THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

WITH STUDY NOTES

A Preacher's Guide to the Book of Colossians

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Tom Kelby

15 thoughts to keep in mind when studying Colossians

1. Colossians is a New Testament Book. But the Old Testament casts a large shadow over it.

The apostle Paul never directly quotes the Old Testament in Colossians. However, he makes many allusions to passages within the Old Testament in this letter. This means he draws his words from a specific thought found in the Old Testament. A link exists between Paul making the allusion and to a specific passage or passages in the Old Testament. In order to fully understand and to completely explain the message contained in Colossians, the preacher or teacher needs to (1) recognize these Old Testament allusions and (2) turn to and use the Old Testament passages Paul himself uses. Paul use of the Old Testament is a great help to believers because he shows Christians how the Old Testament writings should be interpreted.

2. Colossians is a letter.

Colossians falls into one of three sections found in the New Testament. Each section features a different type of literature and each section accomplishes a different task.

(Type 1) Books of Narrative

The first five books in the New Testament are all books of narrative. A narrative is a story. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. All of the stories in the Bible are true (see, for example, Psalm 18:30, Proverbs 30:5, John 21:24, 2 Timothy 3:16, and Titus 1:2). This means Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts are telling the true story of Jesus, the apostles, and the early church. These books were written so that people might hear the true story of Jesus and, through these stories, come to believe that Jesus is the Christ. According to the Bible, everyone who puts their trust in Jesus receives eternal life (see John 20:30-31). The first five books of the New Testament have the task of persuading people that Jesus is the Christ, of calling people to place their faith in Jesus, and of calling people to join with other people who have placed their faith in Christ. In other words, these first five books are meant to call people to place their faith in Jesus and to join a local church. It is impossible to be a Christian without knowing the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus because an essential part of the gospel is faith in Christ's resurrection from

the dead (see Romans 10:9). Therefore, it is very important for people to know the things that have been written in these five books of narrative. This narrative section of the New Testament is for non-Christians and for Christians. It is for people who have never heard about the Christ. It is for people who are currently part of other religions and who currently worship other gods. No one can come to God the Father except through Jesus Christ (see John 14:6). Therefore, it is important for all people to know the story being told in these five books. The fact that these books contain the story of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection makes them easy to understand. All humans understand the basic "rules" of stories. Stories have a beginning, middle, and an end. Typically, stories don't use many metaphors or symbols. The simplicity of its stories is why this first section of the New Testament is easier to understand than the other two sections in the New Testament. This doesn't make the other two sections less important than this first section. Again, all parts of the New Testament are "breathed out by God" (see 2 Timothy 3:16). Therefore, all of the sections are equally important. The books of narrative all quote from the Old Testament Scriptures frequently. This is a reason it is important for the preacher or teacher to be familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures.

(Type 2) Letters

The second section of the New Testament contains letters. The letters are to churches (for example, Romans and 1 Peter) and to individuals (for example, 1 Timothy and Philemon). There are twenty-one letters in the New Testament. Scholars sometimes refer to the letters in the New Testament as epistles. The New Testament letters are all connected, in one way or another, to the story of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. This means the letters are impossible to understand if one does not know the story being told in the gospels. And the letters are also all connected to real churches. This means it is impossible to understand the letters if one does not understand the importance of the local church. This means the reader of the letters must know the story being told in the book of Acts. What is the task being accomplished by the epistles? These letters were written to help churches. These churches are not pretend churches. They actually existed in the first century. The letters helped first century churches by encouraging them when they were weak, by correcting them when they were in sin, and by instructing them when they did not know what to do. Most of all, the letters strengthened churches by building their theology. This means the letters helped the churches understand God and his kingdom and their place in his

kingdom. The letters protected the churches from false teaching. But the letters weren't just for real churches in the first century. They are for real churches today. The letters help churches today by encouraging them when they are weak, by correcting them when they are in sin, and by instructing them when they do not know what to do. Most of all, the letters strengthen churches today by building their theology. This means the letters help churches today understand God and his kingdom and their place in his kingdom. The letters protect churches today from false teaching.

The letters all quote from or allude to the Old Testament Scriptures frequently. This is a reason it is important for the preacher or teacher to be familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures. Beyond this, the letters frequently refer to events described in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. The preacher or teacher must be familiar with the first five books of the New Testament.

(Type 3) Apocalyptic Literature

The final section of the New Testament contains just one book—the book of Revelation. This book is different from all of the other books in the New Testament because it is the only book of apocalyptic literature. This type of literature is often used in books describing cataclysmic (earthshaking) visions or events which are hard to describe using normal language. This type of literature makes heavy use of visions and symbols. While there are no other books using apocalyptic literature in the New Testament, there are books of apocalyptic literature in the Old Testament. Portions of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah all include apocalyptic writing. What is the task being accomplished by the book of Revelation? This book was written to give courage to churches and to individual Christians facing persecution and temptation to sin so that they might endure to the end and be saved. This book was written for Christians in the first century. But it was also written for Christians living in every other century. This means it is for Christians today.

3. There are two categories of letters in the New Testament. Colossians falls within the first category of letters.

The first category of letters in the New Testament contains Paul's letter collection. The second category contains the general epistles. The general epistles are sometimes referred to as the

catholic epistles. The word catholic is not a reference to the Roman Catholic church. In the Greek language used at the time when the New Testament was being gathered together, the word catholic referred to things of a "general" or "universal" nature. These letters, then, are called the catholic epistles because of their more "general" or "universal" nature.

It is easy to see that the "general epistles" are different from Paul's letters because the general epistles are not specifically addressed to individual churches. There are not many specific details about specific churches in the "general epistles." That is not the case with the letters in Paul's letter collection. It is easy to determine the recipients of all of the letters in Paul's letter collection. That is why all of the letters in Paul's letter collection (including Hebrews) are named after the recipients. This means Paul's letters are named after the places or people to whom letters were addressed. For instance, "Ephesians" tells the reader that this letter is addressed to the church in Ephesus. "Colossians" tells the reader that this letter is addressed to the church in Colossae. But it is difficult to determine the recipients of the "general epistles." The title "James" does not tell the reader anything about the recipients of this letter. It only tells the reader that James is the author of the letter. The reader needs to read further in order to find out about the recipients of the letter. Usually, in the general epistles, it is difficult to find specific information with specific details.

However, in spite of the fact that Paul's letters are named after individual churches (for example, Ephesians) and the general epistles are named after the authors (for example, Peter), the reader needs to remember that all of the New Testament letters are for the local church. Therefore, the difference between these two letter collections is not as large as it may at first appear to be. The "general epistles" were, like Paul's epistles, intended to be read by real local churches struggling with real problems in the first century. They are also intended to be read by real local churches struggling with real problems in this century.

4. The book of Acts prepares the reader for both categories of letters in the New Testament.

The first half of Acts prepares the reader for the general epistles. The books in the general epistles are James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude. The second half of Acts prepares the

reader for Paul's letter collection. The books in this collection begin with Romans and end with Hebrews. The book of Acts demonstrates that the two different letter collections in the New Testament do not have a different message. The book of Acts presents one unified gospel message. The unity of the book of Acts demonstrates the unity of the letters in the New Testament and prepares readers to accept these letters. The letters found in Paul's letter collection and the letters found in the general epistles are proclaiming the same truths. People have sometimes said that these two letter collections are not unified. People will sometimes teach that Paul was teaching a gospel that was different from the gospel taught by Jesus and the apostles. For instance, people have said that the book of James is different from Paul's teaching. They say this because they think James teaches works while Paul teaches grace. This is a misunderstanding of James and of Paul. Both of these apostles teach that salvation is by grace through faith and that faith must include works because works prove that faith is real. James is not teaching something different from Paul. Both of their words are inspired by God.

5. The apostle Paul wrote many of the letters in the New Testament.

The apostle Paul wrote at least thirteen of the letters in the New Testament. Nine of the letters are to churches. Four of the letters are to individuals. A fourteenth letter, Hebrews, is traditionally considered to be part of Paul's letter collection. However, scholars are not certain who wrote the letter to the Hebrews.

Paul is first "introduced" to readers of the New Testament in Acts 7:58. He was, at that time, opposed to Christianity. In fact, he aggressively persecuted the church (see Acts 8:1-3). The facts of Paul's early life may be found in many Scriptures (see Acts 13:9, 22:3, 22:22-28, 23:16, Romans 11:1, and Philippians 3:4-7). Paul's conversion to Christ is outlined in Acts 9:1-19. Paul was focused on ministry to the Gentiles (see Acts 13:46, 15:7, 21:19, Romans 1:13, 11:13, 15:16-18, Galatians 1:16, 2:2, 2:8-9, Ephesians 3:1, 3:8, 1 Timothy 2:7, and 2 Timothy 4:17). This is important, because Paul is careful to demonstrate that the benefits of Christ's life, death, and resurrection are for all people, not just Jewish people.

In 2 Peter 3:15-16, the apostle Peter compares Paul's writings to "the others Scriptures." This is a significant statement, because one of Jesus's original apostles is declaring Paul's writings to be Scripture! This demonstrates that even in the first century, Paul's writings were understood to be Scripture.

6. The apostle Paul's letters are written to churches and to individuals.

The first nine books in Paul's letter collection are all written to churches. They are meant to bring help to whole churches. The letters are named after the city or village where the church was located. For instance, the letter titled Colossians was written to the church in Colossae. The next four books in Paul's letter collection are written to individuals. These letters contain instructions to people who were somehow associated with Paul. But while there are letters to entire churches and letters to individuals, it is important to remember that all of the letters in the New Testament, whether they are written to churches or to individuals, are related to churches. It is impossible to read the New Testament epistles correctly if you do not understand the importance of the local church. At the same time, since the local church is made up of many individual Christians, all the letters in the New Testament, whether they are written to churches or to individuals, also relate to individuals. Christians must be careful to apply the Scriptures to themselves. The book of Hebrews is the one book in the apostle Paul's letter collection that does not fit within this pattern. It is not grouped with the letters to the churches and it is not grouped with the individual letters. Hebrews probably appears at the end of the entire collection of Paul's letters because the author of Hebrews is unknown. This does not mean that Hebrews is of less value than the other letters in Paul's letter collection. Hebrews is, like all Scripture, "breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (see 2 Timothy 3:16).

7. Colossians is one of four "prison epistles" written by Paul.

Paul wrote Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon from prison. It appears Paul sent Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon at the same time, and they were delivered by the same messenger—a man named Tychicus (see Eph. 6:21–22 and Col. 4:7).

8. The letters in Paul's letter collection have been carefully arranged.

The letters to churches in Paul's letter collection are, for the most part, arranged in order of size. The largest letters are first. The smaller letters are last. The letters were probably arranged in this way because the individual letters were first gathered into scrolls. It was normal, when putting different works together in a scroll, to put the largest items in the work first. This is somewhat similar to packing clothes in a suitcase. You will normally pack the largest items first and put the smaller items in the suitcase afterwards. This appears to be how Paul's letter collection is arranged. Romans appears first in Paul's letter collection. It is not first because it is the best letter. All of the letters in Paul's letter collection are perfect. They all perfectly fulfill the purposes for which they were written. Romans is not first because it is the most important letter. All of the letters in Paul's letter collection are important. And Romans is not first because it was the first letter written by Paul. Actually, 1 Thessalonians was probably Paul's first letter. Again, the books in Paul's letter collection are not arranged in chronological order.

Romans is first because it is the longest book in the apostle Paul's letter collection. The second longest book is 1 Corinthians. That is probably why it appears second in Paul's letter collection. 2 Corinthians is placed next to 1 Corinthians because the two letters to the Corinthian church belong together.

The letters to individuals are also arranged in order of size. 1 Timothy is first because it is the largest. 2 Timothy is next to Timothy because the letters to Timothy naturally belong together. Philemon is last because it is the smallest. The letter to the Hebrews appears after the letters to individuals. However, Hebrews is not a letter to an individual. It probably appears at the end of the entire collection of Paul's letters because its author is unknown.

9. The letters in the New Testament were written to real churches in the first century, but they are meant to be read by all churches in every age.

Any church receiving a letter from Paul in the first century was supposed to do something with the letter when they received it. First, the church was supposed to receive the letter as if it came from God himself. They were supposed to carefully read the letter, and they were supposed to

respond to the things that were written. To ignore Paul (or James, Peter, John, Jude, or the author of Hebrews) was to ignore God himself. To say this another way, to disobey Paul was to disobey God himself. For instance, when Paul called the church in Corinth to remove a sinful man from the church, the church needed to obey Paul's words (see 1 Corinthians 5:2). When Paul told the members of the church in Colossae to "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you" (see Colossians 3:5), the people in Colossae needed to obey Paul's instruction. To disobey the letter was to disobey God himself.

Even though the letters were addressed to one church, copies of the letter were quickly passed on to other churches (see Colossians 4:16). This explains why manuscripts of Paul's letter collection have been found in so many different locations.

But the letters weren't just for churches in certain places in the first century. They were written for God's people in every place and in every century. This means churches today are supposed to receive the letters as words from God and they are supposed to respond to his words. When the letters call the churches to flee from evil, the churches are to flee from evil. When the letters call the churches to appoint leaders in a certain way, the churches are to obey these instructions. Churches today need to carefully consider how they respond to God's words found in the epistles. Because all of the letters have been delivered to God's people, God's people are responsible to read the letters and to obey the things written in them. To disobey the letters is to disobey God.

10. The New Testament letters were all written for a specific reason.

Each of the letters was written for a specific reason. This is why scholars sometimes refer to the New Testament letters as *occasional documents*. This means the letters are all related to some particular *occasion*. The author of the letter wrote his letter with the occasion in his mind. The people receiving the letter also knew about the occasion. They either knew it because everyone in the church was thinking about the same thing, or they quickly discovered the occasion as they read the letter and studied the information included in the letter.

For instance, the occasion prompting Paul to write his letter to the Galatians was the fact that false teachers had confused the church in Galatia and the saints were now beginning to believe a false gospel. Anyone in Galatia would have known, instantly, that Paul's letter had been sent because of this particular occasion in the church.

An example of an occasional document is a birthday card. A birthday card is written and delivered because of a particular occasion—someone's birthday. Both the person writing the card and the person receiving the card know the occasion connected to the card. However, imagine that this birthday card is put into a box. Would someone, even if this person lived many years later, be able to determine the "occasion" that prompted this card? The answer is almost certainly yes. The person finding this card would be able to use the words in the card and other clues in the card and on the envelope (like the festive color of the envelope or a picture of a birthday cake) to figure out that this was a birthday card. Knowing the occasion that prompted this letter would help the person reading the letter to understand why certain things were written in the card. It would also help that person understand why other things were not included in the card.

This description of a birthday card is similar to how the New Testament letters were written. The writer in the first century wrote the letter because of a particular occasion. The readers knew why the letter had been written. People today are different from people in the first century. We are like the person discovering the birthday card in a box many years later. We must use the words in the letter to determine the occasion that prompted the letter.

Sometimes the occasion which prompted the letter is easy to see. For instance, the occasion prompting the letter to Philemon was the fact that a slave named Onesimus had run away from Philemon to Paul. Paul was sending him back. That explains why Paul sent the letter. He wanted Onesimus to be received by Philemon and the local church.

The occasion prompting 1 Timothy was chaos that had broken out in the church in Ephesus. Some of this chaos was due to false teachers. Paul gave Timothy specific instructions so that Timothy might deal with the problems in Ephesus (see 1 Timothy 1:3).

The fact that all of the letters are occasional documents means the reader needs to pay careful attention to the words in the letter. What are the things being emphasized by the author? What commands is he giving? What promises from God is he emphasizing? These are connected, in some way, to the letter's occasion. This understanding of the New Testament letters as occasional documents teaches us that the letters in the New Testament are not just words on a page. Everything was written for a specific purpose. Every word in the epistles was written to help in specific situations. This means the words in the epistles will also be a help in churches today.

Usually, the occasion prompting the letter did not originate with the writer of the letter. Instead, the occasion was "birthed" on the reader's side. In other words, the writer (Paul, Peter, James, etc.) is normally responding to an occasion on the reader's side of things. For instance, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians because of sin in the church in Corinth. Thus, sinful worldliness in the church in Corinth was the occasion prompting Paul to write this letter. Paul wrote Galatians because the church in Galatia was embracing a false gospel. Thus, heresy in Galatia was the occasion prompting this letter. Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians because the believers in Thessalonica were worried that Jesus had already returned. Thus, fear in Thessalonica was the occasion prompting the letter.

Sometimes, however, the occasion is prompted by the writer. For instance, Paul wanted to visit Rome (see Romans 1:8-15). His desire to visit the saints in Rome was the occasion prompting Romans.

Understanding that letters are occasional documents helps readers today read the letters with far greater understanding. It explains why certain things are emphasized in the letter. It explains why other things are not emphasized. For instance, the occasion prompting Colossians is the fact that the church was embracing false teaching. False teachers had come into the church. They were telling the saints that they needed to do additional things in order to be holy (see Colossians 2:8 and 2:16-23). The church was becoming confused about the true gospel. Because of this false teaching, the people were adding "works" to the "grace" that had been given to them in Christ. Understanding that this was the occasion prompting Colossians explains many of the statements

Paul makes throughout the letter. For instance, at the very beginning of the letter, Paul calls the believers in Colossae "saints and faithful brothers in Christ" (see Colossians 1:2). Even at this early point in the letter, Paul is counteracting the false teaching which this church has been embracing. Even at this early point in the letter, the occasion is influencing the things that are being said in the letter.

By God's grace, the New Testament letters cover every type of occasion modern churches will ever face. Whether a church is wrestling with confusion, false teaching, legalism, sexual sin, or persecution, it will find specific instructions written to it. Beyond this, the epistles provide a warning to churches so that they might avoid the occasions that are seen in the first century churches. It is important to know that the occasion prompting an author to write and to send a letter needs to be discovered by the reader. This demands careful reading of the letters. Why, for instance, did Peter write 1 Peter? The occasion prompting this letter may be found by careful reading of 1 Peter.

Every local church will experience "occasions" like the ones experienced by these early churches. The New Testament letters are God's gracious gift to all churches in every age so that these occasions might not destroy the churches, but, rather, be faced with confidence and without fear.

11. God's people must hear the New Testament letters. This means they must be proclaimed when the church is gathered.

The New Testament letters demonstrate that in order for a local church to be healthy, it must obey God's words. Obviously, in order for a local church to obey God's words, God's people in that local church need to hear God's word. This means when the church meets together, the preaching of God's word must be given great priority (see 1 Timothy 4:13 and 2 Timothy 4:1-2). The church should allow enough time for God's word to be read to the people and to be explained. There should also be time for the church to respond to God's word.

The people will not always receive God's word. But leaders in the church must be willing to speak God's words even if those words are not popular. This is one of the main ways the leaders demonstrate their love for the people.

Preaching requires preachers. Gifted elders need to devote themselves to study, so they might faithfully teach and preach God's word to God's people (see 2 Timothy 3:14-4:4). The church needs to treasure those who proclaim God's word to them (see 1 Timothy 5:17). And churches need to raise up younger leaders who will also treasure God's word.

One helpful pattern is for the main preacher of the local church to systematically preach through different books of the Bible. For instance, a preacher may preach through the entire book of Ephesians, covering a few sections at a time. By going through an entire book, the preacher is forced to cover every topic in the book. The main "point" of the sermon is the main "point" of the biblical text. Focusing on preaching through biblical books is good for the church, and it is good for the preacher. It keeps him from focusing only on his favorite topics. By preaching through an entire book in the Bible, he will need to cover every single issue being covered in that book.

Preaching on specific topics is necessary at certain times. The preacher may need to preach on a certain matter impacting the entire church. For instance, because of outside pressure on the church, he may need to preach on facing persecution. He may use many different Scripture passages to do this. Or he may preach about the family using many different texts from the Bible. Focusing on specific topics can be very helpful for the church. But there are dangers with exclusively preaching topically-based sermons (i.e., sermons where the subject isn't the main point of a passage in the Bible, it is, instead, a topic). A danger is the preacher may only preach on more pleasant topics. He may avoid subjects like sexual sin or divorce or relationships between husbands and wives. Preaching through books of the Bible is a way to avoid this danger. The person preaching is forced to preach about whatever the biblical author is writing about. For instance, the preacher speaking from 1 Corinthians 5 will be forced to speak about sin within the church and the need for church discipline. Sometimes, people in the church will not like what they hear in God's word. They may want to "build" the church on things that are more "exciting"

or more "current." Leaders must resist the urge to build on anything except God's word. Churches that do not regularly listen to the messages being proclaimed in the Bible and that do not obey the message found in the Bible will become unhealthy. Unhealthy churches are in real danger of ceasing to exist as true churches (see Jesus's warning to the churches in Revelation 2:2-7, 2:12-17, 2:18-29, 3:1-6, and 3:14–22).

12. The letters demonstrate that local churches in the first century had many struggles.

The New Testament letters teach God's people that they should not expect perfect conditions on this earth during this present age. Local churches on earth will always be struggling. Local churches are in constant danger and are in constant need of help from God. Local churches in the first century faced dangers from within the church and dangers from outside the church. Both of these dangers demand God's people remain alert, strong in faith, and constant in prayer.

Local churches are in danger from outside pressures. Jesus said that we should not be surprised when we are hated (see John 15:18-25). While there have been times of peace for local churches (see Acts 9:31), persecution has been something which has been endured by local churches from the very beginning. This persecution comes in many different forms. It may come from the ruling authorities. It may also come from the followers of another religion. The New Testament letters provide great comfort to believers in these situations (see, for instance, 1-2 Thessalonians, Hebrews, and 1 Peter). There are many words in these letters intended to strengthen Christians who are facing persecution from the outside (see also Revelation 2:8-10 and 3:7-13). It is clear that persecution from the outside can bring great harm to local churches. However, by God's grace, persecution also serves to strengthen the people within the churches. The New Testament letters remind local churches today to remain faithful even when facing these outside pressures. Often, local churches can do nothing in regard to their struggle with outside pressure except pray. God may, in answer to the prayers, grant relief from the outside pressures. But while the pressures from outside of the church are very real and are very dangerous, the majority of the words in the New Testament letters are not related to dangers from outside of the church. Rather, most of the words in the letters relate to dangers arising from within the church. Local churches are in constant danger from inward pressures.

The letters demonstrate that local churches must take sin within the church very seriously (see, for instance, 1 Corinthians). Sexual sin, worldliness, anger, wrath, and gossip are all deadly enemies attacking every local church. Far too often, local churches are not willing to face these "enemies" that arise from within. Sin is allowed to flourish. The letters demonstrate that the church must not give in to these enemies. Instead, it is to struggle against sin. This means individuals in the church are to actively fight against their own sin (see Colossians 3:5-11). We must actively fight sin by confessing our sin to others (see James 5:16) and to the Lord (see 1 John 1:9). Beyond this, people in the church must be willing to speak to others in the church when they sin (see Matthew 18:15-20). The church is not to focus on judging those outside the church. Instead, it is to focus on judging those inside the church (see 1 Corinthians 5:12-13). Churches where sin is tolerated cannot stand.

False teaching is another danger attacking local churches from within. As with other forms of sin, far too often local churches are not willing to face this enemy and it ends up destroying the church. People sometimes believe that confronting false teaching will bring trouble to the church. But that is not the case. Instead, the New Testament letters provide strong evidence that ignoring false teaching will destroy a local church. This was happening to the church in Galatia and the church in Colossae. The fact that both churches were tolerating false teaching was the occasion which prompted Paul to write his letter to the Galatians and his letter to the Colossians. Paul also wrote 1 Timothy, in part, because of false teaching in the church in Ephesus. The letters tell local churches today that they must deal with the problems that arise from within the church. The letters tell the churches the things they must do in order to be healthy.

Facing all of these dangers requires God's people to be brave. And it especially requires leaders of local churches to be brave (see Acts 20:17-38). This doesn't mean leaders are never afraid. It means leaders put their trust in God's word and in his good Spirit. They are willing to endure trouble because their eyes are on their Lord. They are willing, like good shepherds, to lay down their lives for their people.

13. The letters prove that local churches are directly responsible for their own actions and beliefs.

When an occasion has happened in the church, the leaders need to look into the New Testament letters to find out what they should do. Churches have needed to do this from the time of the first century until today. They will need to do this until Jesus returns. Imagine, for instance, the church in Corinth in the first century immediately after they have read the first letter the apostle Paul has sent to them (1 Corinthians). How would they react to the letter? In 1 Corinthians, Paul tells the church that he knows about certain things that have been happening within the church. He tells them, for instance, that he knows about their acceptance of the church member who is committing sexual sin with his father's wife (see 1 Corinthians 5:1-2)! In his letter, Paul tells them he is astonished by the things happening in the church. Paul sternly rebukes the church for the things they are allowing to take place. Paul then tells them what they must do (see 1 Corinthians 5:3-13). The leaders needed to decide if they would receive the things written in the letter and do the things Paul was telling them to do, or if they would reject the things written in the letter and disobey Paul's words in the letter.

In regard to the church member who has been committing sexual sin, Paul has told the church that they must exercise church discipline. In other words, the church must no longer treat this man as if he is a believer in good standing with the Lord and with his church. The church needed to tell this man he was no longer welcome to take the Lord's Supper with the church and to officially remove this man from membership in the church (see, again, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13). It is important to know that the word membership is not used in this passage, but the idea of membership is present. The man is clearly a recognized part of the church. But Paul is telling the leaders and the church that they must remove him from the church. To put this in modern terms, this man was to be excommunicated.

In verses 1-13, Paul was telling the church to do a very difficult thing. Instead of treating this man just like the other saints in the church, Paul was telling the leaders to treat this man as if he was in active rebellion against God. This would have meant that this man was no longer welcome to take communion (the Lord's Supper) with the other saints in the church. It would have also meant that all of the saints in the church would agree to treat him as if he were in

rebellion against God. They would no longer have casual fellowship with this man until he repented from his sin. He would have been removed from membership in the church. Paul's words may sound unloving. However, Paul's goal was very loving. His goal was that this man "may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 5:5).

But Paul did not physically come to the church and make the church obey his words. Instead, he told the church what they were supposed to do. The church needed to decide if they would obey Paul's words or if they would disobey Paul's words. Paul had completed the task given to him by the Lord. He had faithfully delivered God's word to the church. But would the leaders in Corinth complete the task they have been given by the Lord? Would they lead God's people to obey God's words? Or would they allow sin to remain among themselves? Even though the apostles were especially gifted by Jesus to bring help to local churches, Jesus did not give the apostles the authority to physically force local churches to obey. In his wisdom, God left the final decisions regarding the beliefs and the actions of the local church to the local churches themselves. Even though the New Testament letters are filled with commands from the apostles telling the churches what they must do, the apostles did not use force. The local churches needed to hear God's word and to make changes themselves.

The New Testament letters demonstrate that local churches in the first century were, in this way, independent. They were responsible before God for the things which had been put under their control. The apostles encouraged and pleaded with the churches, but the local leaders and the local people were responsible for the things that took place within the church.

This is still true today. God's word has been faithfully delivered to local churches. Through the New Testament letters, the apostles are still pleading with local churches to obey God. But the final decisions rest in the hands of the local churches themselves. What will the leaders say? What will the people do? Will they obey? Will they listen to the teaching of the apostles?

The fact that real responsibility rests in the local church demonstrates the importance of godly leaders in the church. Local churches must appoint godly elders who are not afraid but who boldly lead the people in obedience to God's words (see 1 Timothy 3:1-7). This is why Paul tells

the elders in Ephesus to "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Leaders will be tempted to ignore God's word. They will be tempted to be passive. They must reject this sort of weakness and, instead, urge God's people to obey what has been written.

This focus on the importance of current leaders within the church also demonstrates the importance of raising up the new leaders. Local churches always need to be thinking about the future of the church. The New Testament letters clearly demonstrate that local churches are responsible for their beliefs and their actions. Every local church, no matter how small it might be, must read God's words with the understanding that they will be judged based on their obedience to that word.

14. The New Testament letters include facts and commands.

The way the New Testament letters are organized is, in ways, similar to the conversation a mother might have with her child on a rainy day. If the child wanted to go outside of the house, the mother would first say, "It is raining outside." This is not a command. The mother has not told her child what to do. She has merely told her child a fact: "It is raining outside." The mother didn't tell her child this fact about the weather to give her child useless information. Rather, she told her this fact for a reason. The mother is interested in her child's welfare and she doesn't want her child to get wet and cold! The child needs to know that it is raining. But that is not all she needs. The mother knows the child needs additional help from her. That is why the mother would add a command to this fact. She would say something like, "Use an umbrella." The fact ("It is raining outside") lets the child know why the command ("Use an umbrella") was given and why it must be obeyed.

In her first sentence, the mother used an indicative verb. An indicative verb is a verb that indicates the reality about something. The mother said, "It **is** raining outside" (the verb in this sentence is bold). The indicative verb "is" was used here because it allowed the mother to indicate that it was raining. That was the mother's goal in the first sentence. She wanted to tell

her child a fact about the weather. The indicative verb "is" allowed her to accomplish that goal. The indicative verb drew her child's attention to a very important fact: "It is raining outside."

But the mother had a different goal for her second sentence. That is why she used a different type of verb in her second sentence. In this second sentence, she no longer wanted to indicate the reality about something. Instead, she wanted to tell her child what to do. That is why she used an imperative verb. Imperative verbs are used when we want to tell people something they must do. Imperative verbs are used because they draw attention to actions that are imperative. Imperative actions are actions that must be done. The mother said, "**Use** an umbrella" (the verb is bold). The mother chose to use an imperative verb here ("Use"), because she wanted to command her child to do something. She wasn't asking her child to take an umbrella. She was saying something like, "You must use an umbrella. I am not giving you a choice. I am not asking for your advice. You must do what I say."

The two simple sentences used by the mother are a lot like the New Testament letters. After an initial greeting ("Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus"), the author will move on to the main body of the letter itself. In the main body of the letter, the reader will find facts and commands. Usually, the facts come first. Then, after having established those facts, the author begins using commands. Both are necessary. Christianity is not a religion of facts alone. We have also been commanded to do certain things. Christianity is not a religion of commands alone. These commands are based on certain truths.

Look at the mother's words again: "It is raining outside. Use an umbrella." The woman's words to her child were almost perfectly divided in half. Half of her words were related to facts. That is why an indicative was used in this first half. Half of her words were related to commands. That is why an imperative verb was used in this second half.

Sometimes, as with Ephesians, the letters can also be divided in half! The first half of the letter is filled with facts about our faith. This may be seen, for instance, in Ephesians 1-3. There is not a single command in Ephesians 1-3. But there are many indicative verbs in these three chapters. This is appropriate, because Paul is indicating realities of our faith. But the second half of

Ephesians is filled with commands telling the believer what to do (see Ephesians 4-6). This is appropriate, because Paul is commanding the believers to take action based on the things he said in the first three chapters.

Several of the letters are just like Ephesians. Galatians and 1 Thessalonians, for instance, are similar to Ephesians. There are very few commands in the first part of the letter and many commands at the end of the letter. In the book of Hebrews, the number of commands dramatically increases at the end of the book. The same is true in the last part of Romans. With the exception of portions of Romans 5-8, there are very few commands in Romans 1-10. But there are many, many commands in Romans 11-16.

Of course, some of the letters are not as neatly divided as Ephesians or 1 Thessalonians. However, both elements may be found in all the letters. The letters include facts (using indicative verbs) and they include commands (using imperative verbs). These are connected. The facts almost always come first. After the facts have been established, the author gives a command based on those facts.

How does the reader know when the writer is moving from facts to commands? Fortunately, there are certain words the authors use to show the connection between the facts and the commands. These "connecting words" are similar to a bridge connecting two pieces of land. For instance, 1 Peter 1:1-12 contains no commands. In these first verses, Peter is telling his readers facts about the gospel. But after verse 12, Peter is ready to tell his reader what they must do. Peter helps his readers see that he is changing from facts to commands by using the word "Therefore." "Therefore" is the "bridge" connecting the indicative section (verses 1-12) with an imperative section (which starts at verse 13):

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:13

Peter's command in verse 13 ("set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ") is based on the facts he established in verses 1-12.

Paul does the same thing in Ephesians. Remember, Ephesians 1-3 contains no commands. In these first three chapters, Paul is telling his readers facts about the gospel. In Ephesians 4:1, Paul finally gives his readers a signal that he is moving from facts to commands by using the word "therefore." This word lets the reader know that the facts in Ephesians 1-3 are connected with the commands in Ephesians 4-6. "Therefore" is the bridge connecting these two different parts of the letter.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:1-3

Knowing how the letters are organized allows the preacher to follow the author more closely. The preacher is able to see the arguments which the author is building. And the preacher is able to more effectively preach from the letters. The wise preacher, in every sermon, will use facts about the gospel and commands based upon the gospel. The preacher must not just give commands. And the preacher must not just give facts. Both are necessary.

Based on the large number of commands in the New Testament letters, it is clear Christians need commands. If we did not need them, the letters would not include them. But why do God's new creations, people who have been filled with the Holy Spirit, need commands? Here are a few reasons:

1. We need commands from God's word because they are one of the ways God has chosen to help his people in this present age. The commands are a "means of grace." In other words, the commands are a way God brings his grace to his people. He can bring grace to his people using any method he wants to use. Commands are one of God's chosen methods to bring help to his people so they might do the things that please him. If we resist his commands, we need to know that we are choosing to resist his grace.

2. We need commands because God's people do not, in this age, perfectly know what to do. We need a sure guide so that we know what to do. The commands guide God's people into the right path (see Psalm 119).

3. Commands are necessary because we still sin. We can be self-deceived (see 1 John 1:8). But God's word is perfect. The commands help God's people know what is sinful and they serve as a gracious gift intended to keep God's people from sin.

4. We need commands because obedience to God's commandments demonstrates that we love Jesus (see John 14:15, 21, 23).

5. We need commands because disobedience to God's commands serves as evidence that a person does not love Jesus (see John 14:24). Thus, local churches are able to know if a person loves Jesus based on that person's actions (see Matthew 7:15-20 and 12:33).

6. We need commands because obedience to the commands by the believer demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit living within that person (see John 14:16- 17 and Ezekiel 36:27).

7. We need commands because they demonstrate that God has succeeded in creating a new kind of people who delight in keeping his words. Jesus's life, death, and resurrection has resulted in a new creation coming. This new creation is not like the rest of the world (see Romans 3:9-18). Instead, God's new creation people love his word and are grieved when they do not obey his commands. Christians delight to see God's commands and desire to obey them, even when it is difficult to obey them.

8. We need commands because they serve as evidence that we are still waiting for Jesus's second coming. The commands create a hunger in us for the day when we will no longer need commands. Commands are evidence that we are still living in the time between Christ's victory at the cross and the time of his second coming. We are already new creations, but we still happen to sin. We are waiting for the fulfillment of all of God's promises—a time when we will never sin again. Thus, the commands serve as evidence that we already have salvation, but we have not

yet received the fullness of it. When the Lord Jesus returns and God's people are living in the new heavens and the new earth, commands will no longer be needed. However, in this present age, we need commands.

Commands are a gift from God! They are absolutely necessary. They are a beautiful part of God's good word. They are not primary. They do not save God's people. But they do serve as proof that God's people are saved.

15. The New Testament letters teach local churches what to believe.

What are the central teachings of the Christian faith? What are the things which all Christians must believe? What are the teachings every church must embrace? Where do we find these teachings? While these things are found in every book of the Scriptures, and they are certainly summarized in creeds like the Apostle's Creed, most of all, these central teachings of the Christian faith are summarized in the New Testament letters. That is one of the reasons why the letters are so important. They are intended to build the local church's theology. This means the letters are intended to help local churches grow in their understanding of the true God and of true faith in him.

The result of knowing and believing the truths about God and the salvation he has given in Christ should be joyful worship by his people. It should also result in joyful obedience to his commands.

The New Testament letters carefully present and explain many facts about God and the salvation he has given to people which is based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The authors of the letters use all three sections of the Old Testament as they present these facts. The authors of the letters do not quote from Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts because these five books were not completed when the letters were being written. However, the authors of the letters did not need the completed Gospels and Acts. James, Peter, John, and Jude were eyewitnesses of the events recorded in the gospels and Acts. The apostle Paul was not an eyewitness of the events recorded in the gospels. However, the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul (see 1 Corinthians 15:3-11).

He saw the living Christ with his own eyes! Beyond this, Paul spent time with the apostles and with Jesus's brother James. That is why the writers of the New Testament letters did not need the gospels and Acts. They were, again, eyewitnesses of the events contained in those books. Therefore, the authors of the New Testament letters write with the authority of eyewitnesses.

As was already mentioned, in addition to teaching many facts, the New Testament letters also include many commands which the man or woman of God must obey. It is important for the believer to keep these two things (facts and commands) in their proper places. The facts about God and the work of Jesus are primary. The commands are secondary. This does not mean the commands are unimportant. It means, rather, that commands logically follow after the facts. God's grace is not based on our actions. Our actions are based on his grace. We obey because God has saved us and changed us.

The following verses demonstrate the proper order of facts and commands. Notice, the first part of these three verses speak about what God has done and how he has done it. The second part speaks about what we are to do. The order of these things should not be changed.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. Ephesians 2:8-10

As these verses make clear, God's actions are primary. Obeying God's commands does not "create" a person's relationship with God. People cannot earn God's grace. God's love cannot be purchased by doing good works. The Christian faith is not based on actions we do in order to become pleasing to God. Rather, the Christian faith is based on things which God has done. That is why, for the most part, the facts are presented first in the letters. They have a primary place in the Christian faith. The commands logically follow after the facts.

Because of the primary importance of facts, the preacher or teacher needs to carefully study the parts of the letters that teach facts about God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, the

church, the world, and the life of the believer. This demands hard work from the preacher or teacher. These sections (like Ephesians 1-3) are often more difficult to understand than the parts of the letters which include commands (like Ephesians 4-6). It may seem easier to "skip" these sections and to focus on the easier-to-understand parts of the Bible. However, the preacher or teacher must not do this. We must carefully study, understand, and then proclaim the parts of the letters that teach us the glorious facts about God and the salvation he has given us in Christ. We must work hard to understand the truths about the church and the truths about the world. The Holy Spirit will give us help. We must not be lazy in our approach to Scripture. If we are lazy in this area, it will result in weakness in the church.

Focusing on the facts in the letters means the leader must learn to slowly read and study the letters. Every word and phrase should be carefully considered. When the author quotes a passage from the Old Testament, the preacher or teacher should turn to that passage and read it, trying to understand why the author quoted that particular passage.

In the same way that a brick wall is built one brick at a time, the authors of the letters are building the theology of the reader one truth at a time (see 1 Corinthians 3:10-15). If we try to read the letters and study the letters too fast, we will not see the individual "bricks" (truths) which are being laid by the authors. For instance, carefully read the following two verses from Ephesians 1:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. Ephesians 1:3-4

Notice there are no commands in these two verses. These verses are from a section in Paul's letter to the Ephesians in which he is focused on teaching facts. Commands will be given later which are based on these facts. For now, however, Paul wants his readers to know certain truths about God. Again, the apostle Paul does not tell his readers to do anything in these verses. Instead he wants his readers to know and to believe certain things.

What are the truths Paul proclaims in these verses? There are at least five truths here:

1. God the Father is blessed.
2. God the Father is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."
3. God the Father has "blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."
4. God the Father "chose us in him before the foundation of the world."
5. God the Father chose us in him so that "we should be holy and blameless before him."

These five "facts" are absolutely stunning! None of these facts are based on our actions. They are truths about God and his character, truths about our Lord Jesus Christ, truths about actions God took before the creation of the world, and truths about God's purposes for his people. Each of these five facts could have entire sermons preached about their meaning!

Why did God move Paul to write these five things in this letter? That's what the preacher or teacher needs to think about! These things should be meditated upon! Like a person eating the most expensive and most delicious meal which has ever been served, these things should be "savored" and "celebrated," not just quickly "swallowed" and "forgotten."

These five things are meant to lead God's people to think about God's beauty and greatness. These things are intended to teach us about God's great wisdom, his overwhelming generosity, the faithfulness of Jesus, the greatness of God's plan which existed even before the world was created, and his great purposes for people. This should lead us to praise God.

Let us consider just one of these facts. Paul speaks about the fact that God "chose us in him before the foundation of the world"? People would have no way of knowing this amazing fact if it were not revealed to us by God! We may think that we chose God. This is, of course, true. If we are Christians, we have chosen to follow him. However, we did not choose him first. Here, Paul tells us that something preceded our choice to follow God. God chose us before we chose him. When did he do this?

Here, we learn that God chose us before the world existed. This means before you were born and before you had done anything worthy of being chosen, God decided to save you. God chose you to be a recipient of his forgiveness, love, life, and power so that, upon receipt of these gifts, you might be "holy and blameless before him." That is just one of these truths! Much more could be said about this truth and the others in these two verses. But this short look at this one truth in these two verses demonstrates that they must be studied! The New Testament letters are filled with incredible truths about our great God!

Notice, again, there are no commands in these two verses. Paul is not telling believers what they are to do. Instead, he is telling them who God is and what God has done. Paul is teaching the church what is true and what they are to believe. He is teaching them theology.

God's people will not be strong if they never hear about who God is and what he has done. If they only hear commands, they will not know why they have been given those commands. If they only hear commands, they will begin to think they are earning God's favor by doing good works. If they only hear commands, they will not know about God's glorious character. This will hinder worship of him. Leaders, we must, like a person building a strong wall, build the theology of the people. For this to happen, we must study the facts of our faith.

Colossians

Col. 1:1 Paul, an apostle[1] of Christ Jesus[2] by the will of God,[3] and Timothy our brother,[4]

Col. 1:2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:[5]

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[1] Paul begins most of his letters by describing himself as an apostle (see Rom 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1). This title means he has been commissioned by Jesus and sent by Jesus to represent Jesus's concerns to a specific group of people. The title apostle serves to remind the people receiving the letter of the authority Paul carries from God. Even when a letter lacks the title (as in Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon), Paul's words still carry apostolic weight. They must be obeyed. To disobey Paul is to disobey Jesus. For more information about Paul's calling as an apostle see Acts 9; 1 Cor. 15:5–11; 2 Cor. 12:11–12; Gal. 1:15–2:10. Pastors, elders, and church leaders must emphasize the importance of receiving these words as apostolic in nature. They cannot safely be ignored. They must be obeyed.

[2] "Christ Jesus" combines Jesus's title (Christ) with Jesus's personal name (Jesus). This combination demonstrates people may know, with certainty, the identity of God's anointed king. The Old Testament Scriptures announce the coming of "the Christ" (this title is first used to announce the coming of the Christ in 1 Sam. 2:10—see also Psa. 2:2; 20:6), and the people of God were eagerly waiting for his coming and knew many details about him (see, for example, Mic. 5:2), but the saints in that time period did not yet know his personal name or the time when he would be born (see 1 Pet. 1:10–12). The word Christ is based on the Greek. It means anointed. The word Messiah is based on the Hebrew. It also means anointed. New Testament authors most often use Christ because the New Testament was written in Greek. When Paul wants to convince a group of people about Jesus, he argues that Jesus is the Christ (see, for example, Acts 9:22; 17:3; 18:5, 28). When he does this, he is trying to connect the title (the Christ) to a specific person (Jesus of Nazareth). He does not need to do this with the Colossians. They already believe that Jesus is the Christ—God's anointed king.

[3] Paul wants his readers to know he did not give himself the title of apostle. God wanted him to be an apostle. To resist Paul, therefore, is to resist God.

[4] Paul includes Timothy's name in the introduction of the following letters: 2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1 (with Silas); 2 Thess 1:1 (with Silas); Phlm. 1. For more information about Timothy's call, see Acts 16:1–5.

Even though the title indicates the letter is from Paul and Timothy, Colossians features Paul's words (for instance, notice the first-person singular pronouns **I** and **me** appearing in Col. 1:24–29). However, Paul wants the Colossians to know that he isn't the only one concerned for them. Timothy was in full agreement with the entire letter. In addition, Paul wants his readers to know other people were with him when the letter was composed (see Col. 4:7–14). Paul uses second-person plural pronouns (like **we**) when he describes how he and the people with him pray for the church in Colossae. For instance, Col. 1:3 reads: "**We** always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when **we** pray for you, since **we** heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints." See also Paul's description of Epaphras's prayers for the church in Col. 4:12.

[5] The English translation of the words in this verse can make it appear Paul is writing to two separate groups. This is not the case. Paul describes one group in this verse. The NLT captures the sense of the Greek well: "to God's holy people in the city of Colosse, who are faithful brothers and sisters in Christ." Even at this early point in the letter, we are getting a hint regarding the **occasion** prompting this letter. People had come into the church and had persuaded the saints that they needed to add certain religious rituals in order to be holy. Paul wants the saints to know that they are already holy and faithful. The saints may be described in this way because of the work of Jesus and their faith in Jesus's work.

Colossae was located on the Lycos River, 125 southeast of Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia (modern day Turkey). The region was known as Phrygia. The towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis were located near Colossae (see Col. 2:1; 4:13, 16). Paul wanted the letter to the church in Colossae read in Laodicea. He also wanted the church in Colossae to read the letter he had sent to Laodicea (see Col. 4:16). Based on Col. 2:1, it appears Paul had never been to Colossae or Laodicea.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.[6]

Col. 1:3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, [4] since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,[7] [5] because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth,[8] the gospel, [6] which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing[9]—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, [7] just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant.[10] He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf [8] and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Col. 1:9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, [10] so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;[11] [11] being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; [12] giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. [13] He has delivered us from the

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[6] The KJV includes "and our Lord Jesus Christ" at the conclusion of this verse. Modern translations (e.g., CSB, ESV, NIV, NLT) do not include these words. This does not mean modern translations are trying to remove Jesus from the Bible. The words are missing from modern translations because these words did not appear in the earliest Greek manuscripts of Colossians and were likely added to later manuscripts to bring them into conformity with Paul's other letter which do feature these words (see, for instance, Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Titus 1:4; Phlm. 1:3). 1 Thessalonians 1:1 includes both "the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," but these names do not appear after "Grace to you and peace."

[7] Paul provides two reasons he and his team thank God for the Colossian Christians: (1) their faith in Christ, (2) their love for "all the saints." We see here the two greatest commandments lived out by the Colossian Christians: (1) They love God (displayed by their faith in Christ), and (2) they love their neighbors (displayed by their love for their fellow believers). See Mark 12:28–31.

[8] See Psa. 119:43, for Paul likely draws the words "the word of truth" from that passage. There, the psalmist calls the "rules" of Yahweh "the word of truth." Here, Paul uses the same words to describe the gospel. The word of truth we read about in Psalm 119 is made known to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ! See also Eph. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:15; Jms. 1:18.

[9] The words "the whole world," "bearing fruit," and "increasing" in 1:6 are likely intended to remind the reader of God's words in Gen. 1:28: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be **fruitful** and **multiply** and **fill the earth** and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" Paul wants his readers to make a connection between God's words to people in Genesis 1 about bringing his image throughout the earth, and the fruitfulness of the gospel. Because of the death, burial, resurrection, and reign of Christ, God's mandate to humans is finally being fulfilled! God's image is being spread throughout the entire earth! Paul also refers to the Colossian Christians **bearing fruit** and **increasing** in 1:10. He refers to themes from Genesis 1 throughout the first chapter (e.g., "the domain of darkness" in 1:13; "he is the image of the invisible God" in 1:15; "the firstborn of creation" in 1:15).

[10] Epaphras was from Colossae (see Col. 4:12–13). According to Paul, he constantly "struggled in prayer" for the saints in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. In Philemon 23, Paul describes Epaphras as "a fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus." Epaphras possibly became a Christian while Paul was in Ephesus—the leading city in Colossae's home province. Acts 19–20 describe Paul's work in Ephesus. Epaphras, therefore, possibly heard and accepted the gospel during the time described in Acts.

[11] Paul and his friends want to see the Colossian Christians "bearing good fruit" and "increasing." See the note connected to 1:6.

domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, [14] in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Col. 1:15[12] He[13] is[14] the image of the invisible God,[15] the firstborn[16] of[17] all[18] creation.[19] [16] For[20] by[21] him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or

[12] **Two features** related to the structure of verses 15–20 demand comment before considering the actual content of these verses. **One,** many scholars argue Paul bases the words in verses 15–20 on a hymn. While this conclusion about the source of these words is possibly correct, no evidence has been found to prove this was a hymn. Moreover, no one knows which churches in the first century, if any, used this hymn. If these words were a hymn, Paul adapted the words to his argument in Colossians because these words perfectly correspond with the argument he wanted to make at this point in the letter. **Two,** these six verses may be broken into two parts. (1) Verses 15–18a focus on the "beloved Son's" position in relation to all creation. The first section concludes with three statements all beginning with the word "and" ("and he is before all things," "and in him all things hold together," "and he is the head of the body, the church." This reference to the church serves as a link between the first part and the second part. (2) Verses 18b–20 focus on the "beloved Son's" position in relation to the new creation. Both parts include introductory statements (v. 15 and v. 18b) beginning with the relative pronoun "who" (this is not evident in the English), and explanatory statements (vv. 16–18a and vv. 19–20). The church in Colossae (and all believers from that time forward) needed to carefully consider the Son's relationship with both spheres (i.e., all creation and the new creation).

[13] The ESV begins a new sentence here (see also CSB, NIV, NLT). The pronoun the ESV uses to begin this sentence—"He"—refers back to the "beloved Son" in the second half of verse 1:13. Verses 15–20, therefore, provide the reader with more information about God's "beloved Son." In the Greek, the connection between verses 15–20 to verses 13b–14 is even clearer. In the Greek, verse 15 begins with the relative pronoun "who," rather than with the definite pronoun "he" (as in the ESV). Using this type of pronoun forces the reader to make the connection between this verse and the verses immediately above it. Again, verses 15–20 all focus on the "beloved Son's" position in relation to all creation and to the church.

[14] The present tense verb form used in the Greek presents Christ's role as "the image of the invisible God" and "the firstborn of all creation" from the inside. It is as if we are considering him while he is at work. We see these as ongoing roles Christ fills. He is **presently** the image of the invisible God, and he is **presently** the firstborn of all creation.

[15] Paul has already alluded to Gen. 1:26–28 in 1:6 and 10. Those verses in Genesis draw attention to God's image. "Man" was originally made in the image of God. He was commanded to be fruitful and multiply. In 1:15, we learn that "the beloved Son" is the image of the invisible God. However, this verse indicates the beloved Son was already the image of God even before the creation of the world! When he became man, he also perfectly imaged God. Thus, as God and as man, the beloved Son perfectly reflected—and still reflects—the image of God! See also John 1:18; 14:9; 2 Cor. 4:4, 6; Heb. 1:3. According to Rom. 8:29, Christians are predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son. Thus, we bear the image of God only as we bear the image of the Son.

[16] The word firstborn can mean someone who is born first. It can also mean someone who has been assigned the position of the firstborn. The "beloved Son" was not created, therefore the word "firstborn," in this particular context, does not point to him as the first created being. In this context, "firstborn" means that the beloved Son holds the position of the firstborn. The word bears this same meaning tied to rank in Psa. 89:27.

[17] The words "firstborn **of** all creation," while possible, may lead people to think of the Son's position as the firstborn within creation. However, the following verse speaks of the Son creating all things. Therefore, the Greek preposition translated "of" in the ESV should probably be translated as "over" in this instance. NIV captures the sense of the Greek with precision: "the firstborn **over** all creation" (see also CSB).

[18] These six verses repeatedly emphasize Christ's position in relation to **all other things**: "firstborn of **all** creation" (v. 15), "by him **all** things were created" (v. 16), "**all** things were created through him and for him" (v. 16), "he is before **all** things" (v. 17), "in him **all** things hold together" (v. 17), "in **everything** he might be preeminent" (v. 18), "in him **all** the fullness of God was pleased to dwell" (v. 19), "through him to reconcile to himself **all** things" (v. 20).

dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.[22] [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.[23] [18] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning,[24] the firstborn from the dead,[25] that in everything he might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,[26] [20] and through him to

[19] The beloved Son "is the image of the invisible God," **and** he is "the firstborn of all creation." These statements in v. 15 are true when considered separately. However, Paul did not choose to use a conjunction like "**and**" to join these two statements. Instead, he placed these truths next to each other using no conjunction at all (this lack of a conjunction in a text is called asyndeton), forcing the reader to consider the nature of their relationship based on the context alone. The order of the statements may provide some help to us as we consider how these statements fit together. Paul clearly wants his readers to see the Son as the image of God, therefore this statement appears first. This fact was true even before there was a creation. As the image of God, the beloved Son necessarily holds the place of preeminence over all creation. As the image of God, he cannot be anything other than firstborn over all creation. Paul has moved from a general statement describing the Son's relationship to the Father in regard to everything ("He is the image of the invisible God"), to a very precise statement describing the Son's relationship to those which have been created ("the firstborn of all creation"). The second statement necessarily follows the first. To say this another way, since the beloved Son is the image of God, he must be preeminent over all creation as the firstborn. Regarding Christ being the firstborn, see also Rev. 3:14.

[20] This conjunction (translated "for" in ESV) introduces the "ground" for the massive statement about the beloved Son in 1:15. How do we know the beloved Son is the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation? We know these truths because of the truths outlined in v. 16.

[21] The Greek preposition translated by the English preposition "by" in v. 16 ("For **by** him all things were created" - ESV) could possibly also be translated, as is reflected in the NIV, by the preposition "in" ("For **in** him all things were created" - NIV). The word "in" may, perhaps, be a better choice in this particular context, because (1) it is often an appropriate choice for this Greek preposition, and (2) this Greek preposition is especially associated with the creation of all things in the first verse of Genesis ("**In** the beginning"), and Paul deliberately uses language from the first chapter of Genesis throughout these verses. The Greek translation of Gen. 1:1 (this translation is called the LXX or Septuagint) begins with this same preposition when it describes God creating all things: "**In** the beginning God made the sky and the earth" (NETS). Colossians 1:16 may deliberately echo that verse in Genesis. If Paul intends to echo Gen. 1:1 here, he wants his readers to, in a sense, reread Gen. 1:1, but to replace the words "the beginning" with the words "the Son." Rather than reading, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," Paul emphasizes "In the Son, God created the heavens and the earth." Paul's words in v. 18 strengthen this argument, for Paul describes the Son as the "beginning," using the same Greek word as is used in Gen. 1:1. In the same way John reuses Genesis 1 when he writes John 1, Paul reuses Genesis 1 here.

[22] Christ's position in relation to other "rulers and authorities" must be known. All people need to know Christ's position in order to properly relate to him. No power or authority exists over him. He created them, and he created them for himself. See 1 Cor. 8:5–6; Eph. 3:10; 6:12.

[23] The beloved Son creates and he maintains. See Heb. 1:2–3.

[24] See Gen. 1:1. Paul appears to point to Christ as "the beginning" in which all things were created.

[25] See Rev. 1:5.

[26] Many scholars have noted an important connection exists between Col. 1:19 and Psa. 68:16. In the psalm, the author David uses figurative language to speak about **God's desire** to dwell **in his temple** forever. Paul uses similar language in Col. 1:19 when he speaks about God's fullness being pleased to dwell in Christ. The connection between the psalm and Col. 1:19 is especially clear in the LXX (Greek translation) of this psalm (see Psa. 67:16–17 LXX). Paul wants his readers to see Christ as a temple. Further evidence Paul was thinking about this particular psalm when he wrote Colossians may be found in his letter to the Ephesians. Paul quotes from this same psalm in Eph. 4:8 (see Psa. 68:19). Paul wrote Ephesians at the same time as Colossians, and the two letters feature many

reconcile[27] to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.[28]

connections. The quotation in Ephesians demonstrates, at the very least, the psalm was in his mind at the time when the letter to the Colossian church was written.

[27] The verb translated "to reconcile" introduces a new detail of utmost significance into this hymn. Up to this point in the hymn, no details were given pointing to a rupture existing between God and people. This verb proves a rupture did exist. The verb translated "to reconcile" here also appears in v. 22. The same verb is used in Eph. 2:16 (the fact that only Ephesians and Colossians use this verb demonstrates the close connection between these books). A related verb appears one time in Rom. 5:10 and three times in 2 Cor. 5:18–20.

[28] The second section of this (possibly) ancient hymn focuses on the new creation. This verse does not teach universal salvation. Rather, it emphasizes that Christ's death on the cross relates to everything in the new creation being released from bondage to decay. The perfection of all things in the new age depends upon the work of Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. See also Paul's words concerning the perfection coming to all things in the new creation in Rom. 8:18–25. See also Eph. 1:10.

Col. 1:21 And you,[29] who once[30] were alienated[31] and hostile in mind,[32] doing evil deeds,[33] 22 he has now[34] reconciled[35] in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you[36] holy and blameless[37] and above reproach before him,[38] 23 if indeed[39] you continue in the faith, stable and

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[29] The words "And you" connect the Colossian Christians to the words of the preceding hymn (1:15–20). The Colossians to whom Paul is writing had at one time, like everything else in creation, needed reconciliation (v. 20). In the rest of this verse, Paul considers the pre-Christ state of the Colossians.

[30] Three words in vv. 21–23 allow the reader to quickly break Paul's argument into smaller "chunks" for processing: "once" (v. 21), "now" (v. 22), and "if" (v. 23). The word "once" has a counterpart in verse 22—"now." These two words provide the reader with the basic outline for vv. 21–22. Paul wants the Colossians to think about their state or condition in two different time periods: **Once** you were all the things described in v. 21, but **now** you are all the things described in v. 22. The things in v. 22 are only true, however, **if** the readers meet the requirements described in v. 23.

[31] The word translated "alienated" in 1:21 is used three times in the NT (here, Eph. 2:12, and 4:18). In all three occurrences, Paul highlights the "state" in which the people to whom he is writing once existed.

[32] See Paul's two other uses of the word translated "mind" here in Eph. 2:3 and 4:18.

[33] The evil deeds the Colossian Christians had once practiced did not exist in isolation. They were, like a trailer attached to a truck, connected to alienation from God and hostility toward God. The CSB captures this connection well in its translation of 1:21: "Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds as expressed in your evil actions." Evil deeds are expressions of alienation and hostility. This heart condition expressed in evil actions was true with the Colossians. It is also true of all people.

[34] ESV does not include a conjunction (e.g., a word like "but," "and," or "yet") between verses 21 and 22. The Greek, however, does feature a small conjunction at the beginning of v. 22 (again, this is untranslated in the ESV). This particular Greek conjunction provides a signal to the reader that Paul's argument is developing in a new (yet still connected) direction at this point. CSB and NIV translate this conjunction by beginning v. 22 with the word "But." NLT translates this conjunction using the word "Yet." This particular Greek conjunction also helps the reader break Paul's long sentences into smaller parts.

[35] This verb also appears in v. 20. Again, Paul connects the hymn (vv. 15–20) to the lives of the Colossians. See also Rom. 5:10 and 2 Cor. 5:18–20. This verse presents Christ as the one who reconciles. See also Eph. 2:26.

[36] This verse does not present reconciliation as the goal. Reconciliation results in presentation. The Colossians were reconciled in order that they might be presented before Christ (see also Col 1:28). Many verses speak of our presentation before Christ. See 2 Cor. 4:14; 11:2; Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:28; 2 Tim. 2:15.

[37] See Eph. 1:4.

[38] Scholars note the language here is similar to language used in the OT when sacrifices were brought to the temple. They also note this language is similar to language used in a judicial setting. Both may be in mind here. We are presented before Christ as "living sacrifices" (see Rom. 12:1). Also, in a judicial act, Jesus will judge us as clean because of his work on the cross. This judicial judgment takes place only if the conditions in v. 23 are met.

[39] The word translated "indeed" is the English translation of a small two-letter particle in Greek. This particular Greek particle attaches to the previous word (which is why it is sometimes called an enclitic particle) in order to draw extra attention to that word. In other words, the little particle exists to shine a spotlight on the word preceding it. The word "indeed," therefore, draws the reader's attention to the word "if" in v. 23. The things outlined in vv. 21–22 will be true of the Colossians Christians only **if** they continue in the faith. The word "if" points to the "occasion" leading Paul to write this letter (remember, this is an **occasional document**). The Colossian Christians were turning from the true gospel to a different gospel. Paul does not explain, in this verse, what will happen to them if they do

steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard,[40] which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven,[41] and of which I, Paul, became[42] a minister.[43]

not continue in faith. Rather, he emphasizes that the promises of the gospel will only be true in their lives if they do continue. The promises will not be true for them, therefore, if they do not continue in the faith.

[40] Paul's definition of a Christian goes far beyond a one-time declaration of faith in Jesus Christ by a person. That declaration is important. Here, however, Paul emphasizes Christians must "continue in the faith, stable and steadfast." They must not turn from the true faith and embrace a different gospel. See also Jesus's parable of the soils in Mark 4:1–20. The seven letters to the seven churches in Revelation all feature promises reserved for those who conquer (see Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 25–29; 3:5–6, 12–13, 21–22).

[41] The gospel the Colossians had heard is the same gospel that has been proclaimed everywhere—in heaven and on earth! This statement again returns the emphasis to themes already focused on in the letter (e.g., 1:6). The emphasis on "all creation under heaven" again reminds the readers of major truths of the universality of Christ's influence and work focused on in the hymn (vv. 15–20). Paul wants his readers to know the gospel they received was not a localized gospel. Rather, the gospel which had been preached to them is the same gospel which has been proclaimed everywhere.

[42] In the ESV, Paul emphasizes his role two times in the space of just a few words. In the Greek, Paul emphasizes his role three times! A rather "wooden" translation of the Greek would read something like, "of which **I became**, **I**, **Paul**, a servant." Why would Paul, someone who repeatedly emphasizes the importance of humility, emphasize his role in relation to the gospel three different times in this verse? It seems likely he did this because the Christians in Colossae were listening to other people (1) who were preaching a different gospel than the one true gospel which had been proclaimed in all the earth, and (2) who did not have the same credentials as Paul. Paul needed to emphasize his standing as a servant of the true gospel. Perhaps, even more significantly, Paul was emphasizing his standing as "the" servant of the true gospel to the Gentiles. NLT emphasizes Paul's role with great clarity: "The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God's servant to proclaim it." This final statement in v. 23 serves as a transition to the next section in this letter. Paul builds further on his credentials in 1:24–2:5. He needs to do this because of the **occasion** in Colossae.

[43] The word translated "minister" should not be equated with a pastor or similar leader in a local church. Rather, this word means Paul was a "servant" of the gospel (see CSB, NIV, NLT; see also ESV's translation of the same word as "servant" in 1 Cor. 3:5). Paul emphasizes, three times, that **he** became a servant to this gospel. His connection to this particular gospel—the one gospel which is being proclaimed to all creation under heaven—explains why he felt compelled to write a letter to this church which was embracing a different gospel, a gospel emphasizing rules and regulations and visions and the worship of angels.

Col. 1:24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake,[44] and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions[45] for the sake of his body, that is, the church,[46] 25 of which I became a minister[47] according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you,[48] to make the word of God fully known, 26 the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.[49] 27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.[50] 28 Him we proclaim,[51] warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present

[44] Paul often speaks of his sufferings on behalf of the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 4:9–13; 2 Cor. 11:23–28; Eph. 3:13; Gal. 6:17; 2 Tim. 2:10). While vv. 24–29 possibly point to sufferings that Christians in general will face until the time of Christ's return, based on Paul's emphasis on his role as a servant of the gospel at the end of v. 23 (see also his emphasis on his role as a servant in v. 25), and on his words about himself in vv. 24–29, it appears he is especially thinking about a unique role he was playing in bringing the message of the mystery of God to the Gentiles. See Acts 9:15–16; Rom. 11:13–21. Luke's account of Paul's calling in Acts 9 closely connects with the first "Servant Song" in Isaiah (see Isa. 42:1–9).

[45] "What is lacking in Christ's afflictions" does not mean something is lacking in the suffering of Christ which was necessary to purchase eternal salvation for the people of God. That suffering is complete (e.g., John 19:30). Christ will never suffer for sin in that way again. In vv. 24–29, Paul speaks of additional suffering of Christ necessary to bring the gospel (and an understanding of the gospel) to the Gentiles. Paul repeatedly emphasizes his role in completing this task (see Rom. 12:3; 15:15; 1 Cor. 3:10; 2 Cor. 5:14–21; Gal. 1:11–24; 2:9; Eph. 3:1–13; Col. 4:3–4; 2 Tim 4:17).

[46] See Eph. 1:21–22.

[47] This same word is used in v. 23 (see also Eph. 3:7). This word can be translated "servant" (see CSB and NIV). While this word differs from the Greek word used in the translation of the word "servant" in the "Servant Songs" in Isaiah, it probably is intended to remind the reader of the servant in the Servant Songs and to connect Paul to those passages. In the "Servant Songs" Isaiah describes the "servant of Yahweh" who is raised up to reveal to God's people what they had not known previously (see Isa. 52:15, which is quoted in Rom. 15:21). Paul presents himself fulfilling this ministry with the Colossian Christians.

[48] See Eph. 3:2.

[49] Paul uses the word "mystery" here to describe something which was unknown, but which God wanted his people to know. Paul emphasizes this mystery in this letter (1:27; 2:2; 4:3). He also focuses on this "mystery" in many other places (e.g., Rom. 16:25–26; Eph. 3:1–13). A mystery of this sort cannot be learned by careful study. It is revealed by the Holy Spirit. The mystery Paul describes here is not intended to stay secret. Indeed, Paul was commissioned so that the Gentiles might know this mystery. Earlier generations of saints did not know this mystery in the same way Christians in Paul's day were able to know this mystery. See Eph. 3:9. Mystery is used in Dan. 2:18–19; 27–30. See also 1 Cor. 2:1: "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the **testimony** of God with lofty speech or wisdom" (ESV). The word "**testimony**" should probably be replaced with the word "**mystery**" here (as in CSB). Important Greek manuscripts feature either testimony or mystery. However, the textual evidence seems to suggest mystery is the original. This fits with the contents of 1 Cor. 2. Paul further defines this mystery ("the secret and hidden wisdom of God") in 1 Cor. 2:6–16.

[50] "Christ in you" is Paul's theme in this letter.

[51] This preaching of "him" (i.e., Jesus) is to Christians. Paul wants these Christians to know and walk with a full understanding of the mystery of God—Christ in you.

everyone mature in Christ.[52] 29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.[53]

Col. 2:1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,[54] 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.[55] 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.[56]

[52] Paul speaks as if he is preparing the people to be presented before Jesus for his approval. He wants Jesus to see all the Gentiles mature in Christ.

[53] Paul provides his readers one example of what "Christ in you" means in practical terms. Paul emphasizes his labors for the church's knowledge of God's mystery have not been done in his own strength. Rather, he labors relying upon Christ's energy working within him.

[54] The very last phrase in this verse (translated in the ESV as "and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ") is, in the Greek, presented as the ultimate purpose of this verse—knowing Christ! NIV captures this sense well: "My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ."

[55] This verse provides readers (both in Colossae and now) with one of the reasons the Holy Spirit inspired this letter (and other occasional documents) and why it is wise for Christians to immerse themselves in these writings. Paul writes these words to protect his readers from false arguments which sound "plausible" (translated "fine sounding" in NIV and "reasonable" in CSB). In other words, the arguments, at least for the spiritually immature, seem logical. These words of warning from Paul are grace from God. They protect the Christian from faith-destroying teachings.

[56] Based on the letter, it is clear Paul does not think the Colossian Christians are standing firm in their faith. He does not believe their beliefs and practices are in good order. However, he speaks this way because he believes they will receive the letter in faith and will make every change called for within the letter. The letter is one way God caused the Colossian Christians to stand firm in their faith.

Col. 2:6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord,[57] so walk in him,[58] 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.[59]

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[57] The emphasis here is not on the unique way his readers "received" Jesus as their Savior. For instance, a person reading this letter might say, "I **received** Jesus as my Savior when I was 23 years old." Paul is not focusing on the moment when one became a Christian or one's personal experience. Rather, Paul focuses on the **message of Christ** the Colossians received. Paul regularly uses the verb translated "received" here when he speaks about a **tradition** handed down to another person (see 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:1, 3; Gal. 1:9, 12; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:6). Paul often emphasizes the tradition a group of believers received (e.g., Gal. 3:1–5). He also emphasizes his role in delivering this tradition (see 1 Cor. 11:2, 23; 15:3), a tradition he received from Jesus Christ. In this letter, Paul contrasts the true tradition that Christians received with the "human tradition" the false teachers wanted the Colossians to receive (see 2:8). Paul warns the Colossians not to be taken captive (2:8) by those pushing a "human tradition."

For pastors, elders, church leaders, and parents: This verse emphasizes the importance of clearly presenting the true message (tradition) of Christ, and of making it clear that those who receive this message are accountable to hold on to the message they received. We must not present a watered-down version of the gospel in hopes that more people will "receive" it. This strategy will back-fire in the end.

[58] Verses six and seven depend upon each other. Verse six features the main verb controlling both of these verses—the command "walk." The Colossian Christians must "walk"—in other words, daily live their lives—"in Christ." Verse seven details how this daily "walking" takes place.

Regarding "walk" see Col. 1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 4:5. See also Paul's extensive use of "walk" in Ephesians (Eph. 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15). Paul uses this particular verb frequently in his writings. He uses this verb to emphasize one of two things: (1) how non-believers live their lives (and he emphasizes that believers used to live in this way, and (2) how believers must live their lives.

For pastors, elders, and church leaders: We must strongly resist the lie that our behavior does not matter. A person might say, "I accepted Jesus as my Savior when I was 18, therefore, I am safe." Paul, however, focuses on a person's "walk." How a person lives defines a person's identity.

[59] Again, verse seven details how the daily "walking" commanded in verse six takes place. This verse features four participles. Paul begins by using three **passive** participles (translated "rooted," "built up," and "established") to express the means by which the command is to be kept. We walk in accordance with the tradition we received about Christ when: (1) we have been **rooted** in Christ (like a plant planted in healthy soil, this is the ongoing "state" of all those who are true Christians), (2) we are being "built up in him" (like a building growing ever taller, Paul encourages the Colossian Christians to keep growing in their understanding of Christ), and (3) we are being "established in the faith" (like a wrestler in an athletic stance, prepared for the forces he will face). Notice, these are all things God does, not the believer. However, we, by our faith, actively participate in his work. The words "just as you were taught" emphasize that Paul isn't proclaiming anything new here. These three participles focus on the main things the Colossian Christians had heard from the very beginning!

The fourth participle isn't passive. It's very active! Paul speaks about the Christian "abounding in thanksgiving." The Christian's entire "walk" is to be marked by an active giving of thanks. If thanksgiving is not present in a Christian, it demonstrates that a person (1) does not understand the work Christ has done and is still doing in them, or (2) has forgotten what Christ has done and is still doing. This unthankful Christian is susceptible to teachings based on "human tradition" because he or she does not see the value in Christ's work and will be looking for something else to bring satisfaction.

For pastors, elders, and church leaders: The absence or presence of thanksgiving is, in some ways, like a blood pressure measurement. It provides an accurate measurement of the "state" of a Christian's walk.

Col. 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive[60] by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world,[61] and not according to Christ.[62] 9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,[63] 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.[64] 11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,[65] 12 having been buried with him[66] in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith

[60] The Christians in Colossae were in danger of being taken captive. This letter was a gracious gift from God through Paul intended to prevent that tragedy.

[61] The Greek words the ESV translates as "the elemental spirits of the world," at the very least, draw attention to the basic principles and suppositions behind the false teaching in Colossae (see also Col. 2:20 and Gal. 4:3, 9). These basic principles and suppositions enslave people and deny Christ. The differences in English translations in their translation of these words demonstrate questions exist regarding the full extent of Paul's meaning when he uses these words. For instance, the CSB does not use the word "spirits" in its translation of these words. Thus, the CSB emphasizes the worldly aspect of this teaching, without making any comment about spiritual forces behind this teaching: "Be careful that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit based on human tradition, based on the elements of the world, rather than Christ" (see also LSB). Other translations, like the ESV, NET, NIV, and NLT draw attention to more than just the anti-God *human* principles and suppositions behind this teaching. These translations understand Paul's words also point to the demonic forces fueling the false teaching (see Paul's words regarding very similar teachings in 1 Tim. 4:1–5). This connection of the teaching in Colossae to demons does not mean the teaching explicitly exalted demons. Rather, it means the teaching is satanic in its very nature. It denies the finished work of Christ, and celebrates the accomplishments of people rather than the glory of God and his work. The likelihood of this interpretation increases when we consider Paul's emphasis on demonic powers in the verses in close context. For instance, Paul speaks of Christ's position over "all rule and authority" in 2:10 and the disarming of "the rulers and authorities" in 2:15. An emphasis on the believer's battle against demonic powers also appears in Ephesians, the "sister" letter to Colossians (see Eph 3:10; 6:10–20).

For pastors, elders, and church leaders: Paul's words about the worldly and demonic nature of the Colossian heresy should not be dismissed lightly. These words should serve as a warning to believers today. Modern teachings confusing the church are no less worldly and demonic than the false teachings plaguing the churches in ancient Colossae, Ephesus, or Galatia. Satan desires to take every Christian captive (see 1 Pet. 5:8–9). He constantly seeks to take people captive by (1) minimizing the work of Christ, and (2) encouraging humans to rely on their own efforts. These teachings should be seen as demonic in nature (see 1 Tim. 4:1–5).

[62] Following the false teaching would be relying on demonic teaching keeping people in captivity, rather than relying on the victory won by Jesus Christ.

[63] Paul keeps returning to the truth of all God's fullness resting in Christ. The believer should not, therefore, expect to find more fullness of God in some other location (e.g., visions of angels, abstaining from food, etc.).

[64] Christ's position over other spiritual powers is emphasized throughout this letter. See 2:15.

[65] The reference to circumcision at this point possibly points to a Jewish "flavor" to the false teaching in Colossae. Paul wants the Christians to know that they have already been circumcised. He refers to the heart circumcision believers receive based upon the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Regarding circumcision, see Gen. 17:1–27; Deut. 10:15–16; 30:1–6; Jer. 4:4; 9:25–26; Acts 7:51; 15:1–41; Rom. 2:25–29; Phil. 3:2–6.

[66] Words featuring "with" start appearing regularly here. Here, Paul declares the believer has been buried "with Christ." In this same verse, he states you were raised with him. In v. 13, we read you were made alive with him. Paul speaks about dying with Christ in v. 20 and being raised with him in 3:1. Paul uses similar "with Christ" language in Eph. 2:5–10. The Christian has (1) been made alive together with Christ (2:5), (2) been raised with Christ (2:6), (3) been seated with Christ in the heavenly places (2:6). **For pastors, elders, and church leaders: this "theological" language is absolutely critical for Christians to understand. Take the time to carefully teach on the believer's union with Christ and participation in his life.**

in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities[67] and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Col. 2:16 Therefore[68] let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.[69] 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

Col. 2:20 If[70] with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world,[71] why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings?[72] 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.[73]

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[67] The teaching of the false teachers was demonic in origin (see 2:10). Paul wants the Colossian Christians to recognize Christ's position over all demons.

[68] The word "Therefore" signals a change in Paul's argument. He believes he has given his readers enough background (Col. 1:1–2:15) to understand the commands he now is giving (Col. 2:16–4:6).

[69] The command here cannot simply mean, "Do not let anyone judge you in regard to these false teachings." We cannot, after all, control other people's feelings about us. We can, however, control how we respond to their judgments. The command is connected to our response to that judgment. We must not anyone's judgment of our reliance on Christ cause us to submit to regulations (see v. 21).

[70] Paul does not wonder if the Colossian Christians died with Christ. He has just proved that they did, indeed, die with Christ. He uses the word "if" because this word allows him to build his argument: "If X is true (and I have already proved X is true), why are doing Y?" Paul also uses the word "if" to build his argument in Col. 3:1.

[71] See 2:8.

[72] See Isaiah 29:13 LXX.

[73] Paul uses two arguments in 2:20–23. **Argument 1**: You died with Christ. Based on your death, therefore, you have been delivered from the authority of the "elemental spirits" of the age. For these "elemental spirits" have power over the living. For this reason, you have no need to submit to the regulations. The logic is the same as someone saying, "You have been released from prison. Why, then, do you still act as if your former prison guards have power over you. They only have power over the inmates of the prison. You are no longer an inmate." **Argument 2**: The things you are beginning to submit to (e.g., not eating certain foods, etc.) do not have any power to keep you from sinning.

Col. 3:1[74] If[75] then you have been raised with Christ,[76] seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.[77] 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.[78] 3 For you have died,[79] and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.[80]

Col. 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:[81] sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.[82] 6 On account of these the wrath of God is

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[74] See the strong parallels between Col. 3 and Eph. 4–5.

[75] The word "if" does not mean Paul wonder if the Colossian Christians have been raised with Christ. He has just proved that they have, indeed, been raised with Christ (see 2:12). He uses the word "if" because it allows him to build his argument: "If X is true, you should be doing Y." Paul also uses the word "if" to build his argument in Col. 2:20.

[76] The Colossian Christians have been raised with Christ (see also Eph. 2:4–10). "Since" this is true (see Col. 3:1 NIV), these saints should "seek the things that are above." Rom. 6:1–14 and Col. 2:12–13 detail the time when the Christian was raised with Christ.

[77] See Psa. 110. Paul refers to Christ seated at the right hand of God in Rom. 8:34. See also Matt. 26:64. See Eph. 2:6.

[78] This does not mean the Christian should not think about anything on earth. After all, Paul writes this letter because he is thinking about the Colossian Christians and their beliefs and practices! All of these things were taking place "on earth." The meaning is connected to sinful behavior associated with this earth. Paul provides specific examples in Col. 3:5.

[79] The words "you have died" point to the reality that "you have died **with Christ**."

[80] When Christ appears, the Christian "will appear with him in glory." Paul has, up to this point, focused on the spiritual resurrection of the Christian. Here, he focuses on the Christian's physical resurrection. See Rom. 8:17–25; 1 Cor. 15:50–58; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; 2 Thess. 1:10.

[81] Paul does not advocate attempting to control sin. Rather, he speaks of killing it. A literal translation of the Greek would read something like, "Kill, therefore, the members … the [members] on the earth." The word "members" normally refers to body parts. Paul is not talking about actual body parts in this verse. But sin does use the body, therefore the metaphor makes sense. Paul uses the word "members" as a metaphor for specific sinful habits that a Christian might tolerate. Paul's word choice draws attention to sin as if it is a strange body part needing to be killed. Sin is as out of place in a Christian as an extra arm or leg would be on a person. These sinful habits may be regularly found in earthly people, but they are not to be found or tolerated in people who have been raised with Christ. This explains why Paul speaks of these sinful habits as if they are unwanted parts of the body that must be killed. (Jesus uses this same word in Matt. 5:29–30 when he speaks about plucking out your eye or cutting off your hand if these "members" are causing you to sin.) Paul's words here demonstrate (1) the Christian must not tolerate sin in his or her life, (2) the Christian, based on his or her position in Christ, is responsible to deal with any sin remaining in his or her life. Dealing with sin requires a decisive action. We must hate sin and kill it. We do not kill the members in our body (our sinful habits) in our own strength. The Holy Spirit helps us do this (see Rom. 8:13–14). You cannot take the Spirit out of this killing, for he empowers it. And you cannot take yourself out of this killing, for you do it. See also Gal. 5:24–25.

[82] Paul lists two groups of sins in verses 5–11. The list of sins here is by no means exclusive. Paul is referring to everything that is not of Christ. Usually, the problem with the Christian isn't in determining what is and is not sin. The problem is the seriousness with which the Christian regards sin. Too often, certain sins are regarded as abhorrent while others are viewed as acceptable. Paul will not accept this view of sin. The Christian is to put to death anything and everything that belongs to the earthly nature.

coming.[83] 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.[84] 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices[85] 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Col. 3:12[86] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another[87] and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,[88] teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.[89] 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

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[83] Many Greek manuscripts include, at this point, the phrase "on the sons of disobedience." This reading, if correct, is very similar to Eph. 5:6 (see also Eph. 2:2). ESV, NIV, and NLT do not include this phrase in their text (all three do refer to the additional words in the footnotes), however CSB, LEX, LSB, and NET do translate and include these words. "Sons of disobedience" is not a reference to male people alone. It refers to all those who sin.

[84] See Rom. 13:12.

[85] The Greek reads, "You have put off the old man." This is likely a reference to Adam.

[86] Our lives as Christians will not be dominated by eliminating those things that belong to the earthly nature. As we rid ourselves of the old, we are to clothe ourselves with the new. Like a person putting on clothing, we are to put on the new clothing of Christ. This, like the decision to kill off what remains of the earthly nature, is a deliberate action. And, as he helped with the killing of the earthly nature, the Holy Spirit will help with the putting on of this heavenly wardrobe. These verses do not say that we need to develop compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. They merely say that we need to put these things on. The thought is simple: we don't manufacture this "clothing"; that is the Holy Spirit's job. Our job is to put the "clothing" of the Spirit on. The thoughts here are remarkably similar to those found in Gal. 5:22–25.

[87] The idea is "tolerating" one another. See Eph. 4:2.

[88] The "you" in this verse is plural. Paul calls the word to dwell in the body richly. This obviously requires it dwelling richly in the individuals as well.

[89] This verse contains a general command ("Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly") followed by participles explaining the specific means by which this command is to be kept. The Christian obeys the command to let the word of Christ dwell in him or her richly by (1) teaching and warning other believers in all wisdom, and (2) singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with a grateful heart to God. See also Eph. 5:19. In that passage, Paul commands the people to be filled with the Holy Spirit. "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" is one of the means by which this command is kept.

Col. 3:18[90] Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.[91] 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.[92] 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this

[90] Colossians 3:18–4:1 moves from commandments for all Christians in any circumstances (see 3:12–17) to commandments given to Christians in specific roles and relationships. Scholars sometimes refer to these commandments as "household rules" or the "household table" because the commandments concern the relationships between members in a household. Paul provides instructions to people filling six different roles within a household: (1) wives, (2) husbands, (3) children, (4) fathers, (5) bondservants, (6) masters. The six different individuals addressed in these verses are organized into one of three categories based on their most significant relationship within the household: (1) Paul details how wives and husbands should relate to one another, (2) Paul details how children and fathers should relate to one another, and (3) Paul details how bondservants and masters should relate to one another. In all three categories, Paul begins with the person holding lesser authority and ends with the person holding greater authority. In addition, the three categories are arranged in terms of importance within the household. This section repeatedly emphasizes the Christian's service, no matter who he or she might be, is to "the Lord." Paul provides similar instructions, but with some different emphases and far greater detail, in Eph. 5:22–6:9. It is likely the church in Colossae quickly received that letter and benefited from the expanded details, for Paul wanted his letters to be circulated among the churches (see Col. 4:16). Therefore, Paul almost certainly knew the Christians in Colossae would eventually view the letters together. See also Peter's instructions in 1 Pet. 2:18–3:7.

[91] Paul speaks directly to wives in v. 18: "Wives, subject yourselves to [your] husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." The verb translated "submit" (in the ESV) should not be connected to weakness or inferiority, for the same verb is used to describe Jesus submitting himself to God the Father (see 1 Cor. 15:28). Moreover, the participial form of the same verb is used to describe the proper relationship believers should maintain between each other (Eph. 5:21). The words "as is fitting in the Lord" possibly explain why the wife should submit herself to her husband. If this is Paul's meaning, he is emphasizing the wife should submit herself to her husband because this is the right thing for her to do. However, these words more likely describe how a wife would keep this command. She should subject herself to her husband in a way that is fitting for one who professes to be "in the Lord." In other words, the way a wife submits herself should correspond to Paul's instructions for Christians (i.e., those who are in the Lord) in Col. 3:12–17. Therefore, if a Christian wife complains against her husband and will not forgive him (see 3:13) even as she may profess that she is submitting herself to her husband, she is not actually keeping the command to submit herself to her husband, for she is not submitting herself in a way fitting for one who is in the Lord!

This command reflects the order of creation and the order of Christ and the church (see 1 Cor. 11:3–9 and Eph. 5:23–24). It does not reflect the importance of the wife in regard to the husband. Paul's command to Christian wives does not mean a wife should submit to her husband when he wants her to sin. The words "in the Lord" demonstrate the Lord, not the husband, is ultimately over the marriage. Husbands are not called to be the head of the wife. They are not called to act like the head of the wife. Instead, Paul says that husbands are the head of the wife. This is not a position the husband takes from the wife. Nor is it a position the wife gives to the husband. It is a position given to the husband by the Lord. The husband is ultimately responsible for whatever happens within the family.

[92] See Col. 2:2 and 3:14. See also Eph. 5:25–33. The verb in the second half of v. 19 relates to something becoming bitter. When this verb is used in an active sense (and it is **not** used this way in v. 19), this verb refers to the subject making something else (the object) bitter. When it is used in a passive sense (as in v. 19), this verb refers to the subject itself becoming bitter. Thus, the Christian husband is not to "become embittered" toward his wife. ESV connects this verb to harshness ("do not be harsh with them"). See also NLT ("never treat them harshly") and NIV ("do not be harsh with them"). However, these translations likely miss some of Paul's command. Paul's injunction includes the husband's internal feelings toward his wife, whether or not those bitter feelings are openly expressed. CSB captures the sense here ("don't be bitter toward them"). See also LSB and LEB ("do not be embittered against them"). Paul refers to bitterness (when used as a noun) in Eph. 4:31 as a sin all Christians must put away. See also Rom. 3:14, where bitterness is presented as a mark of non-believers. See also 1 Pet. 3:7.

pleases the Lord.[93] 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.[94] 22 Bondservants,[95] obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

Col. 4:1 Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.[96]

Col. 4:2 Continue steadfastly in prayer,[97] being watchful in it with thanksgiving.[98] 3 At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— 4 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.[99]

Col. 4:5 Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

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[93] Paul expands on his instructions to children in Eph. 6:1–3. In that passage, Paul quotes Exod. 20:12 (see also Deut. 5:16). Paul's quotation from the Ten Commandments ties children's obedience to long life in the Promised Land. This command presumes the parents will instruct children in the ways of the Lord. This text does not promise a long life in this present age for obedient children. Tragically, obedient children do sometimes die quite young. Rather, he is pointing toward obedience to parents as a God-given path to eternal life! Parents are one of God's "means of grace" by which he brings his salvation to children. The command here relates to children in the household. It does not relate to children who now have families of their own. As Gen. 2:24 makes clear, the authority structure changes when a new household is established.

[94] The danger, if children become discouraged, is they will no longer want to obey their parents. As parents are a God-given "means of grace," driving a child to keep trying in regard to obedience works against God's intentions for the child-parent relationship. See Eph. 6:4.

[95] Slaves made up a relatively high percentage of the population in the Roman Empire and in the early church, so these words would have been listened to by many with great interest. See also Eph. 6:5–8 and 1 Tim. 6:1–2. Paul's words to bond-servants and masters bear some importance for those who are employed and for employers.

[96] See also Eph. 6:9.

[97] See Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; Rom. 12:12.

[98] The same combination of "watching and praying" is seen when Jesus and the disciples were in the garden (see Matt. 26:41 and Mark 14:38). The watching, based on the gospel accounts, relates to watching your own life so you don't fall into temptation. Demas's presence in this letter demonstrates the need to be praying. See also Acts 20:31 and 1 Pet. 5:8. See also Eph. 6:18.

[99] The reference is to preaching and acceptance of that preaching. See Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9. See Eph. 6:18–20.

Col. 4:7 Tychicus will tell you all about my activities.[100] He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, 9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.[101] They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

Col. 4:10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you,[102] and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him),[103] 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas.[104] 15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord."

Col. 4:18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

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[100] Tychicus carried this letter to Colossae. He also carried the letter to the church in Ephesus (Eph. 6:21–22). The letter to Philemon doesn't mention Tychicus, however, he almost certainly carried that letter as well. See also Acts 20:1–5; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12.

[101] Onesimus was a slave who had run away. For more information about Onesimus, see Philemon.

[102] See also Acts 20:4 and Phlm. 24.

[103] See also Acts 13:13 (Mark is referred to as John in this verse); Acts 15:36–41; 2 Tim. 4:11; Phlm. 24.

[104] Demas is the last of Paul's companions listed in Col. 4:7–14 (see also Phlm. 24). Eventually, Demas deserted Paul: "For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica" (2 Tim. 4:10). Demas's tragic life serves as a warning for all those who claim to follow Christ but refuse to turn from the world. See also Gen. 19:26; Luke 9:62; 17:32.

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