basis. He wasn't promoting some kind of ethereal and impractical brand of religious pietism and asceticism. No, he was recommending a highly practical brand of faith that revealed the transformative nature of the gospel in everyday life. They were to "put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Colossians 3:10 ESV). As chosen ones of God, they were to put on "compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience" (Colossians 3:12 ESV). But none of these "add-ons" would be effective without love.

*...put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony... – Colossians 3:14 ESV*

And since God is love and He best expressed that love through the gift of His Son, Paul called the Colossians to "do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17 ESV). But what does that look like? How were they supposed to make these powerful admonitions practical? Well, Paul makes it plain and simple for them. He begins with the family unit, one of the most foundational and universal arenas of relationship in this life.

The family was God's idea. It was He who originated and ordained the union of one man and one woman, creating an indissoluble bond between them as husband and wife. The creation account found in the opening chapters of Genesis records God's creation of the first marriage.

*So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,*

*“This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man.”*

*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. – Genesis 2:21-24 ESV*

And Jesus Himself confirmed the validity of the Genesis account by stating, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4-6 ESV).

So, Paul begins at the beginning, with the family unit. He calls believing wives to submit to their believing husbands. But he adds an important, yet often overlooked, distinction: “as is fitting in the Lord” (Colossians 3:18 ESV). *The New Living Translation* puts it this way: “as is fitting for those who belong to the Lord.”

For Paul, the use of the word “submission” was directly linked to his call that all believers conduct themselves with compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. If there was ever a relationship where those characteristics were necessary, it was that of a husband and wife. So, he calls wives to lovingly, humbly, meekly, and patiently relate to their husbands in such a way that honors their role as the God-appointed head of the household. Paul provided additional insight into the headship role of the husband when writing to the church in Ephesus.

*...submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. – Ephesians 5:21-24 NLT*

The biblical concept of submission has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority. Paul is not suggesting that women are somehow second-class citizens. He is simply articulating the divinely ordained concept of headship within the family unit. Just as Christ is the head of the church, the believing husband is given responsibility for the well-being of his family. And that responsibility comes with a heavy dose of accountability.

Paul made it painfully clear that one of the primary leadership responsibilities of a godly husband was to selflessly love his wife. And, once again, Paul provides further clarity in his letter to the church in Ephesus.

*...this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. – Ephesians 5:25-26 NLT*

In order to lovingly, graciously submit to her husband, a wife would have to surrender her pride and natural desire for autonomy. In other words, she would have to “put off the old self with its practices” (Colossians 3:9 ESV). Submission doesn’t come naturally or easily. It requires a sacrifice of the human will. In order for anyone to submit in a way that “is fitting for those who belong to the Lord” (Colossians 3:18 NLT), they will have to “put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within” (Colossians 3:18 NLT). And according to Peter, submission isn’t something that is reserved for wives alone.

*Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God... – 1 Peter 2:13-15 ESV*

The life of a believer, regardless of their gender, is to be marked by an attitude of humble submission to others – for this is the will of God. And, according to Paul, one of the greatest displays of death-to-self was to be a husband’s selfless expression of love for his wife. He was to put his wife’s life ahead of his own and to be willing to die on her behalf.

At the core of Paul’s teaching on submission was the idea of humility versus pride. There was no place for self-aggrandizement in the life of a believer.

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty pride, but in humility consider others more important than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. – Philippians 2:3-4 BSB*

Even children had a part to play in God’s divine order for the home. They were to obey their parents in everything. Why? Because it pleases the Lord and is in keeping with His divine will. A child’s obedience is a form of submission to the God-ordained authority of their parents. Again, this is not normal or natural. As the proverb states, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child...” (Proverbs 22:15 BSB).

And it’s interesting to note that disobedience to parents was one of the characteristics Paul listed when describing the future state of the world in the last days.

*You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, **disobedient to their parents**, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. – 2 Timothy 3:1-4 NLT*

But, according to Paul, an obedient child is the byproduct of a loving and godly father.

*Fathers, do not aggravate your children, or they will become discouraged.* – Colossians 3:21 NLT

That same proverb goes on to say, “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, **but the rod of discipline drives it far from him** (Proverbs 22:15 BSB)” Yet, too much discipline, done in an unloving and heavy-handed manner can do more harm than good. It can cause a child to become discouraged. Discipline that is unloving and lacking in compassion can make a child disinterested in trying to obey, and can result in rebellion rather than submission. So, Paul warns fathers to use their role as heads of their households with care.

Next, Paul moves from addressing the family unit to dealing with another relationship that was a ubiquitous part of the Colossian community: Slavery. While we find this topic uncomfortable and somewhat off-putting, it was a normal part of everyday life for the citizens of Colossae.

“Scholars estimate about 10% (but possibly up to 20%) of the Roman empire’s population were enslaved. This would mean, for an estimated Roman empire population of 50 million (in the first century AD) between five and ten million were enslaved. This number would have been unequally distributed across the empire, with a higher concentration of enslaved people in urban areas and in Italy.” – © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Slavery was an everyday part of daily life in Colossae. Yet Paul doesn’t attempt to address the moral implications of slavery. Instead, he tries to show the Colossian believers how their new identity in Christ should impact every area of life. The reality was that slaves were coming to faith in Christ and becoming a part of the local congregation of believers. It was highly likely that the church in Colossae had slaves attending worship services with their own masters. And this presented a particularly difficult problem for Paul and the leadership of the church. How were these people supposed to relate to one another? How was their mutual relationship with Christ to impact their interpersonal relationship with one another?

Paul addresses both parties. He tells slaves, “Obey your earthly masters in everything you do. Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. Serve them sincerely because of your reverent fear of the Lord” (Colossians 3:22 NLT). And he tells masters, “be just and fair to your slaves. Remember that you also have a Master—in heaven” (Colossians 4:1 NLT).

Notice his emphasis on God. Both parties were to recognize that their earthly relationship with one another had been dramatically altered by their new identity in Christ. While nothing had changed regarding their earthly status, Paul wanted them to know that God viewed them in a whole new light.

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

*in all of us. – Colossians 3:11 NLT*

There is an invaluable and universal lesson to be learned from Paul's words to slaves. These were individuals who had no choice regarding their condition. Their position as slaves required that they submit, whether they wanted to or not. But Paul challenged them to take a different attitude.

*Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ. – Colossians 3:23-24 NLT*

And this applied to every believer in the local church in Colossae. It's what Paul meant when he wrote, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2 ESV). A slave was to live his life with an eternal perspective, knowing that his current circumstance was temporal. There was a reward awaiting him that made his present suffering pale in comparison. And that heavenly-minded, future-focused perspective was to motivate the life of every believer in Colossae, regardless of their gender, race, or social status.





## Thy Will Be Done

<sup>2</sup> Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. <sup>3</sup> 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— <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

<sup>5</sup> Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. <sup>6</sup> Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. — Colossians 4:2-6 ESV

Paul has emphasized the relationship between believers and encouraged them to “make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you” (Colossians 3:13 NLT). They were to patiently and lovingly respond to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, forgiving as they had been forgiven, and seeking to promote an atmosphere of Christlike peace and harmony.

Now, Paul calls on the Colossian believers to make prayer a priority in their lives. And Paul practiced what he preached. He opened his letter with several statements concerning the ongoing prayers that he and Timothy prayed on behalf of the Colossian church.

*We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. — Colossians 1:3 NLT*

*...we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. — Colossians 1:9 NLT*

*We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. — Colossians 1:11 NLT*

Prayer was a vital part of Paul’s ministry. With responsibility for the spiritual well-being of so many congregations spread over such a large geographic area, Paul was limited in his ability to make personal appearances. So, he utilized prayer as the means by which he called on the power of God to protect and provide for his far-flung flocks. Paul understood the power and necessity of prayer, and considered it the most vital relationship a Christian could cultivate in their lives. The author of Hebrews, whom many believe to have been Paul, wrote, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16 BSB). Paul wrote something similar in his letter to the church in Ephesus.

*Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence. — Ephesians 3:12 NLT*

Paul was committed to cultivating the interpersonal relationships of the Colossians believers. He wanted them to live out their Spirit-transformed lives by displaying Christlike behavior toward one another. But he also desired that the Colossians maintain a healthy and ongoing dialogue with their heavenly Father. For Paul, prayer was the primary way for a believer to express their dependence upon God. He viewed it as far more than a means of getting what we want from God. Prayer was a way for the believer to align their will with that of the Father. It was to be an ongoing form of two-way communication between the Heavenly Father and His child. Through prayer, petitions could be shared, and directions could be received. For Paul, prayer was an expression of faith that displayed the believer's dependence upon and trust in God. It was a privilege provided by a gracious God that allowed His children to call upon Him at any time. It was to be a delight, not a duty.

Paul was familiar with the proverbs that promoted the efficacy of prayer.

*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him. – Proverbs 15:8 ESV*

*The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous. – Proverbs 15:29 ESV*

He would have known what King David wrote concerning God and the prayers of His people.

*The Lord is near to all who call on him,  
to all who call on him in truth.  
He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;  
he also hears their cry and saves them. – Psalm 145:18-19 NLT*

And he would have concurred with the words of James.

*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power to prevail. – James 5:16 BSB*

So, Paul begins to close out his letter to the Colossians with an emphasis on prayer. He urges them to devote themselves to the practice of prayer. He warns them to be “watchful” (*grēgoreō*), a word that carries the idea of being alert and ready to see how God will answer their prayers. And when God does answer, they are to express their gratitude for His gracious intercession. Prayer requires faith but not blind faith. It has God as its object and, therefore, answers to prayer should come as no surprise. Prayer and thanksgiving should go hand in hand because God is a faithful God who longs to fulfill the desires of His people.

That's why Paul asks the Colossians to pray for him. He understood the power of prayer and was not ashamed to request their prayers on his behalf. But Paul was specific in terms of his prayer request. He wanted them to pray that God would open up additional opportunities for him and Timothy to share the good news concerning Christ. At first glance, this seems like an

unnecessary prayer. The spread of the gospel was God's will. He didn't need to be coerced or cajoled into opening up new opportunities for unbelievers to hear the news of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. According to Paul's letter to Timothy, God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4 ESV). So, why was it important that the Colossians pray this prayer on Paul's behalf?

It seems that Paul wanted them to pray in keeping with the will of God. It was clearly God's will that many would be saved, and the Colossians had the opportunity to align themselves with God by praying for His will to be accomplished. In doing so, they would be setting their minds on things above, not on things of this earth (Colossians 3:2). They would be praying in keeping with God's revealed will.

What makes Paul's prayer request even more fascinating is that he shared it while under house arrest in Rome. He didn't ask them to pray for his release. He didn't covet their prayers for protection or provision. They would have known about his predicament. By focusing their attention on the spread of the gospel, Paul was helping them to understand that God's will trumped his own. If God deemed it necessary for Paul to be released for the gospel to spread, He would make it happen. But Paul's prayer request was selfless in nature. He wanted the good news to go out and for God to get the glory.

Paul also wrote a letter to the believers in Philippi while imprisoned in Rome. Rather than requesting that they pray for his release, he declared God's sovereign will concerning his imprisonment.

*I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear. – Philippians 1:12-14 NLT*

And Paul went on to express the tension he felt regarding his ongoing imprisonment and possible death and the thought of release and continued ministry.

*For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. – Philippians 1:20-24 NLT*

Paul longed to be with Jesus, but he was also committed to the work to which he had been commissioned by Jesus. So, for Paul, it boiled down to the will of God. The gospel must go out and if God wanted Paul to be an ongoing participant in that mission, God would orchestrate

Paul's release. And if God should set Paul free, he asked that the Colossians pray for him to have clarity when proclaiming the message of the gospel.

He reminds them that they too must live out their faith, constantly mindful of its impact on "those who are not believers" (Colossians 4:5 NLT). As they prayed for God's will to be done, they must also live their lives in accordance with God's will for them. They must be salt and light. They must live wisely and circumspectly, always recognizing their role as Christ's ambassadors on earth. That is why Paul encourages them, "Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone" (Colossians 4:6 NLT). Their words were just as important as their works. Their daily interactions with the unsaved would be vital to the continued spread of the gospel. And their patient and loving treatment of one another would go a long way in demonstrating the life-changing nature of the good news.

In a sense, Paul is encouraging his flock in Colossae to practice the model prayer that Jesus gave His disciples.

*"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."* – Matthew 6:10 ESV

Their petitions and their actions were to be in keeping with the will of God. They were to pray and behave in ways that aligned with God's revealed will for the world. So, that the gospel could continue to spread and the lost be restored to a right relationship with God.

## Let's Get Practical

*<sup>18</sup> Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. <sup>19</sup> Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. <sup>20</sup> Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. <sup>21</sup> Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup> For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.*

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There is an invaluable and universal lesson to be learned from Paul's words to slaves. These were individuals who had no choice regarding their condition. Their position as slaves required that they submit, whether they wanted to or not. But Paul challenged them to take a different attitude.

*Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward, and that the Master you are serving is Christ. – Colossians 3:23-24 NLT*

And this applied to every believer in the local church in Colossae. It's what Paul meant when he wrote, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2 ESV). A slave was to live his life with an eternal perspective, knowing that his current circumstance was temporal. There was a reward awaiting him that made his present suffering pale in comparison. And that heavenly-minded, future-focused perspective was to motivate the life of every believer in Colossae, regardless of their gender, race, or social status.



## Thy Will Be Done

<sup>2</sup> Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. <sup>3</sup> 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— <sup>4</sup> that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

<sup>5</sup> Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. <sup>6</sup> Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. — Colossians 4:2-6 ESV

Paul has emphasized the relationship between believers and encouraged them to “make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you” (Colossians 3:13 NLT). They were to patiently and lovingly respond to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, forgiving as they had been forgiven, and seeking to promote an atmosphere of Christlike peace and harmony.

Now, Paul calls on the Colossian believers to make prayer a priority in their lives. And Paul practiced what he preached. He opened his letter with several statements concerning the ongoing prayers that he and Timothy prayed on behalf of the Colossian church.

*We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. — Colossians 1:3 NLT*

*...we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. — Colossians 1:9 NLT*

*We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. — Colossians 1:11 NLT*

Prayer was a vital part of Paul’s ministry. With responsibility for the spiritual well-being of so many congregations spread over such a large geographic area, Paul was limited in his ability to make personal appearances. So, he utilized prayer as the means by which he called on the power of God to protect and provide for his far-flung flocks. Paul understood the power and necessity of prayer, and considered it the most vital relationship a Christian could cultivate in their lives. The author of Hebrews, whom many believe to have been Paul, wrote, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16 BSB). Paul wrote something similar in his letter to the church in Ephesus.

*Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence. — Ephesians 3:12 NLT*

Paul was committed to cultivating the interpersonal relationships of the Colossians believers. He wanted them to live out their Spirit-transformed lives by displaying Christlike behavior toward one another. But he also desired that the Colossians maintain a healthy and ongoing dialogue with their heavenly Father. For Paul, prayer was the primary way for a believer to express their dependence upon God. He viewed it as far more than a means of getting what we want from God. Prayer was a way for the believer to align their will with that of the Father. It was to be an ongoing form of two-way communication between the Heavenly Father and His child. Through prayer, petitions could be shared, and directions could be received. For Paul, prayer was an expression of faith that displayed the believer's dependence upon and trust in God. It was a privilege provided by a gracious God that allowed His children to call upon Him at any time. It was to be a delight, not a duty.

Paul was familiar with the proverbs that promoted the efficacy of prayer.

*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him. – Proverbs 15:8 ESV*

*The LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous. – Proverbs 15:29 ESV*

He would have known what King David wrote concerning God and the prayers of His people.

*The Lord is near to all who call on him,  
to all who call on him in truth.  
He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;  
he also hears their cry and saves them. – Psalm 145:18-19 NLT*

And he would have concurred with the words of James.

*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power to prevail. – James 5:16 BSB*

So, Paul begins to close out his letter to the Colossians with an emphasis on prayer. He urges them to devote themselves to the practice of prayer. He warns them to be “watchful” (*grēgoreō*), a word that carries the idea of being alert and ready to see how God will answer their prayers. And when God does answer, they are to express their gratitude for His gracious intercession. Prayer requires faith but not blind faith. It has God as its object and, therefore, answers to prayer should come as no surprise. Prayer and thanksgiving should go hand in hand because God is a faithful God who longs to fulfill the desires of His people.

That's why Paul asks the Colossians to pray for him. He understood the power of prayer and was not ashamed to request their prayers on his behalf. But Paul was specific in terms of his prayer request. He wanted them to pray that God would open up additional opportunities for him and Timothy to share the good news concerning Christ. At first glance, this seems like an

unnecessary prayer. The spread of the gospel was God's will. He didn't need to be coerced or cajoled into opening up new opportunities for unbelievers to hear the news of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. According to Paul's letter to Timothy, God "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4 ESV). So, why was it important that the Colossians pray this prayer on Paul's behalf?

It seems that Paul wanted them to pray in keeping with the will of God. It was clearly God's will that many would be saved, and the Colossians had the opportunity to align themselves with God by praying for His will to be accomplished. In doing so, they would be setting their minds on things above, not on things of this earth (Colossians 3:2). They would be praying in keeping with God's revealed will.

What makes Paul's prayer request even more fascinating is that he shared it while under house arrest in Rome. He didn't ask them to pray for his release. He didn't covet their prayers for protection or provision. They would have known about his predicament. By focusing their attention on the spread of the gospel, Paul was helping them to understand that God's will trumped his own. If God deemed it necessary for Paul to be released for the gospel to spread, He would make it happen. But Paul's prayer request was selfless in nature. He wanted the good news to go out and for God to get the glory.

Paul also wrote a letter to the believers in Philippi while imprisoned in Rome. Rather than requesting that they pray for his release, he declared God's sovereign will concerning his imprisonment.

*I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear. – Philippians 1:12-14 NLT*

And Paul went on to express the tension he felt regarding his ongoing imprisonment and possible death and the thought of release and continued ministry.

*For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. – Philippians 1:20-24 NLT*

Paul longed to be with Jesus, but he was also committed to the work to which he had been commissioned by Jesus. So, for Paul, it boiled down to the will of God. The gospel must go out and if God wanted Paul to be an ongoing participant in that mission, God would orchestrate

Paul's release. And if God should set Paul free, he asked that the Colossians pray for him to have clarity when proclaiming the message of the gospel.

He reminds them that they too must live out their faith, constantly mindful of its impact on "those who are not believers" (Colossians 4:5 NLT). As they prayed for God's will to be done, they must also live their lives in accordance with God's will for them. They must be salt and light. They must live wisely and circumspectly, always recognizing their role as Christ's ambassadors on earth. That is why Paul encourages them, "Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone" (Colossians 4:6 NLT). Their words were just as important as their works. Their daily interactions with the unsaved would be vital to the continued spread of the gospel. And their patient and loving treatment of one another would go a long way in demonstrating the life-changing nature of the good news.

In a sense, Paul is encouraging his flock in Colossae to practice the model prayer that Jesus gave His disciples.

*"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."* – Matthew 6:10 ESV

Their petitions and their actions were to be in keeping with the will of God. They were to pray and behave in ways that aligned with God's revealed will for the world. So, that the gospel could continue to spread and the lost be restored to a right relationship with God.

## A Prisoner of Christ

<sup>7</sup> Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. <sup>8</sup> I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, <sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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), <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. <sup>14</sup> Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. <sup>15</sup> Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.”

<sup>18</sup> I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. – Colossians 4:7-18 ESV

As Paul prepares to wrap up his letter to the Colossian church, he mentions the names of eight different men: Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Jesus (Justus), Epaphras, Luke, Demas, and Archippus. Each of them had played a vital role in Paul’s life and ministry. Two of them, Tychicus and Onesimus, had been chosen by Paul to deliver the letter once he had completed it. The first mention of Tychicus in the Scriptures is found in Acts 20, where Luke records his name, as well as that of Aristarchus, among those who accompanied Paul as he left Greece and made his way to Syria.

*...he [Paul] decided to return through Macedonia. Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, **Aristarchus** and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, **Tychicus** and Trophimus. These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days. – Acts 20:3-6 ESV*

Tychicus, like the rest of these men, had become a disciple of Paul and had aided him in his ministry. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul refers to Tychicus as his “beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord” (Ephesians 6:21 ESV). Paul had instructed Tychicus to deliver his letter to the Ephesian believers and bring them up to speed on his current situation (Ephesians

6:22). And Paul had entrusted Tychicus with the same responsibility when it came to the congregation in Colossae.

*Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, 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. – Colossians 4:7-9 ESV*

He was accompanied by Onesimus, another disciple of Paul who, at one time, had been a runaway slave. Paul had befriended Onesimus in Rome, where Paul was imprisoned and the young man was hiding from his former master, a man named Philemon. While it is unclear how Paul and Onesimus met, we do know that Paul had the privilege of leading Onesimus to Christ. After discipling his young friend, he determined to send Onesimus back to his master. What makes this situation rather strange is that Paul knew Onesimus' master well. He was a man named Philemon and the church in Colossae met in his home. Paul wrote a letter to Philemon, asking him to receive Onesimus back, not as a runaway slave, but as a brother in Christ.

*I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison. Onesimus hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart.*

*I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf. But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced. It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever. He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. – Philemon 1:10-16 NLT*

According to Colossian 4:9, Onesimus accompanied Tychicus back to Colossae. Tychicus was to deliver Onesimus and the letter from Paul to Philemon. We are not told how this reunion turned out, but it seems likely that Philemon heeded Paul's advice and treated Onesimus as a "beloved brother" (Philemon 1:16).

Paul also mentions Aristarchus, a Greek who hailed from the city of Thessalonica (Acts 20:4). Paul refers to Aristarchus as his "fellow prisoner" (Colossians 4:10), but it seems unlikely that Paul was inferring that Aristarchus was also under house arrest in Rome. Paul used the term "fellow prisoner" when referring to several of his co-workers in the ministry.

*Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my **fellow prisoners**. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. – Romans 16:7 ESV*



*Epaphras, my **fellow prisoner** in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. – Philemon 1:23-24 ESV*

It appears that Paul used this term to refer to their shared captivity to the will of God. Paul opened up his letter to Philemon by describing himself as “a prisoner for Christ Jesus” (Philemon 1:1 ESV). He used the same phrase when writing to the church in Ephesus, another Gentile community.

*I, Paul, **a prisoner of Christ Jesus** on behalf of you Gentiles—assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace that was given to me for you... – Ephesians 3:1-2 ESV*

Paul didn’t consider himself a prisoner of the Roman government but of Jesus Christ. He was where he was because he had been faithfully fulfilling the will of Christ. And he viewed these other men as fellow captives, who shared his commitment to carrying the good news of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.

In a sense, Paul was name-dropping, providing his readers with a list of individuals whom they knew well and whose reputations would further enhance and support the content of Paul’s letter. The believers in Colossae had never met Paul. They were probably familiar with his name and had likely heard about his miraculous salvation story and prolific ministry. But he was a stranger to them. Paul used the names of these men to assure the Colossians that his words could be trusted. Over time, the various churches had heard about the travels of Paul and the assistance he had received from various individuals, including John Mark and his cousin, Barnabas. That is why Paul mentions their names. John Mark had accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey, and Barnabas had been a part of the church since its earliest days in Jerusalem. Luke mentions his name in Acts 4.

*Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles **Barnabas** (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet. – Acts 4:36-37 ESV*

Jesus Justus was one of several Jewish Christians (“men of the circumcision”) who made up Paul’s ethnically diverse ministerial team. Paul wanted the Colossians to know that when he wrote, “In this new life, it doesn’t matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free” (Colossians 3:11 NLT), he meant it. Paul practiced what he preached.

*Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. – Colossians 3:11 NLT*

Epaphras, a citizen of Colossae, had played a major role in the founding of the church there (Colossians 1:7). But he had left his hometown to minister alongside Paul. It seems that Paul had a small contingent of co-workers who had accompanied him to Rome and remained by his side while he was under house arrest and awaiting trial. This included Luke, the author of the

gospel that bears his name as well as the book of Acts. Luke was Paul's "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14 ESV) and remained by the apostle's side throughout his confinement in Rome. Demas was also at Paul's side in Rome, but the day would come when he would allow his love for the world to replace his commitment to Paul and the gospel ministry.

*Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. – 2 Timothy 4:10 ESV*

Paul closes out his letter by asking that it be shared with the church in Laodicea. Evidently, there was a letter he had written to the Laodicean congregation that he wished to be read by the Colossians as well. All of these congregations were in close proximity to one another and the letters Paul wrote to them were intended to be shared among them. The messages they contained were universal in nature and applicable in every one of the communities where local congregations were attempting to live out their faith in hostile surroundings. Remaining faithful in the midst of a fallen and often antagonistic world was not easy, and nobody knew that better than Paul. That is why he closes out his letter by calling on his children in the faith to "Remember my chains" (Colossians 4:18 ESV). He wanted them to know that he had been imprisoned because of the gospel. He was not oblivious to their situation but was well acquainted with the suffering that accompanied the Christian life. He rejoiced in the fact that God had deemed him worthy of the privilege of suffering as Christ had suffered – on behalf of His body, the church.

*I am glad when I suffer for you in my body, for I am participating in the sufferings of Christ that continue for his body, the church. – Colossians 1:24 NLT*