



THRU the **BIBLE**

with *J. Vernon McGee*

COLOSSIANS

BIBLE COMPANION



EPISTLES

READ THIS FIRST

This Bible Companion is a summary of Dr. J. Vernon McGee's teaching of the book of Colossians heard on THRU the BIBLE. These summarized lessons get to the heart of Bible passages and are intended to stir your own thinking, prayer, and study.



Begin with prayer. Dr. McGee said, "We are living in the day of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the day of grace, when the Spirit of God takes the things of Christ and reveals them to us." Before you start each lesson, ask the Lord to use it to grow you up in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as He is revealed in that section. Dr. McGee said, "This is the secret of life and of Christian living."



As you study, read the Bible passage first. Invite God to open your eyes and deepen your understanding of His Word. That's a request God loves to answer!



If you want to listen to Dr. McGee's complete teaching on any specific passage, go to TTB.org/Colossians (or any book of the Bible). The corresponding audio messages are listed at the top of the summaries. You can also use this Bible Companion to follow along and take notes while you listen to Dr. McGee teach a book of the Bible on the radio or online.



After every lesson, several questions are listed for your personal consideration or, if you're reading this as a group, for your discussion. Ask the Spirit to help you take to heart what He wants to show you.

LET THE WORD OF CHRIST DWELL IN YOU
RICHLY IN ALL WISDOM AND TEACHING....

COLOSSIANS 3:16^A

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LESSON 1

CHRIST ABOVE ALL THINGS



Begin with prayer



Read **Colossians 1:1-14**



Listen at [TTB.org/Colossians](https://www.TTB.org/Colossians) to **Colossians 1:1, 2** and **Colossians 1:2-14**

To anyone dulled by the insistent blitz of technology; the mind-numbing flow of social media; and a culture hyper-focused on the rich, the famous, and the reckless of the world, Colossians cuts through it all with a refreshing blast of hope and inspiration. Paul seems excited to share this wonderful message: Jesus Christ is preeminent (above all!) as Creator, Savior, Redeemer, and Lord. Even a casual read of what is perhaps Paul’s most lofty letter, can lift the weariest seeker from the tough place of discouragement to a new experience of hope-filled praise.

The city of Colosse, like Laodicea, Philadelphia, Sardis, Thyatira, and Pergamum—cities put on the biblical map by John’s stirring letter called *Revelation*—sat strategically as coastal fortresses guarding Roman trade routes in Europe from enemy invaders advancing from the East. The church struggled under the philosophy known as Gnosticism—a teaching that promoted mysticism and devotion to a benign divine being over the truth of Scripture, which exalted God as Creator and Savior. Paul confronted that teaching as he penned these now immortal words, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (v. 27).

Heresy (false teaching) arises when someone or some group adds to or takes something away from the pure message of Jesus. Christianity *is* Jesus Christ, plain and simple. And Paul showed in this stirring letter that “in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (2:9). You receive all you need in Jesus.

Paul’s reigning thought is that *Christ is all and above all*. He’s all you need. He is everything! Charles Wesley in his lovely hymn put it like this: “Thou, O Christ, art all I want; more than all in Thee I find.” Is that the song you sing?

Paul organized the letter quite nicely with an opening section (first two chapters) that highlights teaching about Jesus’ deity, followed by the remaining chapters applying those truths to how they can be lived out in the Christian life. Chapters 1 and 2 unpack what Paul meant when he wrote that Christ is the “fullness,” or *pleroma*, of God. Everything you could possibly know and experience about God can be known in Jesus. The rest of Paul’s letter explains how that truth makes a difference in your life.

Paul called himself “an apostle of Jesus Christ” and always “by the will of God.” Paul trusted God’s purpose for his life—he called it simply “the will of God.” He wasn’t confused about his life or tempted to pursue other things. His aim was to serve God as a preacher of the message of Jesus. It freed him to live boldly and without fear of any consequences, knowing God would always care for his needs.

Paul greeted the Colossian congregation as an apostle of Jesus Christ who wrote according to the “will of God.” He also mentioned that his friend Timothy, a longtime partner in the ministry, would share in the writing. Timothy was well-known among these churches as a faithful servant of Jesus and a devoted companion and co-laborer with Paul in the ministry.

In his greeting, Paul highlighted the faithfulness of the Colossian Christians and called them “saints and faithful brethren,” meaning they had been called by God to be holy and righteous before Him. In addition, Paul made certain to bless them in his customary fashion: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 2). Even in Paul’s opening greeting he made sure to mark the centerpiece of faith as being Jesus Christ—the One sent from the Father to bring to them and to the world both grace (underserved favor) and peace. Yet, that centerpiece was being challenged at every turn.

THE HARM OF HERESY

The Colossian world swirled with skeptics and doubters of the deity of Jesus and the reality that God could be known and experienced personally. The Colossian church lay smack in the middle of all the Gnostic controversy, and Paul wrote to encourage them to stay the course in what they believed.

As Paul wrote, memories and feelings of thankfulness for the Colossian believers filled his mind. He thanked God for all they had come to mean to him and praised them for their passionate love for all the other Christians in that area. Just thinking about the Colossians moved the grateful pastor to pray fervently for their spiritual growth and for their courage to face the mounting persecution so many believers faced. And in that remembering, Paul gave one of the most clear and inspiring descriptions of hope perhaps in all the Bible. While pointing the believers to a focus on heaven and their eternal destiny rooted in Jesus, Paul also reported to them that the message they had received from him and learned through Epaphras was spreading with great impact around the world. That must have been such an encouragement to the Colossians.

Paul had a gift for encouraging the churches he founded and served. He did that with the Colossians. The gospel Paul first preached to the Colossians had so dramatically changed their lives that they had become devoted partners in his ministry. He blessed them for their faith in Jesus Christ, trusting not in themselves but in the gospel he had first preached to them. He also reminded them of the hope they now had in Jesus—a hope that lifted them from their helpless situation, stuck in their sin, to a new life in Jesus that would ultimately bring them to heaven.

Paul wanted his friends at Colosse to know that the gospel, which they believed, had made its way around the world, providing hope and salvation to everyone who believed. It's at that point Paul mentioned one of his closest friends and ministry companions, Epaphras.

Epaphras apparently lovingly served the church in Colosse—he was what we would refer to as their “pastor.” Paul wrote always with such gracious words about his colleagues, especially those with whom he had personally served in the ministry of the gospel. Paul commended Epaphras before the Colossian believers for his excellent ministry and for his faithful reporting of their love and faithfulness in the work of the gospel.

Paul loved to emphasize the ministry of the Holy Spirit when he wrote to the churches he founded. He never wanted them to rely on their own resources but rather to draw from the power available to them in the Holy Spirit. It's too easy to start trusting in our own abilities, wisdom, and ideas. We naturally tend to go it alone, for instance, in trying to make major decisions or finding our way through thorny relationship struggles or raising our children in complicated times. But Paul routinely brought the focus back to the resources available to all believers in Jesus—especially in promised help from the Holy Spirit. Paul complimented the Colossians for showing love to all the other Christians. He knew their love for others was just more evidence of God's Spirit working through them.

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE COLOSSIANS

Paul's vivid memories of the Colossian Christians moved him (and Timothy) to prayer:

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. –vv. 9-12

How's that for a heartfelt prayer?

Paul loved these people—and he couldn't stop praying once he started ... in fact, his prayer turned to praise as he longed for his friends at Colosse to grow deeper in their experience and knowledge of God in Jesus Christ. Wouldn't you be encouraged to know your pastor prayed like that? And how inspiring to know that Paul, for all his intellectual giftedness and talent, took nothing for granted when it came to the spiritual growth of the people he served. He made certain to bring them regularly and fervently before the Lord in prayer.

Paul first prayed that they might be filled with the “knowledge” of God. The Greek word is *epignōsis*. Remember, Paul wrote primarily to confront the heresy of Gnosticism, the popular thinking of that day which emphasized mysticism and human intellect over truth. The Gnostics pretended to have a super knowledge that rejected the teaching of the Scriptures. So, Paul

prayed that the Colossians would gain a *supernatural* knowledge of the things of God. The Gnostics boasted they had it. But Paul insisted true knowledge was gained by following “the will of God,” and that it must be revealed “in wisdom”—spiritual wisdom and understanding that come from the Holy Spirit. The second part of Paul’s prayer called for the Colossians to walk in a way that was pleasing to the Lord. The results of that kind of Jesus-focused living could only happen by God working in their lives through the Spirit. Paul called it being “fruitful in every good work” (v. 10).

Finally, Paul wanted the Colossian believers to experience the “glorious power” (v. 11) of God that would bring about a supernatural patience, longsuffering, and joy in their lives. They would need it to face off with the Gnostics. The resulting fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives would be real power to live the Christian life with patience, longsuffering, and joy—not just fleeting periods of happiness touted by the surrounding culture. Paul so desired this for the Colossian believers because he knew if they experienced that from the Holy Spirit, they would be able to resist the error of the Gnostics.

As Paul wrote, his heart swelled with gratitude to the Lord for the humbling privilege of joining with the Colossian believers in serving Christ. Paul’s expression of gratitude made him want to praise God the Father even more for delivering him and God’s people from the realm of spiritual darkness into the glorious light of Jesus.

Paul couldn’t hold back his praise to God for providing salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, who willingly and lovingly redeemed sinners by shedding His blood on the cross. Is Paul’s praise yours today? Have you received the finished work of Jesus on the cross as a gift for the forgiveness of your sin? You can turn to Him now, in prayer, asking Him to come into your life and be your Savior, too. He will deliver you from darkness and place you in light. And it will be pure joy!

NEXT: Learn more about the exalted Jesus and how He’s the visible display of the invisible God.

7. Imagine you were a member of the church in Colosse? What would it do for your faith to know the Apostle Paul was praying for you? What does that tell us about praying for people in our lives?

LESSON 2

JESUS CHRIST, SUPREME



Begin with prayer



Read **Colossians 1:15-24**



Listen at [TTB.org/Colossians](https://www.TTB.org/Colossians) to **Colossians 1:15-18** and **Colossians 1:18-24**

In case you're wondering who Jesus is, after reading and studying Colossians you should wonder no longer.

Paul sets the thrilling tone: Jesus "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation" (v. 15).

Here is the clearest and most inspiring explanation of the deity and majesty of God's Son perhaps in all of Scripture. As Paul mounted his passionate defense of Christianity against the insidious philosophy of Gnosticism (that Jesus was one lesser god born from a cascade of many), he pulled no punches when stating without reservation that Jesus is fully God in every aspect. You may read and study Colossians and come away still not believing, but you cannot read this letter and say you've not been confronted by Jesus in all His deity and majesty.

A companion heresy of Gnosticism was Arianism. Arius of Alexandria taught that the Lord Jesus Christ was a mere creature. The leaders of the Christian church at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. answered him by stating in their creed that, "the Son is very man of very man, and very God of very God." Later in the history of the church, Socinus promoted a false idea that Jesus was not God, that people were not troubled by a sin nature, and therefore

were in no need of a Savior. But Paul's description of Jesus as God counters every aspect of all false religions from then to the present day. Paul lifts Jesus high above the empty religions and philosophies of the world and presents Him as the sovereign Creator of the universe, who—though existing in eternity past—bore the weight of humanity's separation from God in His body on the cross.

Few places in Scripture make a plainer claim to Jesus' deity than this statement by Paul. The word Paul used that is translated "image" is the Greek word *eikon*, which meant "something that exactly represents another." That's what Paul intended. Though God the Father cannot be seen, Jesus shows you God the Father in every possible way. In other words, if you see Jesus, you see God the Father.

He is ... the firstborn over all creation. -v. 15

Paul explained a truth about Jesus' relationship with His Father that placed Him above all other created things, particularly such things that are born from another. He was born into humanity at Bethlehem, but that in no way was His beginning (see Micah 5:2). Rather, Jesus came out of eternity to take His place as a man in order to fulfill the wonderful purposes of God.

Paul confronted the teaching of Gnosticism that claimed Jesus was a mere "demiurge," or the one who "fashioned" the universe but was not in any way equal to the One who created the universe—namely, God. It was a subtle but dangerous distinction that Paul countered here. Paul insisted that Jesus, as the firstborn of all creation, not only came from God, but is God in the flesh (see John 1).

The psalmists wrote about that truth also in joyful praise: "Also I will make [Jesus] My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. My mercy I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall stand firm with him" (Psalm 89:27-28).

The writer of Hebrews shared the same truth: "But to the Son He says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom'" (Hebrews 1:8). This is worthy of worship, yes? It ought to bring you to praise!

Jesus is no mere creature. He came from eternity past and took His place, though in human form, as Creator God of the universe.

For by Him all things were created -v. 16

Paul described Jesus as Creator God—both of all things visible and invisible. In other words, anything you can see in creation, Jesus created. And anything real that cannot be seen was also created by Him. This must have been an astounding concept for the Colossian believers to wrap their minds around, since they were surrounded by an entire culture that rejected such claims.

Jesus is so much more than most people believe. He created the universe, both things visible and invisible. Do you know Jesus that way? Not only as your Savior, possibly, but also your Creator God? Take a few moments now and just ponder that thought. How does it strike you? How does it make you feel? What difference would it make if you fully believed it?

That's why Paul wrote this letter. He wanted you to meet your Creator!

And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. -v. 17

In many ways, this one expression sums up Paul's entire letter to the Colossians. That Jesus exists in eternity past, present, and future and is part of all things that are created speaks of the completeness of His presence. He is eternal—no beginning and no end—and He is omnipresent, meaning His presence is everywhere and knows no boundaries.

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. -v. 18

Then Paul repeated the great thought that Jesus is all and above all—and that includes being the head of the church (see Ephesians 1:22). Coming from their earthly pastor, it must have been inspiring encouragement to know the risen Jesus lived as the wonderful Shepherd of their lives, caring for their needs and keeping them blameless before Him until the end (Hebrews 13:20-22).

And that same Jesus remained for them as preeminent over all things in creation, glorified before God, and seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven (Psalm 2; Hebrews 12:2). This statement from Paul landed as a powerful argument against the prevailing Gnosticism of that day.

WHAT CHRIST DID FOR US

Paul moved from teaching the Colossians about the person of Jesus to explaining to them the work of Jesus—accomplished for them both as one who was fully human, and equal as God to the Father. No mere “fashioner”

of the world could bring about what needed to be accomplished to redeem the world from the grip of sin and to set sinners free from its penalty. Only God could do that. So Paul wrote:

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. –vv. 19-20

Having shown the Colossians the relationship of Jesus to the Father, followed by His relationship to creation and then to the church, Paul turned to establish the relationship of Jesus to all humanity through the cross.

By dying on the cross, Jesus accomplished all the requirements demanded by God the Father for bringing people (and creation) who were lost because of sin back to a right relationship with Him. When you sin, you are rebelling against God—bringing dishonor to Him because He is holy. So basically, because of sin, all people are at war with God, living in rebellion to Him and His holy standards (James 4:4). We are helpless in that rebellion. Our sin condemns us before Him; we simply cannot bring ourselves back into relationship with God, because we are not only spiritually separated from Him, but we are alienated from God in our minds, too (v. 21). We can't even think rightly about God, even if we tried. We need someone to make that all right on our behalf. And that someone, Paul wrote, is Jesus. He accomplished that “through the blood of His cross.” That’s what Paul meant when he wrote about Jesus “reconciling” all things to Himself. He made things right that had been damaged by sin. And those things that Jesus reconciled were the things God appointed to be brought back into a right relationship or order with Him—namely, creation and sinful humanity. But Paul never got over the mercy that God pours out even on sinful people, like himself.

How did Jesus accomplish all of that? Paul wanted the Colossians to know He did it “in the body of His flesh through death” (v. 22). That’s why His suffering was physical suffering, why His death was a brutal, physical death on the cross. It was through the torture and death of His physical body that Jesus paid the price for our sin on the cross. He paid it all for you. Through His physical death on the cross, He made peace between us and God and is able to present us blameless before the Father. Only God could do that. Jesus is God—and He did it for you.

Why? He did it “to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.” How wonderful is that!

Paul offered an explicit declaration that Christ suffered—not in just appearance, but He suffered in a real body—because one of the heresies of Gnosticism in that day was that Jesus did not exist in human form.

But you may be asking the question: *If Jesus did it all, isn't there something I need to do?* Paul answered that as well when he encouraged the Colossian believers to “continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast ... not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven” (v. 23).

Paul urged the Colossian Christians to stay strong in their faith and not to move away from the gospel which he had first preached to them. That would have been such a relevant word since they were being hit from all sides by the dangerous influences of Gnosticism. Staying grounded in what you believe takes a commitment to the Word, to faithfully keeping yourself under the ministry of the gospel, and resisting being led away by any new and tantalizing trend or teaching. By the way, if you're a child of God, *you are* going to continue in the faith, grounded and settled. That's also the work of Jesus in your life.

Paul loved to highlight the glorious privilege he felt for being a minister of the gospel of Jesus. Do you feel that way about your opportunities to share what Jesus has done for you? Do you feel privileged and blessed to know Him? Does that move you to speak His name to those who have not yet believed? That may be worth thinking about as you continue your study of Colossians.

WHAT CHRIST DOES IN US

Paul closed out this section of his letter by mentioning that his own suffering could be cause for the Colossian believers to rejoice and be encouraged. Paul could not separate what he would suffer for preaching the gospel of Jesus from his ministry to the churches. His suffering accomplished much on behalf of the churches he served. In short, Paul wanted the Colossians to understand it was necessary for him to *fill up in suffering* that which was “lacking” in the suffering of Christ (v. 24). His suffering for the gospel, in other words, was an extension of the work of Christ in their lives. Just as Jesus paid a heavy price in His body to accomplish salvation, so Paul's suffering in preaching Christ's gospel brought encouragement and a building up of spiritual maturity for the Christians Paul served and loved so deeply.

**NEXT: Discover just how deeply you can grow
in your knowledge of God.**

7. If you had been a companion of Paul's, and had seen how much he suffered for the gospel, do you think you would have been able to rejoice in his suffering?



— CHRISTIANITY IS —

JESUS CHRIST,

— PLAIN AND SIMPLE. —



THRUtheBIBLE

LESSON 3

CHRIST IN YOU— HOPE FOR THE WORLD!



Begin with prayer



Read **Colossians 1:24–2:8**



Listen at [TTB.org/Colossians](https://www.TTB.org/Colossians) to **Colossians 1:24-29** and **Colossians 2:1-8**

Wondering what God is like? You need only look to Jesus. If you want to experience the presence and nature of God the Father, set out to get closer to His Son!

That is the message of Paul's letter to the believers at Colosse. To know Jesus is to know God. He perfectly represents Him in every possible way. That is why Colossians is such a valuable study for you and anyone wanting to grow in their personal knowledge of Jesus and in their experience of God. It is all here. And having taken care to explain to the Colossian Christians that Jesus shows in every possible way the image and nature of God the Father, he wanted them to understand his passion for their continued spiritual wellbeing. Paul's commitment to preaching Jesus came with a resolve to also suffer for His name. Suffering, for Paul, came with the territory—and proved to deepen the reality of Jesus in his life. He wanted that reality for the Colossians, too.

Are you surprised Paul would link the hardship he endured in bringing the gospel to the Galatian churches with the suffering Jesus endured? You shouldn't be. He has stated all along that his commitment to lay down his life for the gospel flowed from his knowledge of all Christ had suffered on the cross for him and for the church, which Paul calls "His body." Paul was suffering in his body for the sake of Christ's body, the church.

Paul implied that the sufferings of Jesus need to be completed by those who follow Him—in other words, Paul felt compelled to somehow make up for whatever was lacking in the fullness of Christ's suffering and that all believers who receive His gospel must suffer, too. But Paul's suffering for the gospel did not in any way add to what Christ had already done. There is no redemption power in Paul's suffering. When the Lord Jesus spoke to Ananias about going to lay hands on Paul, he said, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things *he must suffer for My name's sake*" (Acts 9:15-16). In other words, Paul's spiritual destiny from the time of his conversion included a commitment to suffer for the name of Jesus!

But, unlike the suffering of Jesus, Paul's suffering did not bring about salvation. There's no merit in his suffering for others or even for himself. Paul carefully explains the difference between what Christ's suffering accomplished (*mediatorial*) and the suffering that Paul endured on behalf of Jesus (*ministerial*).

Mediatorial suffering is the suffering Christ did for us. There is a category of suffering Jesus endured which cannot be shared, and there is the suffering of Christ which can be shared.

Christ's mediatorial suffering (the suffering He did for us, by taking our place!) includes all He suffered by becoming a human. He came as the Son of man and suffered the out-emptying of Himself as God in order to take on the limitation of humanity and to serve the world (John 1:14-18; Philippians 2:6-7). Jesus endured His own human weaknesses, His weariness, His discouragement, His hunger and thirst, His rejection, His grief and sorrow—all those things we as humans experience, but which are unique to each person. Jesus suffered all of that in His own body as a human (Galatians 6:5).

He also suffered as the Son of God—experiencing sorrows no other mortal could endure (John 1:9-11; Hebrews 5:1).

Ultimately, the anguish He endured as the sacrifice for the sins of the world is like that which no other human can endure. He took our place in offering Himself as a perfect, all-satisfying sacrifice for the sins of the world by enduring a cruel death on the cross (John 1:29; 1 Peter 2:24). Only Jesus, the perfect God-man, could pay for the sins of the world and take the place of sinners (Hebrews 12:2)!

But there remains a category of suffering which Paul endured for the sake of Christ that all believers can share as well. This is what Paul referred to as “my sufferings for you” (1:24). And they were sufferings that Paul endured in order to bring about great growth and glory in the church and among the Galatian believers. These were the sufferings Jesus endured that Paul shared in to accomplish God’s purpose in the gospel.

Jesus suffered for righteousness and became the target of multiple assassination plots against Him (John 8:40). People maligned His character, the Jews rejected His message, and the religious leaders caused trouble for Him and His disciples wherever they went. Paul and the other apostles suffered the same because of their allegiance to Jesus and His message of grace (1 Peter 3:14; 2 Timothy 3:12). Suffering for Jesus comes with the territory of following Him! In that way, we all share in His suffering, the ministerial suffering for His name.

Jesus invited His disciples to follow Him down a road of suffering—there would be hardship, painful rejection, even hatred, as people would seek to thwart their cause of righteousness. He challenged each follower to carry the cross of suffering in order to bring His message to the world (Matthew 16:24; John 15:18). If you choose to follow Jesus with any level of seriousness, you also will experience such suffering. In that way, you too share in what Jesus endured in order to build up the ministry of the gospel (Romans 8:36).

Still, God promises joy at the end of this hard road. God’s Word offers assurance of future glory and exceeding joy to all who suffer for Jesus and commit to living for Him (1 Peter 4:12).

Paul had committed his life to this work—the ministry of the gospel. It’s what God ordained for him—to preach and “fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations” (1:25-26). For Paul it was a mystery—a secret message from ancient time that was now being revealed to people through the preaching of the gospel. It was Paul’s chief aim and purpose in life. And yet, it was God’s sovereign purpose (Paul called it the “stewardship of God”) for his life. God ordained it for Paul, that he would preach the gospel and thus reveal this mystery once hidden in Old Testament times to all who would now hear it and receive it by faith (1:26). The *mystery* was no mystery at all now that it had been revealed in Christ!

God was now doing something new. His righteousness would now not only apply to His people, Israel, but to all the nations of the earth—namely the Gentiles to whom Paul had been called to preach. The problem of sin is a

problem for people from every tribe, tongue, and nation in the whole world (Romans 3:23). And the remedy for that problem is Jesus revealed through His church. The universal congregation of blood-bought sinners made right with God through faith in Jesus. And that mystery revealed, as Paul explained to the Galatians, is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (1:27). You are the hope of the world because you have Christ *in you*. Jesus is the mystery revealed in the church and worth all the suffering Paul endured for His name.

Revealing the mystery became Paul’s ministry. Not only was Paul commissioned to preach Christ for salvation, but also for bringing the body of Christ to spiritual maturity. Paul called it presenting “every man perfect in Christ Jesus.” It’s why he suffered and literally “agonized” (*striving*) for these believers in the power of Jesus (1:28-29). He wanted them to both *know* and *grow* in Jesus.

As Paul concluded his teaching on the essence and nature of Christ (chapter 1) he turned to address a nagging challenge for the Colossians: The encroaching of a culture steeped in human philosophy (chapter 2). Many Christians had unknowingly bought into the message that human philosophy mixed with the message of Jesus was a worthy formula for success. After all, if you could have the blessing of knowing Jesus along with the benefits of “fitting in” with society, what more could you need? Paul saw the great spiritual peril in adopting such an approach to faith. Paul expressed the fact that he had grown increasingly conflicted about how these congregations, particularly the church at Laodicea, had embraced the ruling philosophies of the day. He wanted so much more for these believers—to be rooted in the all-sufficient, fulfilling ministry of Christ (2:1-3). That Christ would be enough—more than enough—for finding their purpose in life. So, he sought to confront multiple errors that had crept into and clouded their understanding.

They faced the constant influx of:

- *Persuasive words* (2:4-7): This was a warning about people who used enticing speech, tantalizing words to captivate their imagination.
- *Philosophy and empty deceit* (2:8-13): This expression refers to worldly human wisdom that is deceiving in its effectiveness. Empty of value and truth.
- *Principalities* (2:14-17): This was thoughts and ideas that originate with the demonic world.

- *Mysticism* (2:18-19): This has to do with an over emphasis on spirit beings, a worship of angels and other unseen entities.
- *Asceticism* (2:20-23): This was a common thought that truth is found in material things and worthy of all acceptance.

Paul agonized over these issues because he had worked so hard to bring the Colossians the true message of Jesus and His grace. He offered a safeguard against worldly ideas that would so easily lead them to place a false confidence in themselves and in human wisdom.

The Lord Jesus Himself called out the believers in the church at Laodicea for growing “lukewarm” in their devotion to Him (Revelation 3:14-22). That same fate would befall the Colossians if they refused Paul’s excellent word to them.

Paul assured the believers at Colosse that everything they needed for life in God could be known in Christ—to experience all the wonderful resources (“riches”) and benefits of knowing Jesus, all wrapped up in mystery of God the Father who holds hidden “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” They need not turn to empty human ideas and philosophies or trends or principles for hope and help and encouragement. All they needed was found in the fullness of God delivered to them in human form in the person of Jesus. If you have Jesus, you have everything. Maybe you wrestle with that same subtle temptation to embrace the common, most trending idea of the day to help manage your situation or give you a sense of peace and purpose. If you know Jesus as your Savior, you also, like the Colossian, have the riches of God at your disposal—His Spirit, His Word, His powerful presence and peace. He is faithful. Jesus is all you need to experience that peace and joy that so eludes most of humanity.

Paul encouraged the Colossians to anchor their faith in Jesus alone. He urged them not only to believe in Jesus but also to “walk in Him” by planting deep roots in the life-giving soil of the gospel. He longed for them to live satisfied lives of stability and faithfulness marked by a heart of thanksgiving. No human philosophy can deliver that. Don’t you agree? Only Jesus Christ brings real fullness of life. He not only is the source of all those riches, He *is* the ultimate prize.

You might take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect on your readiness to embrace Paul’s teaching, too. What—if anything—keeps you from fully trusting in Jesus alone for everything you need? Consider that for just a small while before finishing this lesson.

Paul finished with a warning:

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. -2:8

You can't get any more direct than that. Paul made his charge clear to the Colossians and to you, too. Guard against being cheated out of the true riches in Jesus and trading everything for empty human wisdom, powerless to solve life's basic issues. Put your faith in Jesus—He is the fullness of God and the visible expression of the invisible depths of His wisdom, knowledge, understanding, and truth. Remember: If you have Jesus, you have everything!

NEXT: Paul explains that true faith is not about keeping the rules but living in the freedom of Jesus.

7. If you could go back to the first century, do you think you would see more similarities or differences between their struggles and ours?

LESSON 4

COMPLETE IN CHRIST: THAT'S YOU!



Begin with prayer



Read **Colossians 2:8–3:5**



Listen at [TTB.org/Colossians](https://www.TTB.org/Colossians) to **Colossians 2:8-23** and **Colossians 3:1-5**

When the family of God living in Colosse first read this letter, their vision of Jesus must have soared to new heights. They now saw Jesus at the highest level possible within our human imagination—making Jesus equal with God the Father in majesty, glory, nature, and character. It's so easy, then and now, to allow our culture's prevailing philosophies to influence our faith, so this picture of Jesus as the very image of God the Father is what we need to keep in mind for life and faith.

Jesus rises to the top over all things both in the visible and in the invisible realms. This letter reminds us that everything God wants us to know about Himself, He expresses in Jesus. When we live our lives in Christ, all that is now expressed in us. We have Jesus, and He is everything we need.

What an inspiration to live above the meager and empty promises of a self-absorbed culture. Jesus is a more worthy object of all our praise and devotion than anything else in this world. Whatever the question, Jesus is the answer.

Think about how that changes the way we see ourselves. For the Colossians, it meant they shouldn't measure their godliness by whether or not they have kept religious traditions or if they've perfectly kept Jewish laws, like

circumcision (which some were saying they needed to do to be godly). Instead, we should see ourselves as followers of Jesus who by faith were crucified with Him (dying to sin), buried with Him (in baptism), and now we are raised to new life in His Spirit.

Before we knew Jesus Christ, we were spiritually lifeless because of sin (uncircumcised in the flesh), but then we are made alive by the power of Jesus, having received forgiveness for all our sin. For the Jews, circumcision pictured this very dramatically as both an outward and a physical expression of faith. God prescribed this ritual for Jews in the Old Testament Law, but it serves as a metaphor in the Scriptures for a new heart toward God (spiritual circumcision). That's what the Bible refers to as a "circumcised heart" (Deuteronomy 10:12-17; 30:6; Romans 9:24-29).

When Jesus died for our sins on the cross, He made this new heart possible. When we receive Jesus by faith, God—through His Spirit—gives us this new heart (Hebrews 8:10).

Now, the fellowship in Colosse lived in a day when two schools of thought, Stoicism and Epicureanism, warped this truth. Stoicism taught that if you lived well and graciously in this present life then all will be well in the afterlife. Epicureanism promoted the idea that everything is basically uncertain. We have no guarantees about what comes after death. Strains of these philosophies still linger in our culture today.

But that's not God's way. God promises us we will have all we need for this life and the next in Jesus. We don't have to leave this life to chance. This human experience isn't all there is—in fact, it's not even the most important thing. Jesus defeated all claims to fatalism when He suffered and died on the cross—defeating death and ensuring the hope we have of an eternal life with God.

If you are a Christian, trust that by God's Spirit He has raised you from the dead and joined you to a living Christ. You don't have to lean back on religion or to trust your own ability to make things right with God. Jesus Christ did that for you on the cross. It's yours to believe and experience.

Like Paul urged the Colossians, don't let people hold you hostage to a set of religious rules and regulations based on outdated Old Testament practices and human traditions. None of that matters anymore. The only thing you need to hold on to is that Jesus Christ makes us new and brings us back into a right standing with God.

There will always be people who insist their way is right (the Colossians faced them, and we will, too). These people emphasize human wisdom and a strange practice of self-denial that has nothing to do with knowing Jesus.

But knowing Jesus is what it's all about. You let people bully you, saying, "Don't touch this! Don't taste that! Don't go near this!" All that may sound spiritual, but it's really just the world's way of inventing the spiritual, because they don't know Jesus. Follow Jesus and don't worry about all those other rituals.

God wants you to rejoice in Him. And Jesus Christ wants you to be close to Him. And walking with Him means you experience all the blessings that come with knowing God.

But, like most of us today, the Colossians struggled to keep their focus on eternal things against the strong current of what their culture cried after. The way to rise above that is to lift our gaze from earth to heaven and remember our identity in Jesus.

When we are raised to new life in Jesus, we are also positionally "seated with Him" in the exalted place of heaven. Remembering that reality and letting it change our perspective will guide us to a deeper and more effective faith on earth.

This struggle in our perspective doesn't mean our faith isn't real. But just think of it—when we grasp our position in Christ, our daily walk with Him grows stronger. Not only did Jesus rise from the dead, but He now sits at His Father's right hand in heaven—this is a place of limitless authority and power. As believers, we benefit from all that glory. We not only can identify with Jesus in His resurrection, but we also can identify ourselves with His exalted place in God's presence. We belong to Him and can identify with all He is.

Doesn't that change your perspective on whatever challenge you endure today? Discouragement and despair turn into a joyful hope for what Christ has in store for us. No human philosophy and earthly wisdom could ever deliver that to anyone. This glory comes from Jesus.

So how can we live like we believe this today? We can seek those things which are above. That word "seek" means pursuing things of God with "an urgency and a strong desire or ambition." Think about the things you pursue and focus on that bring you great excitement and pleasure—how do they compare to how you feel when you pursue Jesus and the things of God? Take some time to think through that question. It'll change where you put your focus.

Well, what if we don't seek the things that are in heaven? Then we'll naturally keep our minds and hearts focused on things on earth. Earth is simply too powerful a draw unless you deliberately focus on Jesus Christ in heaven. We need to train our minds and affections to focus on Him.

Think about how you are wired—what makes you do what you do and how you approach any given situation. How you respond is mostly determined by how you feel (your affections) and how you think (your thoughts). As a Christian, your highest priority is pleasing Jesus—especially in the places that only He knows about: Your thoughts and feelings. This creates our new identity; this is the hidden part of us we can give solely to Jesus. Because here's the truth: The old you was dead because of your sin. But the new you is alive in Jesus, because of what you believe He has done for you. The real you is joined with Him in heaven in the presence of God the Father this very moment.

How did this happen? The Holy Spirit did it—He saved you, He took you out of your sinful state and put you “in Christ,” and everything became new (2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 1:13). Because of that, you are eternally identified with Jesus and seated with Him in heaven. You still live on earth, but you are positioned spiritually in Christ in heaven.

That changes everything. Now, through the Holy Spirit's power, you can intentionally focus your mind and affections on Jesus and experience His power and peace each day. Someday, our position in Christ will be visible when Jesus appears and we will “appear with Him in glory” (3:4). Until that day, we can live confidently, sure that He will someday come for us. And because we know He's coming, we should pursue a godly life, inside and out. Everything filthy in this world loses its hold on us because we belong to Jesus Christ, and only a pure life is worthy of His name. Just keep reminding yourself of what it will be like to appear with Him in glory.

Simply put, stop sinning. The Colossians needed this reminder and so do we. “Put to death” the desires and attitudes of the human experience. Do whatever it takes to get rid of sin's control of your body, your mind, and your affections. Ask God to help you not even want sin.

Let's face it: Too many people live as if Jesus can't see what they are up to in the dark. But He sees what we do when we're alone or what thoughts we let fill our minds. The only way to stop sinning is to embrace who you are in Jesus. Ask Him to help you live it out in good and godly choices every day.

How are you doing with this? Your thoughts and attitudes really matter. If you don't yet know Jesus Christ, your thoughts and choices impact your eternal destiny. If you know Jesus, do your thoughts and actions reach beyond the immediate moment—are you living a holy life as one seated with Christ in heaven? Because that is who you really are.

If you belong to Jesus, then your life should show it. That means you die to sin. You put to death the things that dishonor the Lord, that aren't worthy of being linked to His name. It means you discipline your body and your thoughts so you can say no to sinful urges, passions, and desires that only push you away from a close relationship with Jesus.

Let's get specific. Are your eyes causing you trouble today? Do you routinely look at things you crave or lust after? Put those eyes in the place of death. Let your eyes be like Jesus' eyes, your thoughts like what Jesus would think, and your affections long for the things of God. You'll find freedom and peace and rest and joyful goodness in a life lived like that. You belong to Jesus and your life is hidden with Him in heaven. Start living like that is reality (because it is). You will never regret it.

NEXT: Paul shows how to live pure and holy lives to experience the best of Jesus.

4. What difference would it make in your life if you were more conscious of having your identity in Christ as you went about your day?

5. Everyone is seeking something. Think back over the last week. What things did you seek instead of Christ? Why did those things gain your attention?

6. What would you do differently if your feelings were intentionally focused on Christ and subject to His will?

7. Imagine for a moment that you could truly see your sins as God sees them. How do you think that would change how you deal with sin in your life?

LESSON 5

IN CHRIST, BUT LIVED OUT



Begin with prayer



Read **Colossians 3:6-25**



Listen at [TTB.org/Colossians](https://www.TTB.org/Colossians) to **Colossians 3:6-12** and **Colossians 3:12-25**

Having the riches of Jesus *in* us should cause us to live differently than when we did before we knew God. We live out our relationship with Him in ways that reflect His goodness, love, holiness, and grace. That is what it means to *walk with Jesus*.

We used to walk in our own power, and we did things dishonoring to the Lord. But now that Jesus lives in us, we live out our new relationship with God in the power of the Holy Spirit. And that new relationship changes everything. In fact, we are to remove those things that once marked us before we knew God—those sinful attitudes and habits that focused on meeting our needs rather than honoring others.

It's like when we change our clothes after being outside in the mud and rain—before we sit down to supper, we change from the dirty clothes and put on the much more appropriate clean garments. We are to do that when we trust in Jesus. We remove sinful patterns (like anger), malicious (unforgiving spirit) thoughts and attitudes, offensive statements about the Lord and other people (blasphemy), and crude speech that displeases the Lord.

Like worn out clothes, we take off sinful habits and put on attitudes and actions more pleasing to the Lord and that reflect our new life in Him.

In addition to removing sinful patterns, we must also demonstrate honesty in all our relationships with others. That's why lying is strictly off limits for anyone who knows Jesus. When we lie to someone or mislead them even in subtle ways, we dishonor those people and diminish the work of Jesus in our lives.

Colossians shows us that the better way to live is to reflect the fact that we have become new people in Jesus and to shine as image bearers of our Creator.

Before we came to know God, we had no choice but to serve our old nature—hopelessly bound to the sinful mindsets and attitudes with which we were all born. But now, in Jesus, all things have become new—and in God's mind, there are no distinctions among people, whether they be religious, racial, economic, gender-related, or regarding ethnicity. Everyone carries equal worth in Jesus.

If we know Jesus, we are all one as well as equal in God's eyes through our relationship to Him. You can see how that approach to others solves so many issues that cause strife, misunderstanding, emotional pain, and all kinds of injustice. Christ makes all things new.

Because we are His chosen people, bound to Him by the mercy and grace of Jesus, our lives look different than those who have stubbornly turned their backs on Him.

We have become holy before Him and our lives shine with tender mercies, humility, meekness, long-suffering—all spiritual character qualities that are formed in us by God's Spirit and reflected in our willingness to forgive quickly and resist complaining about each other, because that is how we are treated by Jesus. We become reflectors of Him, especially in the ways we live toward others.

What an amazing thought. If we have Jesus, we have everything. That *is* the message of Colossians. And having Him means living for Him in every possible way along with experiencing the benefits of a relationship with Him.

Jesus lives in all those that trust Him and rest upon Him. And it's only as we let the living Christ live out His life by the Holy Spirit through us that we experience the blessing of His presence, His power, and His peace in our lives. But there are people who refuse to live their lives in submission to God.

Colossians refers to people who live godless lives as “Barbarians” or “Scythians.” In biblical times, these were people groups that lived rather savage lives, ruled by the basest sinful passions and desires. They were known for their violent, lawless cultures and a basic unwillingness to acknowledge God as Creator.

Yet, the gospel powerfully made its way to people like that and brought about transformation—not only were individuals changed, but also entire ethnic groups experienced transformation. The gospel can penetrate the most resistant of human hearts and bring about lasting change. That is why it does not matter whether you are free or a slave, a godless person, or someone who is deeply religious.

Apart from the mercy and kindness of Jesus, you are hopelessly lost. Only He can save you and make you right with God. If you trust Christ for salvation, it does not make any difference about the color of your skin. It does not matter what is your status or the balance of your bank account. These things don’t mean anything when it comes to pleasing God.

And you will not find spiritual freedom in legalism or any other brand of man-made religion. It just will not add up. In Jesus, you will find all you need.

That’s how practical this section of Paul’s letter is to all of us. Paul showed us how Christ is the head of the church, and that we are complete in Him. We are made full in Him, and all we need for life and eternity we find in Jesus. You will not find that sort of teaching anywhere in any system of thought or philosophy that originates from the world. Even religion falls short of bringing about genuine freedom from sin.

You can’t find spiritual freedom in legalism or any other philosophy that requires you to somehow find a way to measure up to God’s high standard. Everything falls short in every possible way. But in Jesus we find all we need. If we are risen with Christ, we are to seek the things that are above where Christ is at the right hand of God. That mindset then leads us to desire personal holiness. And then that new holiness formed in us by God’s Spirit flows out in the ways we relate and respond to others. That ought to make you want to shout.

Ultimately, God wants our new relationship to Him through faith in Jesus to be reflected in the way we love others—which to Him, is the epitome of being new creations in Christ. Again, this love is a byproduct (or fruit) of the Holy Spirit working in us (Galatians 5:22). Even more exciting are the gifts

God grants to us when we allow His love to be the guiding principle of our lives—we experience a supernatural peace and an overwhelming spirit of gratitude that mark us.

Think of it this way: God's peace flows into our minds and acts as sort of an "umpire" of our competing thoughts and emotions. Ultimately, God's Spirit rules in favor of those thoughts and emotions that are from the Lord and most honoring to Him.

Who couldn't use a bit more peace in their minds and in the seedbed of their emotions? We all need God to oversee our often-splintered thoughts and frayed emotions. Giving our lives fully to the Lord's control ensures that we will know peace instead of strife, and calm in place of stress. Don't you desire that for you and your family? You surely do. When was the last time you turned over your troubled thoughts and the cares of your life over to Jesus and allowed Him to take control? Perhaps you should pause for a few moments and cover that with Jesus right now in this moment. He will be faithful.

None of this would be possible in our lives apart from the Word of God. The Word is living and powerful and able to speak to us in the deepest and most life-changing ways (Hebrews 4:12). That is why Paul urged the Colossians to devote themselves to allowing God's Word to take root in every aspect of their lives and in their times of corporate worship.

The Word of God provides all the direction and wisdom we need to live, as well as being a reliable source of encouragement to one another in our worship. God's truth takes root in our lives when we commit to studying it and to memorizing its words and phrases so they permeate our thoughts and guide our actions.

When we sense the need to encourage someone bent low in discouragement, we will have at our disposal the life-giving truth of Scripture to offer them in ways that are meaningful. Those same words become the content of our praise in corporate worship. Our hearts literally erupt in praise with the very words of truth from God's Word. Did you realize people can be lifted and encouraged when you sing God's Word? That thought alone can be transforming to your worship.

Serving others and worshiping the Lord through the Word of God becomes the foundation of our lives. The Word of God is the standard by which we measure the effectiveness and value of everything we do, including our worship. Everything we do should point to Jesus and bring about a desire in those we encounter to offer their praise to Him too. And all we do should reflect a profound thankfulness to the Lord.

Ultimately, when we live our lives like this our families and those around us benefit the most. God has provided a way we relate to one another in our family relationships. God's plan emphasizes the order of creation and promises a satisfying fulfillment in all relationship that results from living in submission to Him.

Wives are to live in submission (or showing honor and respect) for their husbands and in doing so, bring honor to the Lord. Husbands, on the other hand, are to show a love for their wives that reflects the same depth and character of the love Christ showed for His church (Colossians 3:18; Ephesians 5:22-26). Though counter to what culture promotes, this arrangement of mutual honor and respect between a husband and wife holds the best promise for a long and fulfilling marriage relationship.

As for children, they are to live in obedience to their parents while they are young. All the while, children should be able to count on their father and their mother not to act harshly in ways that only cause frustration and confusion.

But this selfless approach to others does not only apply to the family but extends out to our relationships with those with whom we work, either as employers or employees, and anyone else that happens to be part of our sphere of living. Each individual who is a follower of Jesus, whatever your station in life, ought to live in a way that honors Him and reflects the grace and kindness with which He drew you into a relationship with Himself.

Paul concluded this section with a benediction of sorts followed by no small caution:

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality. -3:23-25

Living God's way not only ensures peaceful and God-honoring relationships but offers the promise of a blessing to those who obey and distress for those who choose to ignore His plan.

NEXT: Paul's lasting advice to believers and a highlight of individuals who served memorably with him in the final stretch of his ministry.

7. Imagine you could take your Bible back to the first century and show it to the Colossian believers who had, at most, this letter, the Old Testament, and possibly pieces of the rest of the New Testament. How do you think they would react to the treasure we have in our Bibles?

LIVE OUT YOUR
RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD
IN WAYS THAT REFLECT HIS

*goodness, love, holiness,
and grace.*



THRU the BIBLE

LESSON 6

WHEN PEOPLE MATTER MOST



Begin with prayer



Read **Colossians 4**



Listen at [TTB.org/Colossians](https://www.TTB.org/Colossians) to **Colossians 3:22–4:18**

Knowing who you are in Christ changes the way you view the world and how you relate to people, especially those closest to you. Taking responsibility for your life and the way you live out your faith is something God expects once you have the fullness of Jesus living in you. It really is a new way of living that is energized by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Devoting ourselves to prayer, which is the best way to stay intimately connected to God, ensures that we do not slip back into old patterns of relying on ourselves and pursue in every situation the things of the Lord. And we will do it with thankful attitudes.

One of the joys of knowing Jesus is praying consistently and with great passion for the work of the ministry and for those who serve the gospel all around the world. Paul enlisted the faithful prayers of his Colossian friends as he turned to close this powerful letter and personal letter.

This life of prayer is not a “one time and we are done” sort of experience. What God desires of us is that we commit to making prayer a regular part of our daily routine—in fact, He desires that we develop a lifestyle of prayerfulness, keeping regular appointments with Him to intercede for those serving Jesus and thanking Him for their ministry.

Being watchful over our lives and the lives of others in prayer is an important biblical principle that originates all the way back in the Old Testament. For instance, in the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, we watch as a faithful servant of God, Nehemiah, undertakes the enormous project of rebuilding the ruined walls and gates of Jerusalem. But not once in the entire story do we see Nehemiah attempting to accomplish that monumental task without a steady and devoted commitment to prayer (Nehemiah 1:4-11).

Remarkably, we too can enter into the amazing work God is doing in ministries all around the world by asking Him to open doors for the gospel and to give boldness, protection, and provision to those individuals, like the apostle Paul (writing from prison!), who serve in Jesus' name. That partnership in prayer pleases the Lord and fosters in us a spirit of thanksgiving.

We also enjoy the privilege of living our own lives in such wise ways as to make the message of Jesus all that more attractive and palatable for unbelievers. We can walk in the Lord's wisdom in ways that draw people's attention to the Savior and makes them curious about our faith. It is a wonderful way to make the most of our time while we are on earth so that as many people as possible have a genuine opportunity to hear the gospel.

Seeking God's wisdom when it comes to impacting unbelievers with the truth is a good thing—in fact, it is one of the most redeeming uses of our time as followers of Jesus. Only God knows what's really going on in someone's mind and certainly in their heart. Let's be passionate about seeking His guidance as to the best approach to broaching eternal things or answering searching questions from someone asking about our faith.

What we say and how we say it can be the difference between someone moving toward a faith in Jesus and deciding they'd rather live without Him. Our words can be what intrigues someone enough to continue their pursuit of truth.

Paul could write about this with authority because he had lived it. And many of the people who became his choicest partners in ministry were individuals he had personally led to the faith.

PAUL'S SUPPORT TEAM

The final words of Paul's letter to the Colossians leaves us with the unmistakable impression that the people with whom we associate and serve are among the most important people in our lives. Paul loved serving with

others. We should, too. And acknowledging those people who help carry out the work of the ministry is a fabulous way to honor them before others and to praise them before the Lord.

What we have here is a list of names of people Paul knew—men and women who lived with Paul, served with him, who walked down Roman roads, and lived their lives in the setting of the rich and often chaotic culture of the Roman world. They lived and served the gospel under Roman rule. They went about their ministries surrounded by paganism, but they were God's children, filled with His Spirit and ablaze with the fire for the gospel.

Many of the individuals Paul mentioned were from Ephesus. You can visit Ephesus today, though now it lays in ruins. And as you do, you could sit high above the city and look down over what once was a bustling enterprise of commerce, entertainment, and allure of a Roman colony. You could imagine the expansive theater looming large over the city square, the marbled boulevards and columns of stone reaching high above the square and telling of the advanced Roman and Greek architecture of that day. You might see Paul walking along the streets talking with Tychicus or Onesimus or Epaphroditus. Ironically, at the time he wrote to the Colossians, Paul had not yet visited Rome or Colosse. But it was the people with whom he had served that compelled him to write.

He told the Colossians to expect to hear from Tychicus, his dear friend and fellow servant of the gospel. To Tychicus he had entrusted the details of his circumstances and freed him to share those things with the Colossian believers. Tychicus served as one of the pastors at the church in Ephesus, that wonderful ministry where Timothy served and that garnered special attention from the Lord Jesus Himself, when John wrote his book of Revelation (Revelation 2:1-7).

Paul wrote next of Onesimus—a slave to Paul's friend, Philemon, and Paul's new son in the faith. Onesimus was the main subject of Paul's letter to his friend, Philemon. The New Testament letter *Philemon* bears his name. Paul had led this young man to put his trust in Jesus and then sent him back with commendation to his master, Philemon. Paul urged Philemon to receive Onesimus back with grace and kindness, since he would be returning not so much as a fugitive slave but as a new brother in the faith (Philemon 17).

Paul then mentioned Aristarchus, a Greek Macedonian who accompanied Paul to Rome and wound up in prison along with him. He had also spent time preaching the gospel in Ephesus and was one of the ones seized by the angry

mob and taken prisoner. Then Paul mentioned Mark, Barnabus' cousin—the sickly young man who at one time had come under criticism from Paul for retreating home at the beginning of one of Paul's missionary journeys. Yet God graciously restored their relationship to the point where Paul later, when writing to Timothy from prison in Rome, urged him to bring Mark (John Mark) because he was “useful to me for ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11).

Next followed a litany of names of some of Paul's choicest ministry companions:

And Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. -4:11-12

Though little is known of Justus, Epaphras we know served as the pastor at Colosse, but, at the time of Paul's writing, was also in prison. Yet, even in prison, Epaphras labored faithfully in prayer for the spiritual well-being of his congregation, the Colossian believers, and maintained a great passion for all the other churches in that area—not the least of which were the church at Laodicea and the church at Hierapolis.

What a responsibility and a joyful privilege for us to pray for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, many of whom serve Him faithfully all around the world. Prayer remains an extremely important ministry for all believers today—to pray for God's servants. If in His providence, God should move you out of ministry, He can use you mightily in a ministry of prayer.

Next, Paul highlighted Luke, “the beloved physician,” and Demas, both of whom were with Paul as he wrote and who extended their personal greetings to the Colossian believers.

Paul went on to mention the believers who were at the church at Laodicea and an individual named Nymphas who hosted a house church in that same area.

Pagan temples abounded in that culture, but the Christian churches most often met in homes—more intimate gatherings of a handful of believers who worshiped Jesus.

Originally, Paul intended that his letter (all his letters) be read aloud to the individual churches to whom he wrote. He wanted all God's people to come under the authority of Jesus and the best way to do that would be to hold public readings where his letters were read aloud in the assembly.

Some scholars believe that the “epistle” Paul referred to here is the New Testament letter Ephesians, which we have now in our Bible. And he was urging the Colossians to read it for themselves, but also that they should circulate it to the other churches in the area so they too could benefit from Paul’s instruction.

On a very personal note, Paul relayed a message to be given directly to Archippus. He wanted to urge him to follow through with the calling to ministry that was clearly on his life at that time. Perhaps Archippus was wavering because of family resistance or prior commitments. Yet, Paul called him out directly in the closing section of this great letter and urged him to “take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord” (4:17). Paul’s personal concern for this individual should be an encouragement to us, too. To know that God has specific plans for each of us and that He often chooses to use other believers in our lives to spur us on to devote our lives to the cause of the gospel.

Paul did not want the church at Colosse to forget his present circumstance: He was writing from prison, chained to a Roman guard because of his boldness in proclaiming Jesus. Paul got personal here—possibly even emotional—as he wrote this final expression. As he penned the last few lines with his own hand, the aged pastor and mighty church planter included a rare plea for prayer on his behalf: “Remember my chains.” A very tender closing, indeed, from a gracious servant of Jesus, no doubt pondering the final chapter of his ministry. Do you regularly and boldly call on the Lord for those individuals who are literally in prison and often suffering great physical and emotional trauma because of their devotion to Jesus? If not, you should begin today.


There are few more honorable positions to be in today than bowing before the Lord on our knees to intercede for those in chains for Christ.

7. Repeatedly in Paul's letters we see him encouraging those that served alongside him and exhorting them to continue in the faith. We never know how much our encouragement means to people. What can you do to encourage a particular person today?

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

**LEARN HOW TO SHARE
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A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays a list of booklets from TTB.org. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a wooden table.

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