

NOTES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

Paul's Epistle to the
Colossians

Gene Cunningham

As Jesus Christ prepared to send the disciples for the first time throughout Israel with His message, He included in their instructions this admonition: *“Freely you have received, freely give”* (Matthew 10:8). This six-word summary of grace explains the financial policy of the publications and audio ministries of Basic Training. All audio materials and publications are provided **without charge** to anyone who requests them. For a list of available material, visit our website.



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“Endure hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

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NOTES ON THE NEW TESTAMENT

Preface

While I was teaching in Myanmar/Burma in March 2019, some of my long-term, advanced students suggested that I go through the New Testament and provide basic notes, which they could then be able print as a study Bible. They specifically asked that I focus on issues that are a major area of confusion in the churches where they work. Therefore, the following commentary will focus on these five primary areas:

1. What is the nature of God's grace and how is it received?
2. What is God's plan of salvation and the clear message of the Gospel?
3. What is the Bible's teaching on the security and assurance of the believer?
4. How is the believer to live the Christian life and be effective in witness/service?
5. What does prophecy say about the last days and the order of end-times events?

Practical Suggestions

These notes are purposely brief in nature. This work is not intended to be a complete commentary. All through the work I have kept in mind those who live in remote areas of our world, who labor to both understand and to teach others the Word of God. They do not have access to Bible school or seminary training. Neither are they able to afford the vast array of books available to pastors and teachers who live in more advanced countries.

I encourage all who utilize these notes to study them with an open Bible. Pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:15–23; 3:14–21) as you study. Read the context of the passage carefully. Look up and compare the references that are provided. Above all, let the Word of God, and not these notes, guide your insight into God's Word. As I always tell my students: "Never take my word for anything; search the Scriptures and prove what is true" (Acts 17:10–12; 1 John 4:1).

Before you begin any study of the Word of God, take a few moments to make sure that you are in fellowship with God, filled by means the Holy Spirit. Comprehension, like everything else in the Christian life, is a gift that can be appropriated only by faith. The Bible clearly lays out three requirements that must be met before we can expect to understand God's Word. All three require nothing from us but faith.

1. *We must be believers in Jesus Christ* (John 3:16).

It is impossible for unbelievers to understand the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:14). Jesus declared to the leading religious leader of His day that apart from spiritual birth, man is blind to the things of God. "*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit ... You must be born again*" (John 3:6-7).

2. *We must be filled by means of the Spirit* (1 Corinthians 2:12).

Only the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God. As believers, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but when we sin, we break fellowship with God and cease to function in the power of the Spirit. When we confess our sins, God is always faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). The moment we confess, we are restored to fellowship and are again under the control of the Holy Spirit and, therefore, able to learn.

3. *We must approach in faith* (Hebrews 11:6).

Only when we approach in humility, with child-like faith, will the Word of God make sense to us (Matt. 18:4; Heb. 11:3). Where we find Scripture at odds with our ideas or our desires, we must submit to the authority of the Word. Intimacy, understanding, and power are reserved for those who are willing to do God's will (John 7:17).

DEDICATION

*“This will be written for the generation to come,
that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.”*

Psalm 102:18

While it is my hope and prayer that these notes will be helpful to all current students of the Word of God, I send them forth with a special dedication to the 144,000 Jewish evangelists who are yet to come on the scene of world history (Rev. 7:1–8). They will be the heroes of the faith in the coming time of Tribulation following the soon coming Rapture of the Church (1 Thess. 4:13–18).

To these brothers and sisters of the future, I want you to know you have been thought of, prayed for, and loved—before you even knew your mission. We of the Church Age salute you for the sufferings you will endure and the victories you will win. We bid you to be strong in the Lord, for your victory is sure in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the labor put into these notes by many hands and through many prayers, be a help to you as you boldly proclaim the name of Jesus Christ in a dark and dangerous time!

INTRODUCTION

The town of Colosse, about one hundred miles east of Ephesus, was a small and insignificant place at the time of this its writing. Yet, it was significant—especially to Paul—because of the Christian church there, and because of the heresies that threatened the truth of the gospel message. These consisted of a mixture of mysticism, Jewish legalism, angel worship, and Gnosticism (chapter 2). These teachings were the result of the false teachers Paul had warned the elders of Ephesus about in Acts 20:28–30. The church was apparently founded by Epaphras (1:7; 4:12), probably after his own conversion during Paul’s three-year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19). This letter is one of the prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon). Epaphras likely carried the letter from Rome in the company of Onesimus (Phi. 10; Col. 4:9), the runaway slave of Philemon.

The Epistles of Colossians and Ephesians are like two sides of a coin. While Colossians exalts Christ as the head of the Church, Ephesians is more focused on the Church as the body, and bride, of Christ. We can also find contrasts between the two. The Ephesian letter assumes a steadfastness in the recipients, while Colossians warns of the dangers of departing from sound doctrine and being led away by empty philosophy. It has been pointed out that many of the words and verses found in one epistle are also found in the other. Because of this, it is worthwhile to study them together as compliments of each other.

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 1

In this first chapter, Paul expounds on the greatness of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for us. We speak of both the Person and the work of the Savior. His work is effective on our behalf because of who He is. Paul ties the finished work of Christ to those who believe, showing the spiritual benefits of our salvation in our new position “in Christ,” and the power available to us “in the Spirit.”

Paul's Greeting and the Promise of the Gospel

Colossians 1:1–2

1:1 *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ.”* The title “*apostle*” was used in the ancient world for one sent forth with delegated authority. Paul was a personal messenger and representative of Christ. *“By the will of God.”* Apostles did not choose their calling, but were called by God (John 15:16). *“Timothy our brother.”* Timothy was a fellow-minister, but not an apostle (Acts 16:1–3; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2).

1:2 *“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ.”* Paul defines the position of all believers in Christ as those set apart to God through faith. Our spiritual position, or standing before God, is defined as holy and believing. *“In Colosse.”* Our exalted position “*in Christ*” equips us for effective service in our geographic location. *“Grace to you and peace.”* “*Grace*” refers to all the spiritual provisions we receive the moment we trust in Christ (Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:2), and we find peace as we learn of them and utilize them in our lives. *“From God ... and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* Since vv. 3–8 is one sentence in the Greek, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit (v. 8) are all included in our spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3, 5, 13).

The Power of the Gospel

Colossians 1:3–5

1:3 *“We give thanks to God.”* Paul mentions his prayers for them, and details the contents of his prayers in vv. 9–14. Paul often reminds his readers that he prays for them (Eph. 1:15–21; 3:14–21; Phil. 1:3–11; 1 Thess. 1:2–4). *“Praying always.”* Prayer for our fellow believers is a duty for us, and a source of supply for them.

1:4–5 *“Since we heard of your faith ... and of your love ... because of the hope.”* Here, we find the great triad of Christian virtues (1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8; Heb. 6:10–12; 1 Pet. 1:21–22). It is the hope/assurance of eternal life that draws forth our faith, which then produces love (Gal. 5:6b, 22; 2 Pet. 1:5–7). *“Laid up for you in heaven.”* This is part of the spiritual treasure reserved for us (Matt. 6:20; 1 Pet. 1:3–5). *“The word of the truth ... the gospel.”* The Gospel is “good news” because it is the message of truth from God. It includes not only the offer of our initial salvation, but also instruction for righteous living (1 Thess. 1:3–10; 2 Tim. 3:16–17).

The Progress of the Gospel

Colossians 1:6–8

1:6 *“In all the world ... is bringing forth fruit.”* The ultimate goal of evangelism is to take the good news to the ends of the Earth (Matt. 24:14; 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2 Tim. 4:5). This is not only to bring new believers to Christ (justification), but also for their spiritual growth and service (sanctification, Gal. 5:22–23; Eph. 5:9; 1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 12:11). *“The day you heard and knew the grace of God.”* For every believer there is a day when the Gospel first makes sense, under the conviction and illumination of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8; Rom. 10:17; Eph. 1:13–14). It is then that we know “*the grace of God*” in our own experience (2 Tim. 1:12).

1:7 *“As you also learned from Epaphras.”* The word “*learned*” here is the root word for disciple. Discipleship is a process of learning, first intellectually, and then experientially (Phil. 3:11–13; 2 Pet. 1:2–11). Epaphras was to

Paul a “*dear fellow servant.*” The word means “a bond-slave” or “a willing servant.” Epaphras is probably the shortened version of the Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25 and 4:18. “*A faithful minister of Christ.*” This is the highest acclaim any believer can attain (Matt. 24:45–46; 25:21, 23; 1 Cor. 4:2).

1:8 “*Your love in the Spirit.*” The love produced by the Spirit of God (Gal. 5:22–23) is the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14–15; 2 Pet. 1:7). It is produced in our lives when we “*walk in the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:18).

Summary Principles:

The Work of the Gospel

1. By faith in the gospel message, we enter into the family of God. We are still in the world, but not of the world (**vv. 1–2**; John 17:14–17).
2. The word “*saints*” (**v. 2**) means “set apart/sanctified” to God. The sanctification process is growth from the inside outward (John 17:17, 19; Phil. 2:12; 1 Thess. 5:23).
3. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit are all working to conform us to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ (**vv. 3, 8**; Rom. 8:29; 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 1:3–14).
4. The gospel message is first heard, then believed, then learned (**vv. 6–7**; Rom. 10:17; Titus 2:10–14). It gives hope/assurance of eternal life.
5. The Gospel bears spiritual fruit in our lives as we grow in grace and truth (Eph. 4:15; Gal. 5:22–23; 2 Pet. 3:18). This fruit consists of increasing faith, hope, and love (Rom. 5:1–5; 1 Cor. 13:13).
6. The **promise** of the Gospel is “*Grace ... and Peace*” (**vv. 1–2**). The **power** of the Gospel is found in “*faith ... love ... hope*” (**vv. 3–5**). The **progress** of the Gospel is both in its universal scope, “*in all the world*” (**v. 6**), and in personal growth, “*bringing forth fruit ... you heard ... knew ... learned*” (**vv. 6–8**).

The Nature of the Gospel

1. It is “good news for all mankind.”
2. It is the expression of ultimate truth regarding God and man.
3. It is universal and unlimited in scope.
4. It keeps on bearing fruit in the lives of believers.
5. It reveals God’s grace, which results in peace to those who receive it.
6. It is a message that requires messengers to transmit it.
7. It brings the hope/assurance of eternal life and inheritance.

Paul Prays for Transformed Lives

Colossians 1:9–14

1:9 “*For this reason we ... do not cease to pray ... and to ask.*” Because of what Epaphras had reported to Paul, he prays for the Colossians continued growth/sanctification. Prayer involves both thanksgiving and requests. “*Filled with the knowledge of His will.*” These believers were lacking in critical areas of doctrine, which made

them vulnerable to the false teachings mentioned in Colossians 2. A full knowledge of God's will comes to those who desire to do His will (John 7:17). "*Filled*" (*pleroma*) is the same word used for the "filling" of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18). That the filling of the Spirit is inseparable from being filled with God's Word is shown by comparing Ephesians 5:18–19 with Colossians 3:16. "***In all wisdom and spiritual understanding.***" It is not enough for us to simply have an intellectual knowledge of God's Word; that knowledge must be illuminated by the indwelling Spirit, resulting in an understanding of how to relate it to daily life. The Gnostics who were seeking to infiltrate the church claimed to have special knowledge into the "mysteries" of life. Paul declares that only the wisdom that comes from understanding the Word of God is capable of guiding us in our experience (James 1:5).

1:10 "***That you may walk worthy of the Lord.***" The goal of spiritual growth and insight is a life conformed to Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:3–5; 8:29; 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 3:18). The word "*worthy*" is *axios* and pictures a set of scales or balances in which our life reflects the character of God (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 5:1). "***Fully pleasing ... fruitful ... increasing in the knowledge of God.***" The fact that one is walking "*worthy*" does not mean that they are perfect (Eph. 4:1). Obedience to what we know can only increase as we continue to study God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 1:5–8; 3:18).

1:11 "***Strengthened ... according to His glorious power.***" Strength comes from exercise. The "*might*" of the Holy Spirit gives strength to those who obey, and the result is that the resurrection power of Christ is displayed in our lives (Rom. 1:4; 6:4–5; Phil. 3:10). "***For all patience ... longsuffering ... joy.***" Progress in the path of spiritual growth demands persistence/endurance, sustained by the joy set before us of a productive life and resulting eternal rewards (Neh. 8:10b; Acts 20:24; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 9:24–27; 2 Tim. 4:6–8; Heb. 12:1–2).

1:12 "***Giving thanks to the Father.***" Effective prayer is offered to the Father, in the name of the Son, and in the power of the Spirit (John 14:13; 16:23; Eph. 6:18). We must also learn to pray according to the will of God, as it is revealed in His Word (1 John 5:14–15). "***Who has qualified us.***" By forgiving our sins and imputing us with the righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21), the heavenly Father has made us worthy of receiving an eternal inheritance (Rom. 8:16–17; Gal. 4:4–7; Eph. 1:11; 2:4–8; 1 Pet. 1:4–5). "***Partakers of the inheritance.***" Those who are sanctified—set apart to God in Christ—are children of light (Eph. 5:8–9; 1 Thess. 5:5) and will share a glorious inheritance. While the basic inheritance of the child of God cannot be diminished (1 Pet. 1:4–5), it can be enhanced by faithful service in this life (Matt. 5:12; 6:20; Heb. 10:35–36). When the Bible speaks of losing our reward (1 Cor. 3:15; Col. 2:18), it is not talking about losing our inheritance as a child of God. Rather, it is the loss of some reward we might have gained but failed to achieve through apathy or indifference.

1:13 "***He has delivered us.***" The heavenly Father rescued us from the dominion of darkness through the work of His Son on the cross. "***And conveyed [transferred] us.***" In the moment we believe in Jesus Christ, this liberation and transfer takes place. We are rescued out of Satan's kingdom and "*conveyed*" into the kingdom of the beloved Son of God (Eph. 5:8; 1 Thess. 5:5; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 1:5).

1:14 "***In whom we have redemption.***" Jesus Christ redeemed us—paid the price for us—to be delivered from the curse of the law upon the sinfulness of mankind (Gal. 3:13). "***Through His blood.***" This redemption came at the cost of giving up His own life (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18–19; Rev. 5:9). "***The forgiveness of sins.***" While the work of Christ accomplished so much more than forgiveness, this is the beginning of the redemptive work. To this is added the imputation of Christ's righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21) and all the spiritual riches that come with it (Eph. 1:3, 7, 18; 2:7; 3:8; 2 Pet. 1:3).

Summary Principles: The Elements of Spiritual Growth

1. Spiritual growth demands that we study God's Word until our souls are saturated with it (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:18).

2. To this study we must add an obedient attitude, that the indwelling Spirit may give us insight, wisdom, and understanding (John 7:17; Eph. 1:17–18).
3. The life-long goal is that our lives are pleasing to God and productive in good works (Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14; Heb. 11:6).
4. As long as we are on this earth, we need to continue onward and upward in our spiritual growth (Phil. 3:7–15).
5. Only with consistent and persistent growth can we realize our full potential in experiencing the resurrection life of Christ (John 14:21, 23; Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:10).
6. Our lives are transformed into the image of Christ by these seven things.
 - a. We are “*filled with the knowledge of His will*” (v. 9).
 - b. We “*walk worthy of the Lord ... pleasing Him*” (v. 10).
 - c. We are spiritually “*fruitful in every good work*” (v. 10).
 - d. We are “*strengthened with all might*” by His Spirit (v. 11).
 - e. We endure trials in “*patience ... longsuffering ... with joy*” (v. 11).
 - f. We are constantly “*giving thanks to the Father*” for what He has done (v. 12).
 - g. We remember that He has “*qualified us ... delivered us ... conveyed [transferred] us*” into Christ’s kingdom by “*redemption through His blood*” (vv. 12–14).

Summary Principles: The Ingredients of Effective Prayer

1. Effective prayer begins with thanksgiving for what God has already done for us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:18).
2. This thanksgiving should not only consider what we have been given in Christ, but also for all that is yet to come in eternity.
3. Note these great words: “*qualified ... delivered ... conveyed.*” These are all in the past tense and speak of works that are finished (John 19:30). To these we can add, “*we have redemption ... the forgiveness of sins.*” These are all present possessions of every child of God.
4. The child of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, is transferred from:
 - a. darkness to light,
 - b. slavery to freedom,
 - c. judgment to forgiveness,
 - d. the power of Satan to the power of God, and
 - e. damnation in hell to glory in Heaven.
5. Our gratitude is greatly strengthened when we consider the cost of all these blessings, “*through His blood*” (v. 14). This simple term includes much more than just the physical sufferings of Christ, great as they were. His spiritual agony in the garden and on the cross shows that the penalty for our sins exceeds our ability to fully comprehend, as Isaiah 53 shows.
6. As if all this was not enough, we also have the expectation of eternal residence in “*the kingdom of the Son of His love*” (v. 13). We cannot begin to fully comprehend what awaits us in the ages to come (1 Cor. 2:9; Eph. 2:7).

The Declaration of the Deity of Christ
Colossians 1:15–23

1:15 *“He is the image of the invisible God.”* The word *“image”* is *eikon*, which means both the manifestation (speaking of the incarnation), and representation (speaking of visible expression) of the true God—which is only seen in Jesus Christ (John 1:18; 14:8–11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:1–3). *“The firstborn.”* This phrase speaks of Christ as the rightful owner of creation. It is a messianic title (Psalm 89:27). In His perfect humanity, Jesus reveals both what God is like, and what man was intended to be. In Old Testament times, the firstborn was the ruler, priest, and heir of the family. In Genesis 49, we see that Reuben, due to his sin, lost the rights of the firstborn. Judah became the tribe of the ruler; Levi became the tribe of the priest; and Joseph became the tribe of double-portion inheritance.

1:16 *“By Him all things were created.”* The Bible is very clear that creation is a work of God (Gen. 1:1, 27; Deut. 4:32; Isa. 40:25–26; 41:20; Mal. 2:10; Rom. 1:18–20). This includes all things visible and invisible, including the human and angelic realms. Paul is refuting the Gnostic heresy that claimed spirit was good and matter was evil, therefore, God could not have created material things. *“Created through Him and for Him.”* Jesus Christ is both the Source of all that is, and the One for whom all things were made. He is the Heir of all creation (Heb. 1:2).

1:17 *“He is before ... in Him all things consist.”* Jesus Christ eternally existed with the Father and the Spirit. He is *“before”* all things—both in time and in preeminence. He is also the Sustainer of the Universe—the One who holds *“all things”* together (Heb. 1:3).

1:18 *“Head of ... the church.”* He is the Author and Ruler of the new creation (Eph. 1:20–23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rev. 3:14). *“The firstborn from the dead.”* As in v. 15, *“firstborn”* suggests ownership and inheritance. Jesus Christ is the first to be resurrected. All previous people raised from the dead, such as Lazarus (John 11:43–44), had to die again. Jesus Christ is Lord over all who are resurrected through faith in Him. *“Preeminence.”* The highest position of glory, honor, and power.

1:19 *“In Him all the fullness should dwell.”* This *“fullness”* is the fullness of the Godhead (John 1:16; Col. 2:9). Jesus Christ is undiminished Deity and perfect humanity united in one person (Phil. 2:5–9). Only in this way could He be a true Mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

1:20 *“To reconcile all things to Himself.”* Reconciliation is the work by which all things are brought into a right relationship with God (Rom. 5:10–11). This does not mean that all are automatically saved, but that the cross provides a basis for the restoration of all of fallen creation with God (Rom. 8:18–23; 2 Cor. 5:18–21). *“Things on earth or things in heaven.”* Ultimately, both the heavenly realm and the earthly realm will be reconciled to God. For fallen angels and men who reject Christ, this reconciliation will require that they bear the judgment they have freely chosen. *“Having made peace through the blood of His cross.”* The cost of this reconciliation was the self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ on behalf of fallen creation. Christ died not just for sinful men, but to reconcile a fallen universe to Himself. The goal of reconciliation is to make peace between alienated parties (Rom. 5:1).

1:21 *“And you ... He has reconciled.”* Paul applies the victory of Christ to these Colossian believers. The idea in this verse is amplified in Romans 5:6–10. Jesus Christ died to reconcile those who were enemies both in hostile attitude and in rebellious conduct.

1:22 *“In the body of His flesh.”* Paul stresses the physical body of Jesus to refute the Gnostic heresy. In Colosse, there were two branches of Gnostic thought about Jesus:

1. The Docetic branch (from *dokeo*, “to seem or appear”) claimed that Jesus was a spirit who only appeared to be human—He was really only a phantom.

2. The Cerinthian branch (followers of Cerinthus) said that He was only a man, and that the “Christ–Spirit” came upon Him at His baptism.

To deny either the deity or the humanity of Christ is to present “*another Jesus*” and a “*different gospel*” (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:8–9). “**Holy, and blameless, and above reproach.**” This is what it means to be a “saint” (Col. 1:2). This is the standing of every believer in Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:8–9; Eph. 1:4; 5:26–27).

1:23 “If indeed you continue in the faith.” The warning here is that they must be wary of being led astray from the gospel they had heard and believed. It is not so much conduct Paul is concerned with at this point, but loyalty to the truth of the gospel message. “**Not moved away from the hope of the gospel.**” If the false teachers should lead them astray, they would lose—not their standing in Christ, but the hope, the assurance, and the confidence they had in trusting the Lord Jesus Christ.

Summary Principles: The Nature of the Lord Jesus Christ

1. When we use the common Biblical phrase, “The Lord Jesus Christ,” we are describing the unique nature of Jesus Christ. He is the God-Man.
2. The term “Lord” refers to His deity. This can be easily seen in Romans 10:9–13, where the word “*Lord*” is linked in v.13 to the quote from Joel 2:32. In the Hebrew, that word is *Jehovah*.
3. The name “Jesus” speaks of His humanity. It is His human name from the Hebrew *Yeshua*, which means, “The salvation of Jehovah.” He is the one and only Savior.
4. The title “Christ” means “The Anointed One,” and speaks of Him as the promised Messiah—prophet, priest, and king (Deut. 18:15; 2 Sam. 7:14; Psalm 2:6–7; 110:1–7).
5. This is why Jesus is called “*the only begotten of the Father*” and “*the only begotten Son*” (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). He is the unique One in all of human history. Theologically, this blend of the divine and human natures into one is called the “hypostatic union.” The Greek word *hypostasis* speaks of a distinct and independent nature, and the union indicates two natures in one person.
6. It is because of His unique nature that Jesus is able to be our Savior and the Mediator between God and men (1 Tim. 2:5). A mediator must be one who is equal to both parties, and only the God-Man could reconcile men to God.
7. Job described the work of a mediator in Job 9:32–33 as one “*who may lay his hand on us both,*” meaning God and him. He later anticipated the work of Christ as Redeemer in Job 19:25–27 as One who was always living, but who would stand on the Earth in the last days.
8. Many passages speak of this unique nature of Jesus Christ (John 1:1–4, 14, 18; Phil. 2:5–9; Heb. 10:5–7). In this passage (Colossians 1:15–23) we see that Jesus Christ is:
 - a. The visible “*image of the invisible God*” (v. 15a),
 - b. The “*firstborn [ruler and heir] over all creation*” (v. 15b),
 - c. The creator of all that is (v. 16),
 - d. The Author and Sustainer of all that is (v. 17),
 - e. The “Head” of His body, “*the church*” (v. 18a),
 - f. The “*firstborn [first resurrected] from the dead*” (v. 18b), and
 - g. The One who holds first place (“*preeminence*”) in all things (v. 18c).

The Prize Worth Suffering For Colossians 1:24–29

1:24 *“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you.”* Jesus Christ warned that those who followed Him would suffer persecution—a message echoed by the apostles (Matt. 5:10–12; Luke 14:26–27; John 15:18–19; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12–14). The sufferings of Christ on the cross were all sufficient for our salvation. However, for the message of the Gospel to spread throughout the world, all who serve Christ will share in His *“sufferings.”* **“For the sake of His body ... the church.”** The Church began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and continues to be built. Each of us has a part to play in bringing members into this Body, in which Christ dwells.

1:25 *“Of which I became a minister ... the stewardship from God.”* Paul was called by God to be the Apostle to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:13; Gal. 2:7–8). The word *“stewardship”* speaks of a servant entrusted with the administration of the household (Luke 16:1–3; 1 Cor. 4:1–2; 9:17). Paul was chosen by God to reveal, new, previously unrevealed, truths essential for our growth and service to the household of the Church (Eph. 3:1–12).

1:26 *“The mystery which has been hidden.”* The doctrines related to the Church Age, such as our position *“in Christ”* and the role of the Holy Spirit in the church, were never before revealed in the Old Testament. This *“mystery”* was specifically that the Gentiles would stand on equal, spiritual footing with the Jews (Rom. 11:11–21; Eph. 2:11–18).

1:27 *“The glory of this mystery among the Gentiles.”* Although the Jews looked forward to the promise of the New Covenant, when the Spirit would indwell every believer (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–28; Zec. 4:6), they never imagined that the Gentiles would be included in this promise. **“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”** The fact that Jesus Christ indwells every believer, by His Holy Spirit, gives each of us the assurance that we will share His glory in eternity (John 14:15–18; Rom. 8:9–11; 1 Cor. 6:19–20; 12:13).

1:28 *“Him we preach ... that we may present every man perfect in Christ.”* While every believer will be ultimately conformed to the perfect image of Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18), the word *“perfect”* here is speaking of spiritual maturity. There will be a distinction made at the Judgment Seat of Christ between those who were faithful to grow and serve, and those who did not (1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Pet. 1:5–11).

1:29 *“I also labor, striving.”* The word *“labor”* means *“to work to exhaustion,”* and the word *“striving”* means *“to agonize”* and was used of the struggle of athletes in the arena.

Summary Principles: The Prize Paul Suffered For

1. Paul rejoiced that his sufferings furthered the cause of Christ in the lives of these Colossian believers. It was the prize of sharing in the mission of Jesus Christ that made his sufferings worthwhile (**v. 23**).
2. In the ancient world, the steward was a trusted slave who was put in charge of the administration of the household (Gen. 15:2; Matt. 20:8; Luke 12:42). As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul was entrusted to administer God’s riches to the household of faith—the Church (**v. 25**).
3. These riches are found in the new revelations given to Paul concerning the unique privileges and position of Church Age believers (**v. 26**; Eph. 1:3, 7, 9–14; 3:1–7; Col. 3:1–4). This is the *“new wine”* Jesus spoke of in Matthew 9:17, Mark 2:22, and Luke 5:37.
4. This new revelation was that the Gentiles would be included in the Body of Christ—a new spiritual creation, indwelt by the Holy Spirit (**v. 27**). This was the fulfillment of the promised New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:25–27; Matt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11:25).

5. Paul’s message was for “*every man*,” that true wisdom and holiness could be found only by faith in Jesus Christ (v. 28; 1 Cor. 1:30).
6. To achieve this goal and win this prize, Paul labored in the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 29; Phil. 3:7–14).

COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 2

Paul now addresses the problems being face by these Colossian believers. They were being challenged by many false teachings, which detracted from their faith and growth in Christ. He will express his desire for the church (vv. 1–7), the danger facing the church (vv. 8–19), and the deliverance that comes from knowing the truth (vv. 20–23).

Paul’s Desire for the Colossians

Colossians 2:1–7

2:1 “Great conflict” describes the spiritual warfare Paul was engaged in on behalf of the Colossians, as well as the believers “*in Laodicea*.” These people had never met Paul or heard his teaching. Spiritual growth in this world always comes at the price of spiritual warfare from Satan’s forces (Acts 16:16–30; Rom. 13:12–14; 2 Cor. 10:3–6; Eph. 6:10–18; Phil. 1:27–30; 2 Tim. 2:3–5).

2:2 “Being knit together in love.” The “*love*” of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) is the bond that holds the Body of Christ together (Eph. 4:15–16; Col. 3:12–14). The love of Christ is the power that translates faith into works (2 Cor. 5:14–21; Gal. 5:6). “*The mystery of God*” refers to new revelation for Church Age believers, never before given to man (Rom. 16:25–26; Eph. 1:9–12; 3:1–12). This “*mystery*” reveals the truth that Christ dwells in us, and that we are spiritually dwelling in Him (Eph. 1:17–22; 2:4–10; Col. 1:27; 3:1–4). “*Both of the Father and of Christ*.” Here, Jesus is identified as God along with the Father.

2:3 “In whom are hidden.” In Colossians 1:26, we are told this mystery (new teaching) was hidden from previous generations. That is because it was hidden in Christ and could not be revealed until He came and finished the work of redemption. “*Treasures of wisdom and knowledge*.” The true wealth of the believer is found in the truths now revealed about our union with Christ (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:18).

2:4 “Lest anyone should deceive you.” The great danger to every believer is false teaching, which always robs us of assurance and power (2 Pet. 2:1–3, 18–22).

2:5 “Good order ... steadfastness of your faith in Christ.” Paul uses military language here for a solid line of soldiers who do not give way to an enemy attack. We can never permit false teaching to enter into our churches or our minds. In vv. 2–5, Paul lists five blessings obtained by those who study, learn, and apply the doctrines of the mystery:

1. Understanding the mystery gives **encouragement** to believers.
2. Knowledge of the mystery **unites** believers together in love.
3. The certainty and conviction that comes from full understanding of Church Age doctrines is the greatest **riches** that God can give to us.
4. The cornerstone teaching of the mystery is that **Christ is God** in the flesh, and that “in Him” all the treasures of God are hidden.
5. Those who learn and apply the truths of the mystery will **escape** from false doctrines and false teachers.

2:6 “*As you ... received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.*” The simplicity of faith is the key, both to our initial salvation, and to our continued spiritual growth (2 Cor. 11:3). Faith lays hold of the power of Christ’s redemption, and also of His resurrection power for living (Rom. 6:4; 12:1–3; Eph. 1:19; 3:19–21). Just as we are saved by faith, so we are to walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7; Eph. 2:8–9).

2:7 “*Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith.*” Three words are used here of a building which has a solid foundation and cannot be shaken (1 Cor. 3:11; Matt. 7:24–25; Heb. 12:28). We are never to cease building up and fortifying the sanctuary of our soul and spirit.

Summary Principles:

1. The Christian way of life is likened to the Olympic Games, or to a spiritual battle (v. 1). Paul is engaged in a “great struggle” (*agon* = agony) on their behalf.
2. This struggle is for a spiritual unity and cohesion among the churches in Colosse and Laodicea. This unity is based on a clear and mature understanding of the “*mystery*” belonging to God, both Father and Son (v. 2; Eph. 1:9–12; 3:1–12). This is called “*the unity of the faith*” (Eph. 4:13). The linking of “*the Father and of Christ*” to “*God*” is a clear declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:9).
3. This “mystery” consists of spiritual treasures of wisdom which are “*hidden*” or kept safe and secure in Jesus Christ (v. 3; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Eph. 1:3, 18–19; 3:8).
4. These newly revealed truths, which concern the Church Age, are the key to the avoidance of false doctrines and maintaining unbroken ranks in the Church against false teachers (vv. 4–5; Matt. 7:15–20; Gal. 1:6–10; Eph. 4:11–16; 2 Cor. 11:4; 2 Pet. 2:1–3).
5. Paul summarizes his point thus far by a simple formula: Just as we received Jesus Christ, and with Him eternal life, so we should continue to walk (“live life,” Col. 1:9–11). How did we receive Christ? By grace through faith (Eph. 2:8) in response to hearing the truth (Rom. 10:17). Both eternal life and abundant life are received in the same way: We hear the truth, we receive it by faith, and its power begins to work within us (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 1:13–14; Col. 1:6).

The Mystery: A Summary

1. The term “mystery” refers to new truths unique to the Church Age, which were not revealed until Christ came and accomplished the work of redemption on the cross.
2. These spiritual treasures of wisdom relate to a “*new creation*” (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:13–22; 3:5–6) made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers, and of a new dispensation of history, which we call the Church Age (Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25). In these last two passages, the words “*dispensation*” and “*stewardship*” (often translated, “administration”) both come from *oikonomia*, which refers to the rule of a distinct household, or the law by which the household is to be ruled.
3. With the finished work of Christ on the cross, and His ascension into Heaven, a new age began at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit. Again, we refer to this as the Church Age, which will continue until the Rapture of the Church, prior to the Tribulation Period (1 Thess. 4:13–18; 5:1–11).
4. During this time, God has created an entirely new spiritual family, made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers, collectively called “the Church” or “the Body of Christ,” or “the Bride of Christ.”

5. The uniqueness of this company is based on our union with and position “*in Christ*,” a position including privileges and possessions no believer of any other age could claim. We refer to this theologically as “positional truth.”
6. In simple terms, positional truth declares that all believers who live in this age are united with Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Acts 1:5; Rom. 6:3–5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:5; Col. 2:12; 1 Pet. 3:21). Because of this, we share in His death, burial, resurrection life, and present session at the Father’s right hand (Col. 3:1–4).
7. To summarize, the “mystery” refers to new revelation from God, which was kept for a new spiritual family (the Church), to be the source of power in a new age or dispensation (the Church Age).

Church Age Truths Not Known in Old Testament

1. The baptism of the Holy Spirit (see references under point 6 above).
2. The permanent indwelling of each Church Age believer by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (John 14:16–18, 21–23; Rom. 8:9–11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19–20).
3. Our complete spiritual union with Jesus in all that He has done (life, death, burial, resurrection), and is now doing, seated at the Father’s right hand in reigning power (Psalm 110:1–2; John 17:11–19; Rom. 8:31–37; Col. 3:1–4).
4. The creation of the Church—the Body of Christ (Matt. 16:18; 2 Cor. 5:17).
5. The provision of all spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph. 1:3; 3:8–9; 2 Pet. 1:3).
6. The provision of spiritual gifts for all believers (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Pet. 4:10–11).
7. The anointing of every believer as a priest of God, making us ambassadors and ministers of Christ (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; 2 Cor. 5:17–21; Phi. 13; Heb. 6:10; 1 Pet. 4:10).

The Dangers Facing the Colossians Colossians 2:8–23

The Danger of Empty Philosophy (vv. 8–10)

2:8 “*Cheat you*” literally means “to take you hostage.” “*Philosophy ... empty deceit ... tradition of men.*” These all speak, not of the proper study of philosophy, but of any system of thought that robs Jesus Christ of His place of preeminence (Col. 1:18–19; 2:9–10). Paul himself was well-instructed in the works of various philosophers, and quoted them when they were right (Acts 17:28–29; 1 Cor. 15:32–33; Titus 1:12–13). “*Not according to Christ.*” This is the truth by which all others must be judged (John 14:6).

2:9 “*In Him dwells.*” The word “*dwells*” speaks of permanent residence. “*The fullness of the Godhead bodily.*” In the incarnation of Christ, we see God in human flesh (John 1:1, 14). The word for “*Godhead*” is *Theotes* and can only refer to the total essence of God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one in essence, but are each unique in personality. This verse, like v. 19, is a bold declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ (John 10:30).

2:10 “*Complete in Him.*” Nothing can be added to the redemption we have in Christ (1 Cor. 1:24, 30; Col. 1:12–14, 21–22; 2:12–14). “*The head of all principality and power.*” Jesus Christ is victorious over all angelic powers (v. 15) and has set us free from the dominion of Satan (Col. 1:13; 2:15). The word “*complete*” is the same word

translated “*fullness*” in v. 9. Just as Christ has the fullness of the Godhead in Him, so we have His fullness in us. There is nothing of Him that is withheld from us.

The Danger of Jewish Legalism (vv. 11–17)

2:11 “*In Him you were ... circumcised.*” Many Jewish believers were still confused about circumcision, thinking it was essential for salvation (Acts 15:1–5). Paul shows that circumcision was only a physical ritual, looking forward to the true separation from sinful flesh that could be found only in Christ (Rom. 2:28–29; Phil. 3:3). For a believer in Christ to turn to physical circumcision as an add-on to faith was, in reality, to reject the all-sufficiency of Christ (Gal. 5:1–6). “*Without hands*” refers to the work of the Holy Spirit in baptizing and sealing us in our union with Christ, thus freeing us from the power of sin (Rom. 6:4–6; 1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:21–22; Eph. 1:13–14).

2:12 “*Buried with Him in baptism ... raised with Him through faith.*” This refers to the baptism of the Spirit. Water baptism is a public ritual, which testifies to what the Holy Spirit has already done by faith, uniting us with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. The ritual of water baptism is a visible witness to the invisible reality of what the Holy Spirit accomplished at the moment of our salvation. “*Faith in the working of God.*” The work of saving the soul is accomplished by the same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Eph. 2:4–8).

2:13 “*And you, being dead ... He has made alive.*” The unbeliever is spiritually dead—separated from God. But at the moment of faith in Jesus Christ, God gives the resurrection life of Christ to the believer (John 3:3; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 2:1–8). “*Having forgiven you all trespasses.*” Not only are we forgiven all sins, (past, present, and future), but the righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself is credited to our account before God (Rom. 4:3; 2 Cor. 5:21).

2:14 “*Having wiped out ... having nailed it to the cross.*” Every requirement of the Law of Moses, which condemned us, has been removed by the cross of Christ (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:10–13; James 2:10–11). The purpose of the Law was never to save us, but to reveal our sinfulness so as to bring us to faith in Jesus (Rom. 7:7; Gal. 3:22–29).

2:15 “*Having disarmed principalities ... triumphing over them in it.*” By the work of the cross, our Lord broke the power of Satan’s realm. The power of sin is death (1 Cor. 15:56–57; Heb. 2:14–15), and Jesus, by His death on the cross, claimed the keys of death and hell (Rev. 1:18). He alone holds the power to deliver the believer from hell, or to lock the unbeliever there forever (John 5:21–27).

2:16 “*So let no one judge you.*” In the early church, many sought to cling to Jewish rites and regulations, assuming that it somehow added to their holiness. Those who love rules and regulations always seek to judge those who rest in their completeness in Christ (vv. 9–10; Romans 14).

2:17 “*Which are a shadow ... but the substance is of Christ.*” All Old Testament rituals and regulations pointed forward to spiritual realities in Christ. Now that we have the reality, why should we return to the ritual? If we hold to Jesus Christ, the body that cast the shadow, why would we turn from Him to the shadow? (Heb. 8:4–6; 9:11–15; 10:1, 11–18).

The Danger of Mysticism (vv. 18–19)

2:18 “*Let no one cheat you of your reward.*” In the Greek athletic games, if you broke the rules, but still came in first, the judge would take the prize away from you and give it to the next finisher. The warning here anticipates the danger of seeking so-called higher knowledge, which distracts from Christ. In the end, at the Bema (judgment) Seat of Christ, it would cost eternal reward. “*Taking delight in false humility ... vainly puffed up.*” The false teachers assumed a superficial show of being humble, which goes hand-in-hand with arrogance of mind. They

sought to lead others in pursuing mystic practices either of worshipping angelic beings, or of trying to imitate angelic worship (Isa. 6:1–3).

2:19 “Not holding fast to the Head.” Any teaching or practice that leads away from the firm foundation of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11) is dangerous to the soul. **“From whom all the body ... grows with the increase which is from God.”** From Jesus Christ, *“the Head,”* all the **“joints and ligaments,”** which represent the spiritual gifts and ministries of individual believers, are nourished, and matured (Eph. 4:11–16). All true and faithful teaching begins and ends with the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30).

The Danger of Taboos and Regulations (vv. 20–23)

2:20 “Therefore, if you died with Christ.” The little word *“if”* here expresses a certainty in the case of every believer (Rom. 6:3–4; Gal. 2:20; Col. 2:12; 3:1–3), and could be translated “Therefore, **since** you have died with Christ.” **“From the basic principles of the world.”** Worldly *“principles”* are concerned with life in this *“world,”* but we are new creatures in Christ—citizens of a heavenly kingdom (Col. 1:13; 3:1–4; Phil. 3:20). **“Why ... do you subject yourselves to regulations.”** This could refer either to Jewish rules and regulations, or any other legalistic practices. This very thing has been a plague in the Church throughout her history. There always seems to be an idea that the more one gives up, the more spiritual he or she is (1 Tim. 4:3). This is worldly wisdom and seeks to add our *“sacrifice”* to the work of Christ (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 2:5).

2:21 “Do not touch ... taste ... handle.” Worldly religion is always negative. It stresses what not to do but has no positive instruction for godly living. True spirituality is joyful and profitable for self and others (2 Cor. 7:4; Gal. 5:22–23; Col. 1:11; Heb. 10:34). The Gospel of Luke especially emphasizes our Lord’s joyful gathering with the common people in feasting and fellowship (Luke 5:29).

2:22 “Which all concern things which perish with the using.” This is precisely Jesus’ point in His instruction in Mark 7:14–23. **“The ... doctrines of men.”** Men tend to build doctrines on tradition instead of the revealed Word of God (Matt. 15:1–6; Mark 7:13; 1 Pet. 1:18).

2:23 “These things ... have an appearance ... but are of no value.” It is much easier to appear spiritual, by outward observances, than to be truly spiritual within. The Pharisees were masters at this practice (Matt. 6:1–2, 5, 16). **“Self-imposed religion ... and neglect of the body”** are practiced by every false religion and, too often, also in Christian circles. These practices do absolutely nothing to curb **“the indulgence of the flesh.”** Rather, they tend to feed the need for recognition among men, and the selfish gratification it brings.

Summary Principles:

The Three Dangers of False Teaching/Teachers

1. False teachers take you captive (v. 8).
2. They hold you under constant judgment (v. 16).
3. They rob you of eternal reward (v. 18).

Five Additions of the Heretics

To add anything to the finished work of Christ is to subtract from its validity and power.

1. Empty philosophy (v. 8),
2. Jewish circumcision (v. 11),
3. Jewish law observance (v. 16),

4. Worship of Angels (v. 18), and
5. Rigorous asceticism/legalism (vv. 20–21).

Paul’s Doctrinal Counterattack

1. The deity of Jesus Christ is the central issue (v. 9; cf. Col. 1:19).
2. Our standing “in Christ” is unassailable (positional truth, imputed righteousness) (v. 10).
3. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit unites us in Christ’s victory (vv. 11–12).
4. Spiritual regeneration and forgiveness remove all judgment (v. 13; Eph. 1:7; 2:4; Col. 1:14).
5. The curse of the law is removed in Christ (v. 14; Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:13).
6. In Christ we have victory over all fallen angelic powers (v. 15; cf. v. 10b).

COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 3

Paul now begins to work out the practical effects of our position in Christ. The knowledge of what it means to be “in Christ,” and of all that union with Christ implies, has practical implications for our daily lives. As he says in Philippians 2:12–13, what God has worked in us spiritually should then be worked out by us. In other words, our practice ought to reflect our position, and our standing in Christ should lead to effective service for Him. If Christ is to have preeminence in all things (Col. 1:18), He must have preeminence in our lives.

Working Out What God Has Worked in Us

Colossians 3:1–11

3:1 *“If then you were raised with Christ.”* The only condition of the “if” in this phrase is the reality of having been saved by faith in Christ. For the believer, the “if” here could be translated “since you were raised.” There is no room for doubt for those who have believed (Rom. 6:3–5; Eph. 2:1, 4–6; Col. 2:12–13). *“Seek those things ... where Christ is.”* The victory of Christ is to be reflected in our thinking and in our lives (Eph. 1:15–23; 4:1–6; Phil. 2:5–13; 3:13–14). *“Sitting at the right hand of God.”* This is the place of victory and power (Psalm 110:1; Phil. 2:9–11; Heb. 1:13; 10:12–13).

3:2 *“Set your mind on things above.”* This command requires a faith-response on the part of the believer. The present tense indicates the need for persistent, mental effort in keeping our mind fixed on spiritual realities of heavenly value. *“Not on things on the earth.”* Worldliness begins in the mind, when we forget our heavenly calling (Eph. 4:1) and think only of this life and its concerns.

3:3 *“Your life is hidden with Christ.”* Just as all the treasures of Heaven are hidden in Him (Gen. 15:1; Col. 2:3), even so, we are counted as a treasure of God—kept safe in Him.

3:4 *“When Christ ... appears.”* At Christ’s return for His Church, we who believe will be transformed to reflect His glory (John 14:6; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 4:13; 1 John 3:2–3). The degree to which we reflect His glory will be determined by the devotion and faithfulness of our lives here on Earth (Dan. 12:3; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 9:24–27; Phil. 3:12–14; 2 Pet. 1:5–11).

3:5 *“Put to death your members.”* We overcome sin by the daily offering up of our life as a “living sacrifice” to God (Luke 9:23; Rom. 12:1–2), in a firm reliance on the Spirit of God to live out the life of Christ through us

(Gal. 2:20; 5:16; Eph. 5:18; Phil. 3:7–11). The Christian life can only be lived by faith/trusting in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 1:17; Col. 2:6), not by trying in our own strength. In the ancient world, as today, sexual sins and perversions of every kind, along with graft, bribery, fraud and double-dealing for gain were rampant (Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 4:17–19).

3:6 *“The wrath of God ... sons of disobedience.”* God reveals His wrath in this life through the harmful effects of willful sin (Rom. 1:18–32). In the future, His wrath will be poured out eternally on those who reject Jesus Christ (Rev. 6:16–17; 20:11–15). The *“sons of disobedience”* refers to the unsaved world (Eph. 2:2; 5:6).

3:7 *“You yourselves once walked.”* This is a reference to their lives prior to coming to faith in Jesus Christ. *“When you lived in them.”* The perfect tense is used here to summarize their past life in unbelief and sin.

3:8 *“But now ... put off all these.”* The *“now”* refers to their new life in Christ. The outward effect of a spiritual mind-set (v. 2; Rom. 8:13; Gal. 2:20) is a transformed life (Rom. 12:2). The word for *“put off”* speaks of the removal of a filthy garment. The same idea is found in vv. 9–10, where the clean garment of the new nature in Christ replaces the dirty garment (Rom. 13:12–14). *“Anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language.”* Like filthy rags, these attitudes and actions are to be set aside (Eph. 4:22–24; 29–31; Gal. 5:19–21).

3:9–10 *“You have put off ... and put on.”* Again, Paul uses the language of changing clothing (2 Cor. 5:17). *“The old man.”* This refers to the life dominated by the sin nature, whose power over the believer is now broken (Rom. 6:6). *“Renewed in knowledge.”* The consistent instruction of the Word of God transforms our thinking (Rom. 12:2).

3:11 *“Christ is all and in all.”* All human and earthly distinctions of race, culture, and social status are removed in Christ. All who believe in Him have equal standing and equal provisions (Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27–28; Eph. 1:22–23). From the most barbaric (Scythian) to the most cultured (Greek and Jew), all who believe are equally precious in Christ.

Summary Principles: The Practice of Our Position

1. Our spiritual union with Christ is so complete that we sit with Him at the right hand of the Father (v. 1). This unity will be fulfilled physically, yet future (John 17:20–26).
2. Keeping the mind fixed on Christ and heavenly realities is central to living the Christian life (vv. 2–3; Rom. 12:1–2; Heb. 10:19–25).
3. We are to live in the expectation of the coming of the Lord Jesus and our transformation into His image (v. 4; Rom. 8:29; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:13; 1 John 2:28–3:3).
4. It takes a conscious decision to turn away from the sinful practices, which are common to this world, and for which the wrath of God will fall on the unbelieving (vv. 5–6; Rom. 1:18–32; Eph. 2:2–3; 5:3–6). We must choose to trust in and submit to the Spirit of God to live a Christ-like life (Rom. 8:4–11).
5. Paul uses the figure of removing a filthy garment and putting on a clean one to picture the decision process by which we consciously choose to obey the Word of God and honor Jesus Christ (vv. 8–11; John 14:21; Eph. 4:20–24).

The Transformed Life

Colossians 3:12–25

3:12 *“The elect of God, holy and beloved.”* The word *“elect”* means “called” and refers to all who respond to the gospel invitation (Matt. 22:1–14). Each and every believer is both holy and beloved by the Father. *“Put on”* is again the garment analogy and emphasizes that our conduct should reflect our standing in Christ. *“Tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering.”* These all reflect the character and the conduct of our Lord Jesus Christ in dealing with sinful men and women.

3:13 *“Bearing with ... and forgiving.”* None of us will attain perfection in this life, and each of us needs to be patient and forgiving, just as we need others to bear with our faults and failures. *“One another”* comes from a word that means “others of the same kind.” This is conduct toward brothers and sisters in Christ, though it would apply to the unsaved as well. *“Even as Christ forgave.”* We are to forgive as we have been forgiven (Matt. 18:21–35; Mark 11:25–26; Eph. 4:32).

3:14 *“But above all these things put on love.”* Here is the ultimate garment, which is the love of Christ Himself (Rom. 13:14; 1 Cor. 13:13; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; 1 Pet. 4:8). *“Which is the bond of perfection.”* It is the love of Christ that binds believers to one another, in spite of character defects or doctrinal differences (Eph. 4:2–3; 1 John 3:14).

3:15 *“Let the peace of God rule.”* We have peace with God because of our salvation (John 14:27; Rom. 5:1). Only by obedience to His commands will that peace rule in our lives (Rom. 8:6; Phil. 4:7; James 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:11). *“And be thankful.”* Gratitude is the natural result of submission and obedience to God (1 Thess. 5:18).

3:16 *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”* Spiritual growth and spiritual conduct are the direct result of the constant saturation of the soul with the Word of God. The parallel between this verse and Ephesians 5:18–19 makes it clear that being filled with God’s Word is essential to being filled by His Spirit. Abiding in Christ demands His Word abiding in us (John 15:4, 7). *“In all wisdom”* refers not only to our eagerness to receive God’s Word, but also to its application in *“teaching and admonishing one another.”* In the early church, the goal of singing was not just an expression of worship, but the content of the songs was intended for instruction in biblical truths. How far many of the popular “worship” songs today have fallen from this goal, in seeking an emotional response to music and words with little content!

3:17 *“Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”* Our thoughts, words, and deeds should uphold the reputation of our Lord. *“Giving thanks to God the Father.”* Again, gratitude is the only fitting response to all God has done for us through Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:7–8; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2).

3:18–19 *“Wives, submit ... husbands, love your wives.”* These commands parallel those in Ephesians 5:22–25. No marriage can succeed where the wife is rebellious to her husband, or he is bitter toward her. Mutual love and forgiveness make for a blessed and happy marriage.

3:20–21 *“Children, obey ... Fathers, do not provoke.”* As an extension of marriage, Paul includes instruction for the family. Obedience in the children is fostered by the loving guidance of the father, and unnecessary provocation hinders this goal (Eph. 6:1–4).

3:22 *“Bondservants, obey ... not with eyeservice.”* Slavery was common in the ancient world, even among Christians (Phi. 9–16). These same commands would apply to the boss and worker relationship. *“In sincerity of heart, fearing God.”* Ultimately, our lives will be evaluated by how our faith and union with Christ affects our conduct (Rom. 14:12; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 2 Cor. 5:10). Remember that, along with this letter, Paul was sending Onesimus, the runaway slave, back to his master (Col. 4:9; Phi. 10–18).

3:23 “*Whatever you do ... as to the Lord and not to men.*” This restates what he said in v. 17 (Eph. 6:7–8). For the believer, the only proper motivation in life, is to please our Savior (2 Cor. 5:14; 2 Tim. 2:1–4).

3:24 “*The reward of the inheritance.*” Not only does every believer share in the inheritance of the heavenly Father (1 Pet. 1:4–5), but we are exhorted to live and serve in such a way that we gain additional, eternal reward from God (Matt. 5:46; 6:4, 6, 18–20; 1 Cor. 3:14; Col. 2:18; Heb. 10:35; 11:26).

3:25 “*He who does wrong will be repaid.*” This can come in the form of divine discipline and loss of blessing in this life, and loss of reward in eternity (1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:14; Heb. 12:3–11). “*There is no partiality.*” God deals with each of us in accordance with His grace and truth. He will show no slight nor favoritism to any believer (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11; Gal. 2:6).

Summary Principles: The Transformed Life

1. We “*put on*” the character of Christ when we submit to the filling and leading of the indwelling Holy Spirit (**vv. 12–13**; Eph. 5:18; Gal. 5:16).
2. The motivating power of the Spirit is the love of Christ, which brings peace to the heart (**vv. 14–15**; Rom. 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:14–15).
3. Only when God’s Word has the place of priority in our lives are we able to be a witness and minister to others in the things of Christ (**vv. 16–17**; 2 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 4:12–13).
4. God works to transform us from the inside out. Before our actions can be changed, we need a renewed mind by His Word (Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 4:23; 5:26). As God’s Word works out in us, every relationship takes on the nature of a ministry (Prov. 27:17; **vv. 18–22**; 2 Cor. 5:17–21).
5. We are not only to live in the expectation of Christ’s return (Titus 2:13), but also in the knowledge that every act of faithful obedience and service will be rewarded in eternity (**vv. 23–25**; 1 Cor. 3:11–15; 9:24–27; 2 Cor. 5:9–10).

COLOSSIANS CHAPTER 4

Paul gives some final exhortations to faithful conduct, requests their prayers for him, and sends personal greetings to those in Colosse and Laodicea.

Closing Commands and Prayer Requests

Colossians 4:1–6

4:1 “*Masters ... you also have a Master in heaven.*” This verse concludes the instructions, which began in Colossians 3:18, regarding various relationships. Certainly, this challenge, to be “*just and fair,*” would have bolstered his instructions to Philemon to receive back Onesimus as a beloved brother, rather than just a runaway slave. The Christian slave was to serve his master as he would serve Christ, and the master was to treat the slave as Christ dealt with him. It was teaching like this that changed the practice of slavery in the Roman empire. The idea of a “pierced ear slave” from Exodus 21:6, symbolized one who was set free, yet willingly in the service of the master.

4:2–4 “*Continue earnestly in prayer.*” Paul urges dedication and persistence in prayer. The word “*vigilant*” means “to stay awake” and reminds us of how the disciples fell asleep at the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:32) and again in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:40). Prayer should always include “*thanksgiving,*” as well as prayer for others (1 Thess. 5:18). Paul does not ask for prayer that his prison door might be opened, but

“that God would open to us a door for the word.” Paul kept his spiritual priorities straight. Even the great apostle felt the need for prayer ***“to speak the mystery of Christ ... as I ought to speak.”*** How we need to pray for one another!

4:5 ***“Walk in wisdom ... redeeming the time.”*** Every believer is to be an ambassador of Christ and minister of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–21). Opportunities for witness come and go quickly. To redeem each opportunity requires that we have the currency of wisdom from God’s Word, as well as being awake and alert to every open door (Matt. 10:16; Eph. 5:14–16).

4:6 ***“Grace, seasoned with salt.”*** Just as salt adds flavor and helps to preserve, so our speech to others should make the gospel message palatable and lasting. ***“How you ought to answer each one.”*** Believers need to see each person as an individual. No two people need the same approach or answer. The grace of God should dominate our witness, giving it a charm and beauty that draws a response of faith.

Personal Greetings Colossians 4:7–15

4:7–8 ***“Tychicus ... beloved brother ... faithful minister ... fellow servant.”*** With these three descriptive phrases, Paul identifies one of his longtime co-workers (Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21–22; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12). How priceless it is to find those who remain faithful and loyal through the years! Tychicus is sent as a messenger to bear news from Paul and to evaluate how the Colossians are bearing up under the assault of false doctrines (Col. 2:4–23).

4:9 ***“Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother.”*** Paul seeks to prepare this church to receive back a probable thief and runaway slave (Phi. 10–18), not grudgingly, but as a newly won brother in the faith. Onesimus would carry the letter to Philemon.

4:10 ***“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner.”*** Aristarchus had been with Paul through many trials (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2). He may have voluntarily become a prisoner in order to serve Paul. ***“With Mark ... if he comes to you, welcome him.”*** Paul does not want Mark’s earlier failure to cause any resentment in this church (Acts 13:5–13; 15:36–40). John Mark is an example of one who failed but who recovered and became known as a faithful and valued servant of Christ (Phi. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:13).

4:11 ***“Jesus who is called Justus.”*** Of this man we know nothing, but his name change suggests that he would not care to be called “Jesus,” out of reverence for his Lord and Savior.

4:12–13 ***“Epaphras ... a bondservant of Christ.”*** Epaphras was apparently the pastor of the church in Colosse (Col. 1:7), who had travelled to Rome to inform Paul of the false teachings threatening the church. He is identified as a tireless and zealous prayer warrior; not only that, but he prayed specifically ***“that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”*** It is a great thing not only to pray, but to pray with specific requests relating to those you pray for. ***“Laodicea, and ... Hierapolis.”*** Epaphras had possibly come from Ephesus with the gospel message he learned from Paul and had done the evangelistic work in these towns.

4:14 ***“Luke the beloved physician and Demas.”*** Luke joined Paul in Troas in Acts 16:10, where he writes, ***“immediately we sought to go to Macedonia.”*** He remained with Paul to the end (2 Tim. 4:11). Demas is a study in failure, as he began as a fellow-worker of Paul (Phi. 24) and is mentioned here with no commendation. Finally, in 2 Timothy 4:10, he leaves the story having forsaken Paul, due to his love for the world.

4:15 ***“Nymphas and the church that is in his house.”*** The house church in Laodicea met in this man’s home. The early church was a small gathering of believers from the same community, meeting in someone’s home. This contributed to a more close-knit assembly than what we know today.

Final Instructions Colossians 4:16–18

4:16 *“This epistle ... the epistle from Laodicea.”* There are many theories about the letter mentioned here from Laodicea. The most likely possibility is that this refers to the letter we call *Ephesians*, which was sent out as a circular letter to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:11). Some suggest that it was the first epistle to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 5:27).

4:17 *“Archippus, take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord.”* This man was apparently the pastor of the church in Laodicea. Paul’s sharp challenge suggests he was not taking his charge seriously. Perhaps this contributed to the condition of the church at the time when John wrote to them (Rev. 3:14–22). In Philemon v. 2, he is called *“our fellow soldier,”* and Paul challenges him not to lose his zeal for ministry.

4:18 *“This salutation by my own hand—Paul.”* Paul had many secretaries who would write epistles at his dictation (Rom. 16:22). However, he validated these by personally signing his name (1 Cor. 16:21; 2 Thess. 3:17), so that no false teacher could claim to be writing as if he were Paul (2 Thess. 2:1–2). *“Remember my chains.”* Paul writes this not as a plea for sympathy, but to remind them to pray for him (vv. 3–4), and because his sufferings were evidence of his devotion to Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 11:22–33; Gal. 6:17). *“Grace be with you. Amen.”* Paul’s great desire was always that each and every believer live in and be blessed by the matchless grace of God.

Summary Principles: Elements of Victory in the Early Church

1. The first practice of the early church was prayer (Acts 1:13–14; 1 Thess. 5:17).
2. Two priorities in prayer are often stressed: thanksgiving to God and prayer for the needs of others (2 Cor. 1:11; 13:7; Phil. 1:9, 19; 4:6; Col. 2:7; 1 Thess. 5:25; Phi. 22; Heb. 13:18).
3. Along with prayer, there must be action (obedience, Luke 11:28; John 13:17), both in our conduct and our speech, with the aim of bringing others to saving faith in the Lord (vv. 4–6; 1 Cor. 15:34; 2 Cor. 5:14–21; Eph. 4:14–17).
4. The record of faithful co-workers in Christ (vv. 7–15) reminds us that the Church is a body, having many members, and all must do their part (1 Cor. 12:4–7, 12–14). Every believer is gifted to serve and play a part in the ministry of the Church (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:7). The word “fellowship” is often used without realizing that its true meaning is “joint participation” in the work.
5. The careful reading and exposition of God’s Word is always the foundation of all life and work in the kingdom of God (v. 16; Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16–17; 4:2; Heb. 4:12–13). Where these elements are given priority, the Church will be strong and effective.

CONCLUSION

The little book of Colossians is vital and relevant to us today, particularly in its warnings against the deceptions of human philosophy and worldly wisdom (chapter 2). In no other passage of Scripture do we see the Lord Jesus Christ exalted to a higher degree than in chapter 1:15–19. As indicated earlier in the introduction, there are many parallels between Colossians and Ephesians. They are called “sister epistles.” However, Colossians focuses on the role of Christ as Head of the Church, while the Ephesian letter emphasizes the Church as the Body of Christ. These two epistles complement one another, and great benefit is gained by studying them together.