

christ
above all



Colossians

part two



christ
above all

Table of Contents

Lesson 12: Putting Off, Putting On (Part 2) - Colossians 3:12 (6-28-26)

Lesson 13: The Responses of Grace - Colossians 3:13 (7-5-26)

Lesson 14: The Outer Garment - Colossians 3:14 (7-12-26)

Lesson 15: The Peace of Christ - Colossians 3:15 (7-19-26)

Lesson 16: The Word That Brings Peace - Colossians 3:16 (7-26-26)

Lesson 17: The Art of Holy and Happy Living - Colossians 3:17 (8-2-26)

Lesson 18: Grace in the Home - Colossians 3:18-21 (8-9-26)

Lesson 19: Grace in the Workplace - Colossians 3:22 – 4:1 (8-16-26)

Lesson 20: Watch and Pray - Colossians 4:2-4 (8-23-26)

Lesson 21: Grace Seasoned With Salt - Colossians 4:5-6 (8-30-26)

Lesson 22: How to Invest in God's Kingdom - Colossians 4:7-18 (9-6-26)

Appendix: Answer Guide

Sources

Lesson 12 (6-28-26)

Putting Off, Putting On (Part 2) (Colossians 3:12)

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

- Colossians 3:12 ESV

Summary

After commanding believers to “put away” worldly behaviors, Paul offered a series of positive commands to **put on** or to “clothe yourselves” (Rm 13:14) with behavior fitted for God's people. The adjectives **chosen** (Is 43:20; 65:9; Rm 8:33; 2Tm 2:10; Ti 1:1; 1Pt 1:1; 2:4, 6, 9), **holy** (Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34; Jn 6:69; 1Pt 2:9), and **loved** (Mt 3:17; Eph 1:6; 1Th 1:4; 2Th 2:13) were all applied to Israel, Jesus, and the church. The five virtues are just the opposite of the vices listed in vv. 5 and 8.¹

Put on. Paul envisions believers' taking on the character of the Lord Himself. The “new self” of v. 10 is not something believers must construct by their own power. Their new identities, already bestowed by God's grace through faith, take shape as they come to know Christ better, since He is the image of the invisible God and the one in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (1:15; 2:3).

as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. In contrast to the Colossians' fear of cosmic powers, believers are entitled to a clear sense that God guarantees their relationship with Him (John 6:37, 44, 65; 15:16; Eph. 1:4, 5; Phil. 1:6). They can know that they have been declared righteous on the basis of a righteousness that is not their own (Rom. 3:21–26; 1 Cor. 1:2, 30), and that God genuinely, even passionately, loves them (John 3:16; Rom. 8:32; Gal. 2:20; Titus 3:4; 1 John 4:9, 10).

compassionate hearts. An emotional, caring relationship with those whose lives are hurt and broken (Matt. 9:36; 14:14; Rom. 12:1).

kindness. Readiness to do good, even when it may be undeserved (Rom. 2:4; Titus 3:4).

humility. A posture of lowliness and servanthood (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:1–11).

meekness. Or, “gentleness” in offering help, a non-coercive approach to encouraging change in others' lives (Matt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:25).

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Colossians,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1897.

patience. Willingness to take the long view in the face of human frailty (Rom. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:16).²

Observation Questions (What does the text say?)

1. What command begins this verse?
2. Who is Paul addressing in this verse?
3. What three identity statements describe believers?
4. What specific character qualities are believers commanded to “put on”?
5. How many virtues are listed in the verse?
6. What imagery does Paul use to describe Christian character?
7. Which words describe identity, and which describe actions or attitudes?
8. What does the phrase “put on” suggest about intentionality?
9. What relationships or behaviors do these virtues seem designed to affect?
10. What is emphasized first in the verse: identity or behavior?

Interpretation Questions (What does the text mean?)

1. What does Paul mean spiritually by the command “put on”?
2. Why does Paul remind believers they are “chosen,” “holy,” and “beloved” before giving commands?
3. How does understanding our identity in Christ influence our behavior?
4. What is meant by a “compassionate heart”?
5. How is biblical humility different from worldly humility?
6. What is the difference between meekness and weakness?
7. Why are patience and kindness especially important within Christian relationships?
8. How do these virtues reflect the character of Jesus Christ?
9. Why might Paul use clothing imagery for Christian living?
10. How do these virtues help strengthen and unify the church?

Application Questions (How should this change us personally and as a church?)

1. Which of these virtues is strongest in my life, and which is weakest?
2. How can I intentionally “put on” these Christlike qualities this week?
3. Are compassion, kindness, and patience evident in the relationships within our church?
4. How should remembering that we are “chosen, holy, and beloved” affect the way we treat others?
5. In what situations do I most need humility, meekness, or patience?
6. How can our church better demonstrate compassion and kindness to hurting people?
7. Are there conflicts or divisions that require greater patience and gentleness from believers?
8. How can church leaders and members model these virtues publicly?

² R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition)* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 2127.

9. What practical habits could help believers grow in these qualities daily?
10. What would change in our homes, church, and community if this verse were consistently lived out?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from R. Kent Hughes, *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ, Preaching the Word* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 101–104.]

The apostle began a new section with a welcome and a soothing description of believers: “God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved.” What is remarkable is that each of these three titles was an honored Old Testament appellation for Israel, “God’s chosen people.” “The Lord did not set his affection on you and *choose* you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord *loved* you” (Deuteronomy 7:7, 8a emphasis mine). The Colossians were now chosen by God and thus were secure. “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies” (Romans 8:33). Israel also had been designated “holy”—that is, set apart for God himself. These Colossians were now given that august title. And, most beautifully, Israel was called “dearly loved.” These Colossian believers now wore this title with all its privileges and rights.

What a rich array of titles! These opulent appellations were meant to soothe the Colossian believers’ Gentile Christian hearts and prepare them for the great putting on which was immediately commanded. In these verses the Colossians were commanded to put on virtues which stood in brilliant contrast to the vices which the Colossians were previously commanded to put off. Here we have the wardrobe of the saints, and what beautiful garments they are!

PUTTING ON _____ CLOTHING (v. 12)

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” The first article of clothing is “compassion.” The old *King James Version* renders this more literally, “bowels of mercies” because the word literally refers to the stomach or entrails, where so much of our emotion is felt. Peter O’Brien says that this term forcefully expressed personality at the deepest level, especially in the matter of living. A good translation might be, “tenderness of heart” or “tender mercies.”

The ancient world, apart from Biblical revelation, was merciless. The maimed and sickly and aged were discarded; the mentally ill were subjected to inhumanities. But Christianity brought compassion, and it still does. “It is not too much,” says William Barclay, “to say that everything that has been done for the aged, the sick, the weak in body and in mind, the animal, the child, the woman has been done under the inspiration of Christianity.” The gospel brings with it sympathy and tenderness of heart. That is one of its great glories!

Paul is telling us here that if we are new creatures in Christ, we must be compassionate people. John Perkins, in his book *Let Justice Roll Down*, tells about a time of dark, extended discouragement in his life when he was ill and seriously thinking of giving up the struggle. Then he met a Dr. Roberts. In Perkins's words: "Dr. Roberts was one of the few white persons I had contact with at that time, and she—well, she met me on the level of my humanity and not just on the theological level preferred by so many church folks." Dr. Roberts saw him through his great crisis with her merciful compassion. This is something of what we are called to—every one of us! All of us must be tenderly merciful. This is the first garment.

The second item of clothing is simply "kindness." Kindness does not happen naturally in human relationships. George Bernard Shaw once wrote a letter to Churchill: "Enclosed are two tickets to the opening night of my first play ... bring a friend (if you have one)." Churchill replied: "Dear Mr. Shaw, unfortunately I'll be unable to attend the opening night of your play due to a prior engagement. Please send me tickets for a second night (if you have one)." We should probably understand that there is considerable playfulness by these words. But the human personality naturally descends to harshness in word and deed.

The great Archbishop Trench, the prime mover behind the *Oxford English Dictionary*, says that the Greek word here translated "kindness" is a lovely word for a lovely quality. It was used to describe wine which has grown mellow with age and has lost its harshness. It was used by Jesus to describe his yoke: "My yoke is easy" (Matthew 11:30). It is listed in Galatians 5:22 as a fruit of the Spirit, and thus is a result of the fullness of God in human life. It is a quality of God himself, for Romans 2:4 tells us that God's "kindness" leads us to repentance. Kindness is an altogether lovely article of clothing.

The third garment we are to don is that of "humility," a word the Greeks never applied to themselves. William Gladstone, the learned prime minister of England, once remarked to his scholarly peer John Morley: "It is a pathetic reflection that while humility is the sovereign grace of Christianity, the Greeks had no symbol in their language to denote it. Every word akin to it has in it some element of meanness, feebleness, or contempt." But the gospel took this word of contempt and made it one of its chief graces. It was used to describe Christ's humbling himself by becoming obedient to death (Philippians 2:8). Christians are called to serve God (Acts 20:19) and one another (Ephesians 4:2) with all humility and lowliness. Jesus himself invited his followers to learn from him, as he was lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29).

Jesus was *not* suggesting a cringing, groveling servility; nor was he teaching his followers to think poorly of themselves. Rather, he was teaching the necessity of the absence of self-exaltation. He wanted us to have nothing of the arrogant pride that Churchill evidently saw in his antagonist Sir Stafford Cripps when he remarked as Cripps walked by: "There, but for the grace of God, goes God." The person who wears the garment of humility knows who God is, what man is, and who he or she is. Those who walk with awareness through a wheat field will notice that it is the drooping ears that are heavy with grain. Humility is a proper garment for every believer.

The fourth item with which we are to clothe ourselves is “gentleness,” or as the older translations have it, “meekness.” Some time ago humorist J. Upton Dickson said he was writing a book titled *Cower Power*, and that he had also founded a group for submissive people called DOORMATS, which stands for: “Dependent Organization Of Really Meek And Timid Souls—if there are no objections.” Their motto is, “The meek shall inherit the earth—if that’s okay with everybody.” Their symbol is the yellow traffic light. Mr. Dickson has a clever sense of humor, but the misconception he exploits is no laughing matter, for most people think that meekness/gentleness is weakness. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

There is gentleness and self-effacement in this word, but behind the gentleness is a steel-like strength, for the supreme characteristic of the meek man or woman is that he or she is under perfect control. Gentleness/meekness is strength under control. Numbers 12:3 tells us that Moses was the most “meek” (KJV) man on earth, but at the same time Moses was a man who could act decisively, be as hard as nails, and rise in anger at the proper time. Those wearing the true garment of gentleness/meekness are immensely powerful people, for they are controlled by God.

The final garment from the celestial closet is “patience,” long-suffering in the face of insult or injury. This is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), and it means more than just enduring difficulties or passive resignation to the circumstances. It is based on a lively, outgoing faith in God and is to be exercised toward “everyone,” as Paul instructs us in 1 Thessalonians 5:14. It is an excellent garment, to be sure.

CONCLUSION

So we have Heaven’s wardrobe from the hand of the Ultimate Tailor. It is revealing to note, as many have before, that all of these garments were perfectly worn by Christ. Therefore, when we put on these five graces, we are putting on a family resemblance to Christ...

One other fact about this wardrobe: all these garments can be worn only in community with others, in relationships. How tempting to think that these garments would be so much easier to wear if we did not have to wear them among people. How much easier to *think* about “compassion” than to *do* it. How much easier to be kind when we are away from mean people. It would be far easier to put on “humility” and “gentleness” if we were not being jostled by the proud and assertive. How much easier “patience” is in isolation. But that is not the way it works! Christians become better Christians in community, in their families, among their associates, in their dorms, in their churches, where there is sweat and breath. The truth is: the very things we may think are keeping us from putting on these garments are the things which make possible their wearing. “Clothe yourselves” is a present imperative: “Put them on and keep putting them on.

Lesson 13 (7-5-26)

The Responses of Grace (Colossians 3:13)

¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

- Colossians 3:13 ESV

Summary

The words **bearing with** (cp. Rm 15:7; Eph 4:2) and **forgiving** (cp. Eph 4:32) express the habitual manner in which believers exhibit the stated virtues. Both verbs pertain to interpersonal relationships in the body of Christ. **Just as the Lord has forgiven** echoes Jesus's injunction to forgive because believers are forgiven (Mt 6:12, 14–15; 18:23–35; Lk 7:42).¹

Observation Questions (What does the text say?)

1. What two main actions are believers commanded to practice?
2. Who is the focus of these commands?
3. What situation does Paul describe that may require forgiveness?
4. What phrase shows that conflict between believers can happen?
5. What comparison does Paul use as the basis for forgiveness?
6. How many times is forgiveness mentioned in this verse?
7. What does the phrase “bearing with one another” suggest about relationships?
8. Who is identified as the example for forgiveness?
9. What does the word “must” reveal about the importance of forgiveness?
10. How are believers expected to respond when they have complaints against others?

Interpretation Questions (What does the text mean?)

1. What does it mean to “bear with one another”?
2. Why is patience necessary in Christian relationships?
3. What kinds of “complaints” may arise between believers?
4. Why does Paul connect forgiveness to the forgiveness believers have received from the Lord?
5. How does God's forgiveness shape the way Christians forgive others?
6. What makes Christian forgiveness different from merely ignoring offenses?
7. Why is forgiveness essential for unity in the church?
8. What does this verse teach about the seriousness of unforgiveness?
9. How does this verse reflect the character and example of Jesus Christ?
10. What relationship exists between receiving grace and extending grace?

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Colossians,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1897–1898.

Application Questions (How should this change us personally and as a church?)

1. Is there someone I need to forgive right now?
2. How patient am I with the weaknesses and struggles of others?
3. When conflicts arise, do I usually respond with grace or resentment?
4. How does remembering Christ's forgiveness toward me affect my willingness to forgive others?
5. Are there grudges or unresolved conflicts harming relationships in my life or church?
6. How can our church cultivate a culture of grace, patience, and reconciliation?
7. In what situations is it hardest for me to "bear with" others?
8. How can believers lovingly address complaints without creating division?
9. What practical steps can I take this week toward reconciliation with someone?
10. What would change in our church and families if believers consistently practiced the forgiveness described in this verse?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from Richard D. Phillips, *Colossians & Philemon*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2024), 250–252.]

The expression "Clothing makes the man" has a long literary background. Attributed to the American novelist Mark Twain, it originates in the writings of the Renaissance theologian Erasmus of Rotterdam, who in turn was quoting the ancient writings of the Roman philosopher Marcus Fabius Quintilianus. This ancient precept was confirmed in a 2012 article in *Psychology Today*, which noted that people who dress conservatively are shown to convey the virtues of self-control and reliability, while daring dressers are viewed as more attractive and individualistic. Our clothing even influences how we think of ourselves: experiments show that students wearing white lab coats performed better on tests than when they wore casual clothing.

If "clothing makes the man," it is not surprising that the apostle Paul advocated a fashionable Christian outfit. It was not actual clothing that Paul had in mind, but rather the graces that come through union with Christ: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience" (Col. 3:12). Because Christians have been saved in union with Christ, it is only natural that Paul's primary teaching for daily Christian adornment involves a conscious embrace of Christ and the grace that he gives. The apostle wrote in Romans 13:14, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ," and he takes this same approach with the Colossians, urging them to put on Christ by daily outfitting themselves in the garments of his grace...

Paul's point is that these inward resources of grace not only are to be *sought* but also must be *caught* through close communion with Christ in daily discipleship. Therefore, as has been true of so much of Paul's teaching in Colossians, his exhortation to proper Christian clothing finds its

gospel roots in Jesus' parable of the vine: "I am the vine; you are the branches.... Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). J. C. Ryle rightly comments: Holiness comes from Christ. It is the result of vital union with Him. It is the fruit of being a living branch of the true Vine. Go then to Christ and say, "Lord, not only save me from the guilt of sin, but send the Spirit, whom Thou didst promise, and save me from its power. Make me holy. Teach me to do Thy will."²

THE RESPONSES OF GRACE

Having noted the reasons for and the resources of a gracious life, Paul adds the *responses* of God's grace in our dealings with others: "bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other" (Col. 3:13).

Bearing with one another is the natural outworking of Paul's fifth virtue of patience. Davenant explains that the forbearing Christian is one who, "though attacked and wounded either by words or deeds, does not immediately rise up to inflict revenge; but endeavors to overcome his enemy with mildness and to bring him back to a proper mind." Jesus espoused this mild approach, saying, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matt. 5:9).

Most telling is the Christian's response of forgiveness for those who have sinned against the believer: "if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other" (Col. 3:13). Paul assumes that we do have complaints against one another that are often justified. The need for forgiveness is therefore acute, especially in our closest relationships: within marriage, families, and the church. The pervasive problem of our world is sin, and the consistent Christian solution is forgiveness: God's forgiveness of our sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and our forgiveness of one another in his name.

Paul's basis for Christians to forgive is straightforward: "as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Col. 3:13). We do not forgive one another because the harm is minimal, because we trust that wrongdoers will do better in the future, or even because a suitable repentance has been exhibited. We forgive because we have been forgiven. Jesus linked the two actions when he taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12).

Christians forgive, even when we have been sinned against greatly, because we hold in mind how great are the sins that we have committed against God—far greater than any sins done to us. Yet God forgave us at the cost of Jesus' blood. To forgive does not necessarily mean that trust has been restored. For instance, forgiveness does not require an abused spouse to return to a violent home that remains unsafe. But forgiveness does mean that our hostility is put away and our grievance is set aside, all for a single reason: because "the Lord has forgiven you."

² Richard D. Phillips, *Colossians & Philemon*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2024), 250.

Christians forgive as those who are forgiven, and we offer our forgiveness to others not because they deserve it but as an act of worship to God through Jesus Christ.

It is when believers sincerely forgive that we offer the world what it most greatly needs. The world does not have a basis for forgiveness, so strife is generally followed by further strife in a vicious cycle. It is in just this respect that Christians are to respond differently by virtue of the reasons and resources of God's grace. John Perkins tells of having been savagely beaten in a Mississippi jail years ago because of his skin color. Feeling an overwhelming impulse of hatred, Perkins instead began thinking of what Jesus—the only truly righteous man—had voluntarily suffered on his behalf. Jesus had been unjustly accused, savagely beaten, viciously mocked, and murdered in the most painful and degrading manner. Yet, Perkins reflected, “when He looked at that mob who had lynched Him, He didn't hate them. He loved them. He forgave them. And He prayed for God to forgive them.... His enemies hated. But Jesus forgave. I couldn't get away from that.... He washed my hatred away and replaced it with a love for the white man in rural Mississippi.”

CONCLUSION

There is no hope for the world apart from the Christian message of forgiveness. As sinners, we stand guilty before the judgment of a holy God. We must be forgiven through faith in Jesus' blood if we are to escape a just and eternal condemnation. But we are also sinners standing before one another in a cycle of mutual mistreatment. There is no hope for a society—especially a torn and fractured society such as ours—unless Christians can show the world that there is a way to forgive one another's sin and be restored in a spirit of genuine love.

Lesson 14 (7-12-26)

The Outer Garment (Colossians 3:14)

¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

- Colossians 3:14 ESV

Summary

The imagery here suggests that the final and most important new article of clothing for God's people is **love**, the **perfect bond of unity** that binds believers together in complete oneness (Eph 4:3).¹

Observation Questions (*What does the text say?*)

1. What command does Paul give in this verse?
2. What phrase shows the priority of what Paul is about to mention?
3. What virtue are believers commanded to "put on"?
4. To what does the phrase "all these" refer?
5. What imagery does Paul continue using in this verse?
6. What does Paul say love does?
7. What result comes from love according to the verse?
8. Which word emphasizes unity or connectedness?
9. How is love positioned in relation to the other virtues listed in the surrounding verses?
10. What appears to be the central emphasis of this verse?

Interpretation Questions (*What does the text mean?*)

1. Why does Paul say "above all these" before commanding believers to put on love?
2. What kind of love is Paul referring to in this passage?
3. How does love relate to the other virtues listed in Colossians 3:12–13?
4. What does Paul mean when he says love "binds everything together"?
5. What is meant by "perfect harmony"?
6. Why is love essential for healthy Christian relationships?
7. How does this verse reflect the character and teaching of Jesus Christ?
8. Why might Paul continue using clothing imagery ("put on") for Christian living?
9. How does love promote unity within the church?
10. What does this verse teach about the relationship between Christian character and Christian community?

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Colossians," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1898.

Application Questions (*How should this change us personally and as a church?*)

1. How evident is biblical love in my daily relationships?
2. Which relationships in my life most need greater love right now?
3. Do my actions demonstrate love alongside kindness, humility, patience, and forgiveness?
4. How can remembering Christ's love for me shape the way I treat others?
5. Are love and unity clearly visible within our church relationships?
6. What attitudes or behaviors threaten harmony in my life, family, or church?
7. How can our church intentionally cultivate a culture marked by Christlike love?
8. In what practical ways can I "put on love" this week?
9. How should love influence the way believers handle disagreements or differences?
10. What would change in our homes, church, and community if believers consistently lived out this verse?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *Richard D. Phillips, Colossians & Philemon, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2024), 252–253.*]

In keeping with the motif of putting on clothes, **love** is the belt or sash that pulls **all these things** just mentioned together (cf. Phil. 2:1–5). Love is the most important moral quality in the believer's life, for it is the very glue that produces unity in the church. Believers will never enjoy mutual fellowship through compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, or patience; they will not bear with each other or forgive each other unless they love one another. In fact, the way to sum up the commands of 3:12–13 is to say, "Love one another." Paul said in Romans 13:10 that "love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law." To try to practice the virtues of 3:12–13 apart from love is legalism. They must flow from love, which in turn is a fruit of the Spirit-filled life (Gal. 5:22). Nothing is acceptable to God if not motivated by love (1 Cor. 13:1–3), including knowledge (Phil. 1:9), faith (Gal. 5:6), and obedience (John 14:15). Love is the beauty of the believer, dispelling the ugly sins of the flesh that destroy unity.²

THE OUTER GARMENT OF _____

It is not a coincidence that, having urged the calling to forgive one another, now Paul concludes the wardrobe of the well-dressed Christian: "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col. 3:14).

When Paul says "above all these," he describes Christian love as the outer garment that binds all the other gracious virtues together and presents them to the world. It is possible to be

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Colossians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 157.

compassionate, forbearing, and even forgiving in a way that is dispassionate and cold. But when Christians cultivate gracious virtues in a spirit of true love—love that is from God and for others—then we have truly “put on” Christ before the world. Paul says that love is—literally translated—the bond of “perfection” or “completion,” since, as the English Standard Version puts it, love “binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14). Herbert Carson writes of our other virtues: “Without love they are only dutiful moral attitudes, but with love they are blended into a moral unity which is complete.” Love not only binds together Christian virtues but also binds people together in a blessed harmony.

This outer garment of love especially commends our message to the world. During the Communist occupation of Yugoslavia, a Christian named Jakov went among the towns, preaching the gospel of Christ. In one village, an old man named Cimmerman abused him, reminding Jakov of how the official church had plundered, exploited, and even helped the Communists kill innocent people. “They wear those elaborate coats and caps and crosses,” he complained, “but their evil designs and lives I cannot ignore.” Jakov replied that these churchmen did not truly represent Jesus. He compared them to a man who broke into his house, stole his coat, and then robbed a bank. He asked, “What would you say if your coat were stolen and you were accused of bank robbery?” The old man replied, “I would deny it.” “ ‘Ah, but we saw your coat,’ they would say,” retorted Jakov. Before he could go further and share the gospel, the man demanded that he leave.

Jakov did not give up on Cimmerman. He came back and looked for ways to encourage the old man and share Christ’s love with him, employing the resources of God’s grace that Paul has urged on us: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. One day, Cimmerman finally asked him, “How does one become a Christian?” and Jakov told him. Cimmerman repented of his sin, trusted in Christ’s saving work, and bent his knee in faith to Jesus. Then, with tears in his eyes, he embraced Jakov, thanked him for his love, pointed up to heaven, and said, “You wear his coat very well.”

Colossians 3:12–14 does not present the well-dressed Christian primarily with evangelism in view. We are simply to live day by day by putting on the garments of Christ in his grace. Jesus observed that these clothes not only make the man or woman but also display our witness to the gospel: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).³

CONCLUSION

Loving others is always elevated as the supreme quality we are called to demonstrate (1 Cor 13:13). Love is evidence of our salvation, it is a testimony of the gospel, it expresses our love for God in response to his love for us, it epitomizes the character of God, and it ultimately fulfills

³ Richard D. Phillips, *Colossians & Philemon*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2024), 252–253.

the law (1 John 4:7–21; cf. Rom 13:10). God’s love for us and our love for one another is the “perfect bond of unity” (Col 3:14) that weds us together and blends the virtues in complete harmony.

This list of virtues describes an outfit of loving sacrifice and service. Following Jesus requires us to “put on” the disposition and duties of a servant. Just as Jesus wrapped himself with the towel of humility to wash the disciples’ feet (John 13:1–5) and clothed himself in humanity in willing submission to the Father (Phil 2:5–9), we are called to dress ourselves in humble acts of service to God on behalf of others. But too often we are more concerned with feeding our desires than ministering to those in need. Instead, we must take off our spiritual bibs and put on our spiritual aprons that reflect the compassionate heart of our Savior by loving others and willingly sacrificing on their behalf.⁴

⁴ R. Scott Pace, “Colossians,” in *Exalting Jesus in Colossians and Philemon*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2021), 94–95.

Lesson 15 (7-19-26)

The Peace of Christ (Colossians 3:15)

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

- Colossians 3:15 ESV

Summary

The **peace** brought by **Christ** should control believers' hearts (Rm 8:6; 15:13; 2Co 13:11; Gl 5:22; Eph 2:14; Php 4:7; 2Th 3:16). **Be thankful** harks back to 1:3, 12; 2:7 (cp. 3:17; 4:2).¹

Observation Questions (*What does the text say?*)

1. What command does Paul give at the beginning of the verse?
2. What is supposed to "rule" in believers' hearts?
3. Whose peace does Paul mention?
4. Where is the peace of Christ to rule?
5. What phrase describes the believers' calling?
6. What does Paul say believers were called into?
7. What additional command appears at the end of the verse?
8. What word connects believers together corporately?
9. What relationship exists between peace and unity in this verse?
10. Which ideas or themes are emphasized most strongly in the verse?

Interpretation Questions (*What does the text mean?*)

1. What does Paul mean by "the peace of Christ"?
2. What does it mean for Christ's peace to "rule" in a believer's heart?
3. Why is peace important within the body of Christ?
4. What does Paul mean by believers being called "in one body"?
5. How does peace contribute to unity among Christians?
6. Why might thankfulness be connected to peace and unity?
7. How does this verse reflect the character and work of Jesus Christ?
8. What is the difference between worldly peace and the peace of Christ?
9. How can inner peace affect relationships within the church?
10. What does this verse teach about the connection between the individual believer and the church community?

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Colossians," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1898.

Application Questions (*How should this change us personally and as a church?*)

1. Is the peace of Christ ruling my heart, or are anxiety, anger, or conflict controlling me?
2. How do I usually respond when conflict or stress arises?
3. In what ways can I pursue peace in my relationships this week?
4. How can gratitude help strengthen peace in my life?
5. Are unity and peace evident within our church?
6. What attitudes or behaviors may be disrupting peace in my family or church community?
7. How can our church better reflect the unity of being “one body” in Christ?
8. What practical steps can believers take to cultivate thankful hearts?
9. How can church leaders and members promote peace during disagreements or challenges?
10. What would change in our homes, church, and community if the peace of Christ truly ruled in believers’ hearts?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *Richard D. Phillips, Colossians & Philemon, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2024), 254–258.*]

Harry Ironside tells of a train ride he took in the early twentieth century. The first morning, he began his day as always by reading from his Bible. A German lady came by and asked him what he was doing. When he told her, she said, “Wait, I go get my Bible and we have it together.” Sometime later, a Scandinavian man saw them. “Reading the Bible?” he asked. “Well, I think I’ll get mine, too.” Soon, pretty much everyone in their car was taking part in the Bible study, which gathered daily during the long train ride. Before long, the conductor had advertised it to all the cars, hymns and prayers were added, and Ironside would preach. When they finally arrived and the passengers disembarked, the German lady who had started it all asked Ironside, “What denomination are you?” He answered, “I belong to the same denomination that David did.” “What was that?” she asked. “I didn’t know that David belonged to any.” Ironside replied, “I am a companion of all them that fear Thee and keep Thy precepts.” The lady replied, “Yah, yah, that is a good church to belong to.”

Ironside’s remark reflects the apostle Paul’s emphasis throughout his letters on the unity and peace that reflects the true body of Christ. Because we are joined to Christ in faith, our unity as believers should bear the aroma of peace and thanksgiving. In the previous verses, Paul urged Christians as individuals to put on the grace that we have received in Christ, bearing with one another and forgiving one another. He turns now to the peace that Christ gives. As loving Christians dwell together in the church, each animated by thanksgiving for God’s grace, we experience a peace that the world cannot give and does not know but that our Savior freely gives to those who believe.

CHRIST'S RULE OF _____

Whenever Christians consider “the peace of Christ” or “the peace of God,” we should think both vertically and horizontally. From a vertical perspective, Jesus died so that his people would be justified and accepted by his Father; Paul wrote, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1). William Hendriksen writes that the Christian’s peace “is the conviction that the sins of the past have been forgiven, that the present is being overruled for good, and that the future cannot bring about separation between Christ and his own.” Peter urged believers to “[cast] all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7), so that God’s peace dwells in the hearts of those who know the lordship of Christ.

Possessing peace *with God* through Jesus, believers also bear the peace *from God*—the horizontal perspective—that enables us to live graciously toward one another. Yet experience shows that this peace does not occur automatically. Paul therefore urges us to “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (Col. 3:15). By referring to our “hearts,” Paul locates Christian peace as working in our minds, desires, and reactions to people and events. His key word is “rule,” which evokes the illustration of a referee in athletic contests. The apostle means that as Christians think about one another, deciding what to say or do in any situation, Christ and his peace are to provide the deciding factor. Do I think I am not receiving proper honor? What does the peace of Christ have to say about my gracious response? Is there possible offense in something that another Christian has said or done? How would I think and respond if the issue were placed in the hands of Christ’s peace? Just as Paul states that Christ’s peace *resides* in every believer, so it should also *preside* in our decisions.

When Paul remarks that peace should govern our “hearts,” he undoubtedly reflects the reality that our hearts are the source of all strife and contention. John Calvin notes, “Hence he says, *in your hearts*; because we constantly feel *there* great conflicts, while the flesh lust[s] against the Spirit.” Just as Paul said in Colossians 3:13 that we should forgive one another because we have been forgiven, so also because we have received peace from God we should cultivate peace in our hearts toward others. Knowing that our hearts are especially unruly if left to themselves, Christians must not leave the heart alone but must determine that the peace of Christ will rule.

Paul gives a further reason for peace: “to which indeed you were called” (Col. 3:15). Jesus promised, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14:27), and this benediction constitutes a calling to peace. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” he also taught, “for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9).

Matthew Henry comments: When Christ was about to leave the world he made his will. His soul he bequeathed to his Father; his body he bequeathed to Joseph, to be decently interred; his clothes fell to the soldiers; his mother he left to the care of John; but what should he leave to his poor disciples, that had left all for him? Silver and gold He had none; but He left them what was infinitely better, His peace.

Peace, therefore, is a Christian privilege as well as an obligation. This calling is especially important because we were called “in one body” (Col. 3:15). Thus, Paul especially urges Christians to exhibit peace within the unity of the church. We should be eager to forgive everybody, but especially those who have also been forgiven in Christ. Likewise, we must let peace rule in our hearts toward all, but especially in the communion of Christ’s peace that is the church.

By its nature, the church is a place where peace might seem most difficult, since faith in Christ joins all kinds of different people into close spiritual proximity—rich and poor, white and black, educated and uneducated (Col. 3:11). What is more, Christians are still sinners, so that the typical selfish sources of strife are every bit as likely to show up in church as elsewhere. J. Dwight Pentecost recounts the situation of a church that split so violently that lawsuits were filed, contrary to biblical teaching. One side was awarded the church building, so the other side built its new church next door. During the trial, it was revealed that the conflict had started at a church dinner when one elder received a smaller slice of ham than another. While this example is extreme, it illustrates how sin is a threat to any church’s peace.

In pursuit of this peace, Paul alludes to the metaphor of the church as a body, in which there is an organic whole for all its diversity (see 1 Cor. 12:14–17). Some parts of the body are strong, while others are weak. Some parts are given honor, while others are kept hidden. Different body parts have different functions, but they are all needed. Similarly, the church body derives its oneness through union with Christ and the bond of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is precious not because of the excellence of its people or its heritage but because it is the body of Christ. For this reason, Christians should be loath to disrupt the peace of the church, gladly submitting ourselves instead to disappointments, knowing that this body proclaims the gospel message of Christ to the world. Not only within a single congregation or denomination, but across all denominations of Christ’s body, Christians should be governed by his peace despite disagreements over important though secondary matters. To exhibit a spirit of strife shows merely that we are out of touch with the Giver of true peace. As Dick Lucas succinctly puts it, “When Christ rules in the heart, his peace will rule in the fellowship.”

It was more than a postscript when Paul added to his call for peace the further admonition “And be thankful” (Col. 3:15). Discord arises from discontent. But the Christian has every reason to live thankfully before God. We have been forgiven our sins at the cost of Christ’s blood. We were loved by God when we were unlovable and reprobate. We have waiting for us beyond this world of woe an eternal inheritance in glory. How can we be discontent, despite all the lesser and greater disappointments we experience in this life? We are cared for by a loving, sovereign, and faithful God, both physically and spiritually. The Christian who lives in this realization will find it easy for Christ’s peace to rule in his or her heart. Ultimately, Paul shows, Christ’s peace will rule in hearts that are most satisfied with him. Thinking about ourselves in Christ—as, in the words of Colossians 3:12, “chosen ones, holy and beloved”—we will express our thanks to God by showing thanks to one another.

CONCLUSION

In addition to being suitable for service, clothing ourselves in Christ also allows us to be ready to relax. Paul goes on to encourage us, “Let the peace of Christ ... rule your hearts” (v. 15). In our culture it is easy for our hearts to become filled with tension, anxiety, and fear. Frustrations can fester and worries can weigh on us, causing our lives to be characterized as anything but peaceful. But in Christ we can have peace with our Creator (1:20), peace with our consciences (Phil 4:7), and peace with our circumstances (John 14:27). His peace can “rule” or control our hearts as we trust the Lord and place our confidence in him. This peace is an inherent aspect of our salvation, “to which [we] were also called.” It is cultivated individually through prayer and corporately through the comfort and assurance of God’s people as part of “one body” (Col 3:15; cf. 1:18). When our hearts find peace in Christ, we will have a proper perspective that allows us to “be thankful” (v. 15). A heart filled with gratitude can be thankful for all things (Eph 5:20) and in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:18).

As we submit ourselves to him through prayer, we can allow his supernatural peace to guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:6–7). By immersing our hearts in gratitude, we can fix our eyes on him and abide in his peace (Isa 26:3). In doing so, we put on clothes that allow us to comfortably rest in our Savior.²

² R. Scott Pace, “Colossians,” in *Exalting Jesus in Colossians and Philemon*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2021), 95.

Lesson 16 (7-26-26)

The Word That Brings Peace (Colossians 3:16)

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

- Colossians 3:16 ESV

Summary

dwell in you richly. Because believers are united to Christ (3:3 note), not only the “word of Christ” but Christ Himself lives in their hearts (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; cf. Rom. 8:9). With God’s wisdom present in this way (3:3; cf. 1 Cor. 1:30), the ethical demands of Christian love can be lived out in every part of life, including the everyday responsibilities that are reviewed in 3:18–4:6.

teaching and admonishing. The first half of this verse is strongly reminiscent of 1:28. In the Colossians’ ministry to one another, the word of Christ will be as effective as the presence of the apostle himself.

psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. In the Septuagint, the three nouns used in this phrase are often synonymous. It is unlikely that in Colossians they designate three separate types of song (Eph. 5:19).¹

Observation Questions (*What does the text say?*)

1. What command begins this verse?
2. What is supposed to dwell in believers richly?
3. What does the word “richly” suggest?
4. What two actions are believers instructed to do toward one another?
5. How are believers to teach and admonish one another?
6. What forms of singing are mentioned in the verse?
7. What attitude should accompany worship and singing?
8. To whom are believers singing with thankfulness?
9. What relationship exists between the Word of Christ and worship in this verse?
10. What activities in this verse seem both personal and corporate?

Interpretation Questions (*What does the text mean?*)

1. What does Paul mean by “the word of Christ”?
2. What does it mean for the Word to “dwell” in believers richly?
3. Why is Scripture essential for the life of the believer and the church?

¹ R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition)* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 2127.

4. What is the difference between teaching and admonishing?
5. Why should believers instruct one another “in all wisdom”?
6. How can singing be a form of teaching and encouragement?
7. What do “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” reveal about Christian worship?
8. Why is thankfulness emphasized again in this passage?
9. How does this verse connect worship, Scripture, and community together?
10. How does this verse reflect the priorities of a healthy church?

Application Questions (*How should this change us personally and as a church?*)

1. Is the Word of Christ dwelling richly in my life through reading, study, and obedience?
2. What habits could help me grow deeper in Scripture?
3. How can I encourage and teach other believers biblically?
4. Am I open to loving correction and admonishment from other Christians?
5. How does music and worship shape my understanding of God?
6. Are Scripture and thankfulness central in our church gatherings?
7. How can our church use worship music to teach biblical truth more faithfully?
8. Do I worship God with genuine gratitude or merely routine participation?
9. How can believers encourage one another through songs, Scripture, and conversation?
10. What would change in our homes and churches if the Word of Christ truly dwelled richly among us?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *Richard D. Phillips, Colossians & Philemon, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2024), 258–262.*]

Expounding our calling to peace, Paul notes that the church contains the means that God has given so that peace will flourish: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16).

THE WORD THAT BRINGS PEACE

In speaking of “the word of Christ,” Paul uses *logos*, so that we might translate this phrase as the “message” of Christ or even the “doctrine” of Christ. The “message of Christ,” including the record of his life and ministry, was preached by the apostles to the churches. The book of Acts shows that the apostles often preached Christ from Old Testament texts, so we should see the “word of Christ” as the message of both the prophets and the apostles, that is, the entire Bible. The Bible is the Word “of Christ” because he is its author through the Spirit’s inspiration and also its chief subject matter. As Jesus instructed the Emmaus road disciples, “beginning with

Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

Notice the direct relationship that Paul perceives between the peace of Christ and the Word of Christ. He says that we let Christ’s peace “rule” in our hearts as we also let his Word “dwell” in us richly (Col. 3:15–16). The clear implication is that “the peace of God rules where the word of God dwells.” Paul adds that the Word of Christ should be taken into the heart to dwell there “richly” (v. 16). This description implies, more than a general knowledge of the gospel, a deep imbibing of its theology and saving message. John Davenant counsels, “Do not suffer the word of God, as a stranger, to stand without; but let it enter into the chamber of your heart, and constantly abide in your minds.” Paul wrote in Philippians 4:7 that it is by prayer that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Likewise, it is through daily reading of and frequent meditating on the Holy Scriptures that Christ’s peace establishes its ruling presence in the mind and heart.

Given his reference to the body of Christ, Paul especially has in mind the ministry of God’s Word in the worship of the church. His exhortation encourages a Word-centered gathering of God’s people, just as the earliest Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). In the second century, the Christian movement was made fun of by the Romans for the “bookish” nature of its members, who went to great labors to spread copies of the Gospels and Epistles and to teach its members to read. In our time, when entertainment has crowded out Bible teaching in so many churches, it is small wonder that so little grace is exhibited in the life of the average evangelical Christian. John Risbridger comments: “Churches which give the word a *rich* welcome will be glad to give it sufficient time within their services. Their hunger will be less for novelty or entertainment and more for the nourishing, bracing, humbling, heart-winning, worship-evoking delight of hearing the powerful voice of the speaking God through his unfailing and trustworthy word.”

Not only should the Bible be taught in a serious way by ministers, but ordinary Christians are to know and employ the teaching of God’s Word. Paul thus sees healthy Christians as “teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom” (Col. 3:16). Christ has provided Spirit-gifted teachers for his church (Eph. 4:11), yet here is a ministry of God’s Word to which all believers are called—men and women, young and old alike—to strengthen faith and counsel hearts. Christopher Green observes that “where teaching has the idea of imparting information, admonishing has the idea of pressing it home so that people see the implications and act on them, sometimes with the note of warning and sometimes with encouragement.”

As an implication, married couples who wish to enjoy Christ’s peace will frequently have God’s Word enter their conversations. Not only should husbands minister the gospel to their wives, but they should also listen to the respectful biblical admonitions of their wives. It follows that Christian parents who wish to see Christ rule in the hearts of their children will give them loving, Christ-centered biblical instruction. Nicholas Byfield writes, “A house without the word is a very dungeon of darkness,” while, as a result of loving biblical teaching from parents, God’s truth will “be a lantern, and the very way of life to them.” Likewise, Christian friends who

gather to pray and study God's Word will experience the bond of Christ's peace in their fellowship.

Paul adds that this teaching and admonishing must be performed "in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16). The calling to speak the Word of Christ obliges all believers to become sound in doctrine and application. Much harm is done through words spoken with great fervor but little connection to biblical truth or with unsanctified motives. Wisdom involves a right joining of ends and means: what is the best time, the right tone, and the loving approach? For these important matters, Christians should seek wisdom in prayer (James 1:5) and from other believers who can give sound advice.

Paul's emphasis on corporate worship is confirmed as he adds the edifying effects of Christian music: "singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Col. 3:16). Christians are agreed that Paul commends singing, but there are differing views about what he urges us to sing. "Psalms" clearly refers to the great hymnbook of the Old Testament, but what are "hymns" and "spiritual songs"? A popular view today holds that the apostle foresees Christians' composing new musical pieces for gathered worship, such as the hymns that have expressed godly piety throughout the church age that continues through "spiritual songs" composed today. Another view sees Paul as referring strictly to the book of Psalms. Under this view, "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" are three different ways of referring to the Psalms—all three words being used within the Psalter itself to describe types of compositions. An example is Psalm 40:3, "He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God." In the Greek translation typically used by the apostles, "song of praise" is "hymn" (*hymnos*). As explained by W. I. Wishart: "These are not commands to make hymns, but to use hymns and Spirit-given songs such as were already at hand. These could be found only within the volume of inspiration." Yet even if Paul uses all three terms to refer to the Old Testament Psalms—which is likely—it is not clear that he intended to restrict Christian worship to exclusive psalmody.

Those who give more latitude to "hymns and spiritual songs" point out that portions of Paul's letters are structured lyrically, such as the hymn to Christ in Colossians 1:15–20, suggesting the writing of hymns in his time. At the least, it is argued, Paul gives the impression that Christians will respond to God's Word in a variety of musical forms. Such was the view of the noted hymnist Isaac Watts, who was concerned that exclusive psalmody restricted Christians from praising God in Jesus' name. Writing explicitly in imitation of the Psalms, Watts composed "as David might have done had he been a Christian." Churches that follow Watts's lead sing to the Lord "evangelical hymns responding to the fullness of God's revelation of Himself in Christ."

While we cannot provide a dogmatic answer to the kinds of "psalms" to which he is referring, it is certain that Paul sees singing as an extension of the church's teaching ministry. Music prints its messages on our hearts, so it is vital that worship songs be thoroughly sound in doctrine. Throughout history, whenever there have been great movements of the Holy Spirit, there has been an outburst of Christian songwriting, such as the monastic reforms of the twelfth century that produced the hymns of Bernard of Clairvaux, the Protestant Reformation with hymns composed by Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, and the Evangelical Awakening

of the eighteenth century that produced beloved hymns by Charles Wesley, Isaac Watts, and John Newton. In each case, the music not only expressed songs of praise to God but also extolled the doctrinal convictions that these Christians were teaching. Gordon Fee writes, “Show me a church’s songs and I’ll show you their theology.” Good hymns will therefore complement the preaching of God’s Word and write saving truths on our hearts.

While the effect of Christian music on the mind is significant, Paul also wants believers to sing “with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16). His word for “thankfulness” is based on the noun *grace*, so Paul effectively urges that the grace of God that comes to us through the gospel would fill our hearts with joyful thanks as we sing to his glory. God insists that he is not praised when our lips act without the loving engagement of our hearts (Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8), and heartfelt thankfulness is a mark of true faith. In A.D. 112, the Roman governor Pliny the Younger wrote about the Christians to the emperor Trajan, reporting that early in the morning on a special day each week, the believers sang “an antiphonal hymn to Christ as God.” So it has been ever since. Having heard God’s Word carefully and passionately taught, Christians of all generations have sung the truths of “the word of Christ” back to God in the form of praise. Paul says that the result of God’s Word taken into the heart with thanksgiving is the peace of Christ ruling in our midst.

CONCLUSION

Just as clothing ourselves in Christ makes us suitable for service and ready to relax, dressing according to our identity in him also helps us be prepared for praise. A proper understanding of our positional status in him not only saturates our hearts with love and peace but also primes our hearts to overflow in celebration of our Savior!

In order to worship in Spirit and truth (John 4:24), God’s people must worship according to the “word of Christ” (Col 3:16). This phrase is best understood as a summary of the redemptive work of Jesus and parallels the previously used expression, “the word of truth, the gospel” (1:5). In other words, the same message of salvation that adopts us into God’s family and unites us as his people must be the central truth that saturates our corporate worship and everything we do. As we allow the gospel to “dwell richly” among us, we uphold Christ as the source of “all wisdom” (cf. 2:3) and his truth serves as the substance for our “teaching and admonishing” one another (3:16). These same terms summarized Paul’s personal ministry and spiritual ambition (1:28), and they must become our collective goal as well.

While many contemporary churches approach the musical portion of our corporate worship as a formality, according to Paul it is actually meant to be formative. He uses a variety of expressions, “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,” as the means by which we teach and admonish one another (v. 16; cf. Eph 5:19). The variety of musical terms validates multiple styles of “singing to God,” while the content of all forms must be carefully evaluated by its faithfulness to “the word of Christ.” When Jesus and his redemptive work are exalted, the transforming grace of the gospel will promote “gratitude” in our “hearts” where true worship occurs (Col 3:16).

Just as reverent occasions require appropriate attire, our identity in Christ deserves and demands a life that is adorned with praise and thanksgiving. Therefore, we must put on spiritual clothes that gratefully rejoice in our Savior. Our worship must be infused with the truth of the gospel as we promote deeper intimacy with Christ, stronger unity as his people, and higher praise for our King!²

² R. Scott Pace, "Colossians," in *Exalting Jesus in Colossians and Philemon*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2021), 95–96.

Lesson 17 (8-2-26)

The Art of Holy and Happy Living (Colossians 3:17)

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.

- Colossians 3:17 ESV

Summary

This verse is similar to 1Co 10:31: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.” Doing everything **in the name of the Lord Jesus** means doing it in obedience to him.¹

Observation Questions (*What does the text say?*)

1. What phrase shows the broad scope of Paul’s instruction?
2. What two categories of behavior are mentioned in the verse?
3. What are believers commanded to do in all things?
4. In whose name are believers to act and speak?
5. What attitude accompanies the command in this verse?
6. To whom is thanks directed?
7. Through whom do believers give thanks to the Father?
8. What words emphasize completeness or totality in the verse?
9. How does Paul connect worship with everyday actions?
10. What appears to be the main focus of the verse?

Interpretation Questions (*What does the text mean?*)

1. What does Paul mean by “whatever you do”?
2. What does it mean to do something “in the name of the Lord Jesus”?
3. How should Jesus’ authority influence a believer’s words and actions?
4. Why does Paul include both “word” and “deed”?
5. What does this verse teach about the relationship between worship and daily life?
6. Why is thankfulness important in the Christian life?
7. What does it mean to give thanks to God “through” Jesus Christ?
8. How does this verse summarize the Christian life?
9. How can ordinary tasks become acts of worship according to this verse?
10. What does this verse reveal about the believer’s relationship with God the Father and the Lord Jesus?

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Colossians,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1898.

Application Questions (*How should this change us personally and as a church?*)

1. Do my words and actions consistently honor Jesus Christ?
2. Are there areas of my life that I do not fully submit to the Lordship of Christ?
3. How can I better represent Christ in my speech, attitude, and behavior this week?
4. In what situations do I struggle most to act "in the name of the Lord Jesus"?
5. How can gratitude become a more regular part of my daily life?
6. Does our church encourage believers to glorify Christ in everyday life, not just during worship services?
7. How can our church better reflect Christ in the way we serve one another and the community?
8. What ordinary responsibilities in my life could become acts of worship when done for Christ?
9. How can believers help one another live with greater consistency between faith and practice?
10. What would change in our homes, church, workplaces, and community if believers truly lived according to this verse every day?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from Charles Haddon Spurgeon's sermon on Colossians 3:17 titled "Method and Music, or The Art of Holy and Happy Living." It was preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on January 30, 1870, and published as Sermon No. 913 in Volume 16 of the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*.]

Charles Spurgeon called this Colossians 3:17 "The Art of Holy and Happy Living." He believed that if a Christian could truly understand and apply this single verse, it would transform every area of life. Many people think Christianity is primarily about what happens on Sunday mornings. We worship, attend Bible studies, pray, and read Scripture. Those things are important, but Paul teaches us that Christianity is much bigger than that.

God is not only concerned with our worship services. He is concerned with our conversations at home, our attitudes at work, our conduct in public, our use of money, our entertainment choices, and our relationships. Colossians 3:17 teaches us that every part of life belongs to Christ. Spurgeon organized his thoughts around what he called *holy method* and *holy music*. The method is how we live; the music is the spirit in which we live. The Christian life is both obedience and joy.

Holy _____: "Whatever You Do"

Paul intentionally uses all-inclusive language. He does not say: Whatever you do at church; Whatever you do in ministry; Whatever you do during devotional time. He says: "Whatever you do." Every area of life falls under Christ's lordship.

Spurgeon wrote: "The Christian is to carry his religion into everything." He rejected the idea that there are "sacred" activities and "ordinary" activities. For the Christian, every legitimate activity can become an act of worship when offered to God. Spurgeon challenged his congregation by saying: "You are not to be Christians in one place and something else in another."

Discussion Question

What are some areas of life that Christians sometimes fail to connect with their faith?

Often people separate life into categories: Spiritual life; Family life; Work life; Social life; Entertainment life. Yet Scripture recognizes no such division. The Bible teaches that Christ is Lord over every category. For the Christian: Changing a diaper can glorify God. Completing a work assignment can glorify God. Mowing the lawn can glorify God. Serving a meal can glorify God. Studying for school can glorify God. Every activity becomes sacred when it is offered to Christ. Spurgeon noted that Christianity was never intended to be worn like a coat that can be removed when convenient. It is meant to permeate the entire person.

Application

Ask yourself: Does Christ influence how I spend my money? Does Christ influence my work ethic? Does Christ influence my leisure activities? Does Christ influence how I speak to my family? If not, there are areas of life that have not yet been fully surrendered to Him.

Holy Method: "In word or deed..."

This phrase covers everything. Words represent what we say. Deeds represent what we do. Together they encompass the whole of life. Jesus said: "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." (Matthew 12:34) Words reveal what is happening inside us. Every conversation provides an opportunity either to honor Christ or dishonor Him.

Spurgeon noted: "A Christian's speech should be such that he need never be ashamed to ask a blessing upon it." That is a powerful test. Could we ask God's blessing on every conversation we have? Could we ask God's blessing on every post we make online? Could we ask God's blessing on every joke we tell? Could we ask God's blessing on how we speak to our spouses? Could we ask God's blessing on how we speak to our children? Could we ask God's blessing on how we speak to coworkers?

Questions to consider: Are my words truthful? Are my words gracious? Are my words encouraging? Are my words honoring to Christ?

Discussion Question

Why do you think controlling our speech is often one of the most difficult aspects of Christian growth?

Words alone are not enough. The Christian faith is meant to be visible. People often learn more from observing our actions than hearing our words. Our conduct should demonstrate: Integrity; Honesty; Humility; Compassion; Faithfulness. Our actions should make the gospel attractive. Spurgeon reminded believers: "The life of a Christian should be the practical exposition of his creed." In other words, our conduct should explain what we believe.

The Holy _____: "Do Everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus"

This is the central command of the verse. Everything Paul has said builds toward this statement. Spurgeon explained: "To act in Christ's name is to act under His authority, seeking His honor, and depending upon His strength." To do something in someone's name means to act under their authority and as their representative. A police officer acts in the name of the law. An ambassador acts in the name of a nation. Christians act in the name of Christ. Whenever we make a decision, we can ask:

1. Can I Honestly Associate Jesus with This?

Could I attach Christ's name to this activity?

Could I invite Jesus to participate in this conversation?

Could I ask His blessing on this decision?

If the answer is no, we should reconsider.

2. Does This Reflect Christ's Character?

Jesus was: Holy; Loving; Truthful; Compassionate; Humble. Do our actions reflect His character?

3. Does This Bring Glory to Christ?

The goal of the Christian life is not self-promotion. Our goal is Christ's glory.

Imagine wearing a shirt that says: "I represent Jesus Christ." Would that affect: How you drive? How you talk? How you work? What you watch? What you post online? The reality is that every Christian already bears Christ's name. The world associates us with Him whether we realize it or not. Spurgeon offered a memorable challenge: "If you cannot do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, do not do it." That simple principle can guide countless decisions.

Discussion Question

What practical decisions in daily life become clearer when we ask, "Does this honor Christ?"

Holy _____: "Giving Thanks to God the Father..."

Spurgeon called this part of the verse the "music." The Christian life is not merely duty. It is joyful gratitude. Notice that Paul does not simply command obedience. He commands thankful obedience. Gratitude changes our perspective. A thankful Christian remembers: God created me. Christ died for me. Christ rose for me. My sins are forgiven. My future is secure.

When we remember these truths, gratitude naturally follows. Thankful people complain less. Thankful people serve more willingly. Thankful people forgive more readily. Thankful people worship more joyfully. Spurgeon said: "A thankful spirit is one of the surest marks of a gracious soul." Gratitude transforms our perspective.

Discussion Question

How does gratitude help us obey God even during difficult seasons?

Through _____

Everything comes through Christ. We approach God through Christ. We are saved through Christ. We worship through Christ. We offer thanksgiving through Christ. This phrase reminds us that the Christian life is not based on our performance. It is based on our relationship with Jesus. We are accepted because of Him. We obey because of Him. We give thanks because of Him. Spurgeon emphasized: "All our praises must pass through the hands of the Lord Jesus before they can be acceptable to God." This is wonderful news. Because of Him, our imperfect obedience is received by the Father.

Conclusion

Spurgeon believed Colossians 3:17 provides a blueprint for the entire Christian life. The verse teaches: A holy method—how we live. A holy rule—in Christ's name. A holy music—with thankful hearts. The Christian life is not confined to church services and Bible studies. Every conversation. Every task. Every responsibility. Every opportunity. Every decision. All of life belongs to Jesus Christ. "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." (Col. 3:17)

Lesson 18 (8-9-26)

Grace in the Home (Colossians 3:18-21)

¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

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

- Colossians 3:18-21 ESV

Summary

Paul stresses that believers have become new persons (v. 10). This profound transformation impacts every aspect of life. When a believer becomes a new woman, she becomes a different kind of wife, mother, and daughter. When a believer becomes a new man, he becomes a different kind of husband, father, and son. Thus Christian wives should recognize that God entrusted leadership of the family to the husband, and wives should respect the authority of their husbands in the home. This respectful submission is appropriate for those who have been changed by the Lord. Though one consequence of the fall was the husband's domination of the wife (Ge 3:16), Christian husbands should be loving and tender toward their wives. Christian children should give total obedience to their parents. Such conduct pleases the Lord. Parents should not impose impossible demands on their children because this will only incite their rebellion and prompt them to abandon ever measuring up in their parents' eyes. Sin and the fall had a devastating effect on family relationships. Yet as the divine image is being restored to believers, the home becomes more and more what God originally intended it to be.¹

Observation Questions (*What does the text say?*)

1. What groups of people are directly addressed in these verses?
2. What command is given to wives?
3. What phrase qualifies the submission of wives?
4. What command is given to husbands?
5. What warning is given to husbands?
6. What command is given to children?
7. What reason does Paul give for children obeying their parents?
8. What instruction is given to fathers?
9. What result does Paul warn may happen if fathers provoke their children?
10. What repeated themes or patterns appear in these family instructions?

Interpretation Questions (*What does the text mean?*)

1. What does it mean for a wife to submit "as is fitting in the Lord"?
2. How does biblical submission differ from worldly ideas of inferiority or control?

¹ Charles L. Quarles, "Colossians," in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1659.

3. What does Christlike love from a husband look like?
4. Why does Paul specifically warn husbands against harshness?
5. What does it mean for children to obey their parents “in everything”?
6. Why does obedience to parents please the Lord?
7. What kinds of behavior from fathers might discourage children?
8. How do these instructions reflect God’s design for the family?
9. How does Jesus’ example shape each family role mentioned in this passage?
10. What relationship exists between authority, love, obedience, and encouragement in the Christian home?

Application Questions (*How should this change us personally and as a church?*)

1. How can family members better reflect Christ in their attitudes and relationships at home?
2. Are love, respect, patience, and encouragement evident in my family relationships?
3. In what ways do I struggle with the responsibilities God has given me in the home?
4. How can husbands and wives better honor Christ in their marriage?
5. How can children demonstrate obedience with the right attitude?
6. How can parents discipline and lead their children without discouraging them?
7. Does our church actively support and strengthen healthy, Christ-centered families?
8. How can church members encourage marriages and parenting within the congregation?
9. What practical steps can families take this week to apply these verses?
10. What would change in homes, churches, and communities if believers consistently lived according to these instructions?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *Richard D. Phillips, Colossians & Philemon, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2024), 265–275.*]

Paul concluded his general teaching on the Christian life with a charge that is as sweeping as all of life: “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” (Col. 3:17). Paul’s “everything” claims all things outward from our lives but also inward. To prove this assertion, we need only read on in Colossians, where the apostle shows that God’s grace in Christ captures and transforms our most intimate relationships. Steve Pettit comments: “If our faith is to be genuine, it will touch every realm of our lives, including our own human families. These commands therefore reveal how a Christian family is to look and operate under the authority of Jesus Christ.”

Paul lived in a brutal world driven by power and dominance, into which the gospel breathed a new ethic. Christianity taught an equality of all people regardless of race, sex, or social status. It also provided a new power through the indwelling Holy Spirit sent by the exalted Christ,

together with a new purpose to glorify God in all things and a new pattern based on love and servant-hearted submission.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:21 that believers should give thanks to God in all things, “submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” This is not to deny authority or hierarchy, as is sometimes wrongly taught. Paul teaches the obedience of children to parents, not of parents to children; similarly, he teaches the submission of wives to husbands. The fact that in both these relationships he first considers the role of the subordinate—wives and children—suggests what Dick Lucas calls “a subordinationist ethic.” Paul urged his churches to “remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’ ” (Acts 20:35). Jesus, who rejoiced to do the will of his Father, stated that “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). The grace of Christ, so contrary to the spirit of the world, teaches us to sacrifice, serve, and submit. In a spirit of submission, then, Christians exhibit the love of God and serve the cause of his glory.

FITTING _____

Starting with marriage, Paul writes, “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Col. 3:18). Here is a command that cuts across the grain of our society’s secular-humanistic thinking. Paul’s teaching of submission to wives is sometimes dismissed as reflecting his chauvinism or else his surrender to prevailing cultural norms. Neither of these dismissals can be accepted without grave damage to Holy Scripture. If Paul was wrong about this subject, he might equally well be wrong about salvation in Christ. If his “house-code” must be revised under more enlightened postmodern thinking, then his doctrines of sin and grace must also be rethought, as liberal theology has done. The reality is that when Paul teaches wives to submit, he reflects the uniform teaching of Scripture. Faith in God’s Word requires submission to all of Scripture as inspired by the Holy Spirit and bearing God’s own authority (2 Tim. 3:16).

Moreover, the claim that Paul replicated the unjust power dynamics of the ancient Roman world is simply false. William Barclay notes that under both Roman and Jewish law,

a woman ... was the possession of her husband, just as much as his house or his flocks or his material goods were. She had no legal right whatever.... From her there was demanded a complete servitude and chastity: but her husband could go out as much as he chose, and could enter into as many relationships outside marriage as he liked and incur no stigma. Both under Jewish and under Greek laws and custom, all the privileges belonged to the husband, and all the duties to the wife.

Nothing like this idea is seen in Paul’s teaching, which clearly cut against the grain of his society. All things considered, it is not too much to say that there has never been a more elevating influence on the status of women than Christianity in general and Paul in particular. His teaching of God’s grace in the home grants status, dignity, and security to women. It is no coincidence that in countries where the Bible has had a strong influence, the situation of

women has typically improved dramatically, whereas under other religions women remain treated as the mere property of their men.

It is important, however, that Paul be read accurately. As he teaches wives to submit, it is important to observe what he is *not* saying. First, he does not call for all women to submit to all men, but as Ephesians 5:22 directs, wives are to submit “to your own husbands.” This precept argues that women should wisely choose whom they marry, ensuring that they can respect and trust their husbands. Second, Paul does not teach husbands to place their wives in subjection, as was the universal counsel of the ancient world. Rather, the verb “submit” is given to wives in the middle voice, which means that it is something that the woman voluntarily embraces for the benefit of both Christ and her husband.

We should further notice that the verb for the command given to women in submission to husbands is different from the one given to children in obeying their parents. Wives, unlike children, are called not to mere obedience but to active submission. Just as a good manager in the workplace is creative and shows initiative, a godly wife does not wait around for detailed orders like some low-level lackey, but acts assertively in pursuit of the goals worked out together with her husband. Daniel Doriani writes, “A wife can exercise considerable authority in the home and yet be submissive to her husband if she manages their money, property, and time in the ways they have worked out together.” This is exactly what we find in the Bible’s great description of a virtuous wife in Proverbs 31: “The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life” (Prov. 31:11–12).

Given the Bible’s emphasis on oneness in marriage—“they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5)—a husband and wife should cultivate teamwork in the marriage. Yet there will be times when the couple disagrees and the wife is called to yield (although in other cases, the husband may think it wise to wait for greater unanimity). This raises a question: to what extent must a Christian wife submit? Paul answers in Ephesians 5:24 that “wives should submit in everything to their husbands.” Given God’s higher authority, husbands do not have the right to direct their wives to sin. Neither are wives without other sources of protection—such as parents and the church—in cases of abuse or gross neglect. Outside these notable exceptions, however, submission is in all things.

The Bible always cares about our motives, so we should consider *why* a wife would be submissive to her husband. Does she submit because she is inferior? The ancient world uniformly taught the inferiority of women, but the Bible teaches women’s equality with men in value, ability, and destiny. The first, and perhaps most countercultural, comment that the Bible makes about women declares their equality with men before God: “in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27).

So does a wife submit to her husband when and if he has earned it? Does she submit on the condition that she thinks he will do the right thing? Certainly, it helps for a wife to admire and have confidence in her husband. But these are not the biblical basis for her submission. Instead,

Paul writes, “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Col. 3:18). Christian wives submit to their husbands as an act of faith and devotion to Jesus Christ. At the same time, a wife’s submission honors the Lord’s design and intention. The Bible teaches that God created mankind with a pattern of *complementarity*. The woman was made from the man as a helper and companion to him (Gen. 2:18), so that “the husband is the head of the wife” (Eph. 5:23). The submission of wives results, therefore, not from the fall but from creation—though man’s fall into sin has certainly made it harder!

Lucas notes that Paul’s teaching of submission ultimately states for wives “what it means to call Christ Lord.” Paul writes in Ephesians 5:22, “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.” He means not that the husband has taken Christ’s place as lord, but rather that she offers her submission toward her husband ultimately to Jesus as an act of obedient worship. Because submission “is fitting in the Lord” (Col. 3:18), she will gladly conduct her marriage relationship in harmony with Christ’s wisdom and will. Rather than assuming that her equality before God grants her liberty to decide her own pattern of life, she joyfully embraces God’s sovereign wisdom in creating and regulating marriage. William Hendriksen notes: It is when the wife recognizes this basic distinction and acts accordingly that she can be a blessing to her husband, can exert a gracious, very powerful, and beneficent influence upon him, and can promote not only his but also her own happiness.

A further motive for a wife’s submission is the powerful witness it gives to the gospel. There are few greater opportunities for a Christian witness today than a godly woman’s submission to her husband (and, correspondingly, a husband’s sacrifice for his wife). The world’s rebellion against God and his way has made an anguished mess of marriage, and with it all of life. When a Christian woman submits to her husband out of reverence to Christ, she may at first be ridiculed, but that ridicule will turn to marvel over the blessings of harmony and peace. When asked why she does not follow the self-seeking spirit of our age, a Christian wife may bear testimony to the goodness and grace that is in Christ, allowing her to live a better pattern by the power that God gives through faith.

PLEASING _____

Paul next turns to the calling of children. So fundamental is the obedience of children to society that God enshrined it in his Ten Commandments: “Honor your father and your mother” (Ex. 20:12). Even more than self-willed wives are a mark of unruly pagan society, the disobedience of children is a sign of cultural disintegration. Paul’s remedy for such rebellion recites the uniform teaching of Scripture: “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord” (Col. 3:20).

The Greek word *teknon* addresses children living in the home and under the care and authority of their parents. After leaving the home, children continue to honor their mother and father, but in the home they obey. The word for “obey” might literally be translated as “listen to.” Children are to have their ears open to the instruction and direction of their parents and respond with eager compliance. Children must not “tune out” their parents, and parents should

not have to ask ceaselessly, “Did you hear what I said?” Paul directs that children are to obey their parents “in everything.” Unlike wives with their husbands, children are not engaged in a partnership with their parents but should entirely comply with their parents’ wishes, so long as they do not involve disobedience to God’s Word.

Taken together, “obey” and “honor” summarize the duty of children to parents. The first deals with the children’s *actions*, while the second addresses their *attitude*. Yet some children find their parents hard to admire. The noted Bible teacher James Boice admits having this problem as a youth. His father was a busy doctor who was seldom home and did not communicate well. He recalls, “I cannot remember ever having had a meaningful and constructive conversation with my father.” But Boice’s commitment to Christ challenged his attitude. He decided to look for things to admire in his father. He was hardworking and provided well for the family. One reason that he was seldom home was his devotion to healing the sick. Boice learned that his father was generous and never boasted about his giving. These reflections helped Boice to appreciate his father, despite his misgivings.

As with Christian wives, the motives for children’s obeying their parents are important. Why should children obey? Is it because their father is bigger and stronger or that obedience works better? Paul answers in a verse that many children are wisely called to memorize: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph. 6:1).

Notice that Paul addresses Christian children as accountable to the Lord, with duties to God, whether or not they have been converted. This command reflects the Bible’s teaching that the offspring of believers are covenant children and members of Christ’s church (which is also why they are baptized as infants). They obey parents “in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1) because God has called them to do so. For children to obey parents is right simply by the order of nature, which is why virtually every culture takes up this practice.

Paul goes further in Colossians 3:20, saying that the obedience of children “pleases the Lord.” The God who has named himself “our Father” (Matt. 6:9) is pleased when parents are obeyed. We can know that obedience pleases God because in the fifth commandment he assigned a special blessing to it: “that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you” (Ex. 20:12). A child who cannot obey is going to have a very hard time in life, while obedient children are more protected from physical harm and emotional pain. John MacArthur writes: “It is the key principle behind all right human relationships in society. A person who grows up with a sense of respect for and obedience to his parents will have the foundation for respecting the authority of other leaders and the rights of other people in general.” Young people often wonder about God’s will for their lives, but this obviously begins with obedience to parents. Proverbs 4:10 speaks for all Christian parents: “Hear, my son, and accept my words, that the years of your life may be many.”

HUSBANDS, FATHERS

In keeping with the “subordinationist” ethic of the New Testament, Paul addressed wives before husbands and children before fathers. While secular society may have low expectations for husbands and fathers, Christ has the highest expectations for those who exercise authority in his name. Thus, when Paul says that the “husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church” (Eph. 5:23), his point is not the privileges that men receive but rather their sacrificial duties in following the Savior who died for his people.

The husband’s calling to his wife is simple but not therefore easy: “Husbands, love your wives” (Col. 3:19). Paul was not referring to romantic or sexual love, though both are natural to a marriage. He meant, rather, the self-giving love that mirrors the sacrifice of Christ for his church. He wrote in Ephesians 5:25, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.”

A loving husband makes his aim not to see what he can get from his wife but how he can serve her physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Love means bonding with his wife, as Genesis 2:24 observes: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife.” Sacrificial love means placing her good ahead of his own, requiring time, attention, and, very likely, changes to his life.

The love of a husband is not only *sacrificial* but also *caring*. Paul explains in Ephesians 5:28–30: “In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.” This kind of love goes out of its way to provide for and protect a wife. A great tragedy of recent times is the warping of our understanding of masculinity, so that a real man is a self-centered, weather-beaten stoic who is emotionally distant from members of his family. Nothing could be further from God’s design! When Paul urges husbands to “cherish” their wives (Eph. 5:29), he uses a word that means “warming.” The same word is used of a mother who comforts a baby by holding it close. The husband is to warm his wife with his affection, which comes through in the way he spends time with her and speaks to her, so that she feels safe and cared for in his presence.

Finally, the love of a husband for his wife is *redeeming*. Ephesians 5:26–27 declares that Christ gave himself up to “sanctify” the church, “having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” Christ’s example provides the singular model for a husband’s love for his wife. As Christ’s love redeems us for glory, so a husband’s love ought to be directed toward the spiritual growth of his wife. Far from badgering his wife or tearing her down with his speech, a loving husband is to remind his wife of God’s love and minister grace for her blessing and increased spiritual joy.

It is obvious that a husband’s words will be of particular importance. For this reason, Paul admonishes, “do not be harsh with them” (Col. 3:19). When two sinners live closely together, there will be frustration and sometimes anger, so Christian husbands have a duty to restrain

their passions and cultivate inward grace. It is perhaps in these commands for men to love and avoid harshness—in an ancient world that cultivated exactly the opposite—that Paul was at his most countercultural. Christian men are to remember that their wives are precious to the Lord and treat them accordingly. John Stott says of the godly husband: His headship will never be used to suppress his wife. He longs to see her liberated from everything which spoils her true feminine identity and growing towards that ‘glory’, that perfection of fulfilled personhood which will be the final destiny of all those whom Christ redeems. To this end Christ gave himself. To this end too the husband gives himself in love.

A similar warning is given to men as fathers: “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Col. 3:21). Men live and work in a world without pity where the hammer comes down hard. But these attitudes are not to be brought back into the Christian home. Parental authority—especially that of fathers—carries an obligation to godliness and love. After all, fathers are also sons under God’s authority and must therefore submit to and obey his Word!

Paul further warns parents against embittering or exasperating their children: “Fathers, do not provoke your children” (Col. 3:21). MacArthur explains, “To provoke ... to anger suggests a repeated, ongoing pattern of treatment that gradually builds up a deep-seated anger and resentment that boils over in outward hostility.” This is a much-needed warning today. Parental authority must be calculated to inspire a glad obedience rather than resentful compliance.

In Paul’s Roman world, a father had absolute control over his children. He could punish them savagely, sell them into slavery, or even put them to death. But a Christian father accepts the limits of God’s Word and pleases the Lord by imitating his paternal generosity and kindness, taking care not to provoke frustration or bitterness in his children.

Children are provoked under a harsh approach to discipline that conveys personal contempt or even hatred. Martin Luther observed: “Spare the rod and spoil the child—that is true. But beside the rod keep an apple to give him when he has done well.” Children are discouraged when they are never praised and when nothing they can do will ever meet their parents’ expectations. Children are embittered by unfairness, favoritism, constant outbursts of anger, and especially physical, verbal, or—God forbid—even sexual abuse. God grants parents authority in stewardship to him and for the children’s blessing and protection, not to subject them to a parent’s rage or perverse pleasure.

Fathers nurture their children by giving them attention, time, and affection. This means getting on our knees to play games with little kids, throwing the ball in the backyard, taking an interest in ballet, reading stories, and giving hugs. Mothers are called to nurture, too, through kind and encouraging words. As a boy, the famous painter Benjamin West was left in charge of his little sister, Sally. While playing, he discovered some colored ink. He decided to paint Sally’s portrait and in the process spread inkblots everywhere. When his mother returned, she saw a horrific mess, but she also saw the picture. She picked it up and said, “Why, it’s Sally!” and kissed her

son. Years later, West would say, “My mother’s kiss made me a painter.” When parents praise their children and recognize their gifts, they help to shape their calling and identity.

CONCLUSION

There are few greater needs for our world today than the example of loving and godly families that live under God’s wise and benevolent rule. But who is responsible for such a family? Paul’s answer is “Everybody!” Wives are responsible to respect and help their husbands. Children are responsible to obey their parents. Husbands and fathers are especially responsible, as those to whom headship is committed, to love their wives and children.

God’s way of life is the best way, since out of his goodness he designed and commanded the biblical pattern of life. What is more, as we earlier observed, he gives the power to do it! As Christians, we “have died” to sin (Col. 3:3) and “have been raised with Christ” (v. 1) in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that through prayer and God’s Word we receive strength from on high to live for God’s pleasure.

And it all has a great purpose. Why should a Christian wife submit to her husband, a Christian child obey his or her parents, and a Christian husband love his wife and children? Because it works? It certainly does. But we have a higher privilege. As God people, “chosen ones, holy and beloved” (Col. 3:12), we have the privilege of giving pleasure to the Creator of the universe, who is also the heavenly Father who sent his Son to die for our sins. “Why do you live this way?” astonished onlookers may ask. The Christian answers with reference to Colossians 3:17: “Because with thankfulness in my heart, I want to ‘do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.’ ”

Lesson 19 (8-16-26)

Grace in the Workplace (Colossians 3:22 – 4:1)

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

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

- Colossians 3:22 – 4:1 ESV

Summary

The amazing transformation that the believer experiences also impacts the relationship of slaves to masters and masters to slaves. Christian slaves should offer their masters total obedience. They must not work diligently only when the master is watching and then slack off as soon as he turns his back; they should consistently give their best in the master's service. This shows they are sincere rather than phony. It also displays reverence for the Lord, the true master whom they ultimately serve. Slaves should serve the Lord by working hard and to the very best of their ability. Though the human master may not properly reward such service, the heavenly Master will. Faithful slaves will inherit the Master's estate, a reward that far exceeds anything the earthly master could possibly offer.

Paul does not call for the absolute abolition of slavery in the Roman Empire. Given the relatively small size and influence of the church at the time, such a call would have been futile. However, he did call for the practical abolition of slavery. Christian masters were to pay their slaves a fair wage for their labor, a wage equitable to what a free person would receive for the same work. This essentially transformed the slave-master relationship into an employee-employer relationship. Paul's letter to Philemon offers a detailed description of this transformed relationship. There Paul urged Philemon to view Onesimus "no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother" (Phm 16).¹

Observation Questions (*What does the text say?*)

1. What two groups of people are directly addressed in this passage?
2. What command is given to bondservants?
3. How are bondservants instructed not to work?
4. What attitude are bondservants supposed to have as they work?
5. What phrase describes the sincerity expected from workers?

¹ Charles L. Quarles, "Colossians," in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1659.

6. What are believers commanded to do “heartily”?
7. For whom are believers ultimately working according to the passage?
8. What reward is promised to faithful workers?
9. What warning is given to wrongdoers?
10. What command is given to masters in 4:1?

Interpretation Questions (*What does the text mean?*)

1. What principles from this passage apply to modern work relationships?
2. What does it mean to obey “with sincerity of heart”?
3. Why does Paul warn against “eye-service” and people-pleasing?
4. How does working “for the Lord” transform everyday labor?
5. What does this passage teach about integrity and character?
6. Why is the promise of an eternal inheritance significant?
7. What does Paul mean when he says “you are serving the Lord Christ”?
8. How does God’s impartial justice appear in this passage?
9. Why are masters commanded to act justly and fairly?
10. How does this passage challenge both workers and those in authority to honor Christ?

Application Questions (*How should this change us personally and as a church?*)

1. Do I work with integrity even when no one is watching?
2. Am I more concerned with pleasing people or honoring Christ in my work?
3. How can I approach everyday responsibilities as service to the Lord?
4. In what ways do I need greater sincerity, diligence, or faithfulness?
5. If I am in leadership, do I treat others fairly, respectfully, and justly?
6. How can Christian employers or leaders reflect Christ in the way they lead?
7. Does our church encourage believers to honor Christ in their workplaces and responsibilities?
8. How can believers support and encourage one another in difficult work situations?
9. What attitudes or habits in my work life need to change in light of this passage?
10. What would change in workplaces, homes, and churches if believers truly worked “for the Lord and not for men”?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *Richard D. Phillips, Colossians & Philemon*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2024), 276–285.]

Some of the best compliments ever paid to Jesus were spoken by those who opposed him. Among the things said in his trial and at the cross are these: “I find no guilt in him” (Pilate, John

19:4); “He saved others; let him save himself” (Jewish rulers, Luke 23:35); “Hail, King of the Jews!” (soldiers, Mark 15:18); and “He trusts in God; let God deliver him now” (chief priests, Matt. 27:43). These statements were all true, from the mouths of Jesus’ enemies.

Something similar happened with the apostle Paul and his friends. Paul and Silas were driven from Thessalonica by a mob that cried, “These men ... have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). What an apt description of the kind of people that Christians are called to be! In one respect, this was untrue, as our study of Paul’s teaching on the home and the workplace shows. Paul was not primarily a social revolutionary; his mission was to save sinners and found churches. Having previously urged wives to submit to their husbands and children to obey their parents, Paul now teaches slaves to obey their masters. So Paul was not revolting against the social order. But in another respect, his accusers were right about the Christians’ turning the world upside down, for where Jesus reigns, everything is transformed by his grace and holiness. In Christ, marriage involves mutual ministry and love, parenting calls for loving stewardship, and even slavery is brought under the realm of God’s grace.

AND CHRISTIANITY

When Paul instructs Christian slaves (the primary meaning of the Greek word *doulos*), he turns to the final members of the ancient household, which frequently consisted of a husband, a wife, children, and slaves. We tend to think of slavery through the lens of nineteenth-century slavery in the American South. Yet despite similarities, slavery in the ancient world was significantly different. In the Roman Empire, almost half the population was in slavery to the other half. In cities such as Rome, citizens tended not to work; work was done by slaves, much as it is done largely by machines today. Slavery was not based on race. People of all ethnicities became slaves by birth, through conquest, or for economic reasons. By Paul’s time, important reforms had taken root and reduced a great deal of the cruelty suffered by slaves. Slaves and freemen interacted socially. Slaves held high government positions and operated prosperous businesses. Moreover, slavery was seldom permanent. In Paul’s time, almost half of all slaves received freedom by the age of thirty.

This ancient comparison shows how odious race-based, chattel slavery was in America and helps us to understand the New Testament’s view of this cruel institution. Some have argued that the apostle Paul sent a mixed message about slavery, since he taught slaves to obey their masters. On one occasion, Paul converted a fugitive slave named Onesimus and then sent him back into servitude. But Paul also sent a letter to Philemon, the slave’s master, requesting that he be set free. First Timothy 1:10 shows that Paul was clearly opposed to slavery, since he lists “enslavers” among those who live contrary to Christianity. Further, Paul undermined the beliefs on which slavery relies. Contrary to ancient views, Paul did not consider slaves to be inferior people. In fact, he insisted that they are entitled before God to fair and just treatment. Paul further denied that there was any distinction of status in the church between slave and free: “Here there is not ... slave [or] free; but Christ is all, and in all” (Col. 3:11).

So why did Paul not attack the institution more vigorously? For one thing, the Christians in Paul's day were politically insignificant and therefore unable to change the structure of society. Moreover, Christianity is a spiritual movement, not a political one, as Jesus informed Pontius Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). The Christians' goal was to live within their evil society in a godly way and to lead others to Jesus. Yet over the generations, as Christianity spread and gained influence, its presence always subverted tyranny, conflict, and hatred. Philip Ryken explains: "Christianity eventually did become the single greatest force in history for the eradication of slavery.... Wherever Christianity has come to dominate a culture, the institution of slavery has been legally eliminated."

Rather than advocating a political strategy for abolition, Paul labored to set people free not *from* but *in* conditions such as slavery. His gospel proclaimed liberty regardless of circumstances, because God's grace frees us from the guilt and power of sin. Still, Paul encouraged slaves to seek their freedom whenever possible, just as Christians are always free to better our lives (1 Cor. 7:21). At the same time, just as God's grace gives us freedom from sin, the lordship of Christ makes us willing servants—literally, "slaves"—of Jesus as our loving Master. Paul thus wrote: "He who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. You were bought with a price" (vv. 22–23). William Barclay therefore summarizes Paul's appeal to Christian slaves: "[Paul] does not tell them to rebel; he tells them to be Christians where they are." This makes Paul's teaching to ancient slaves directly transferable to our working lives today. Just as with wives and husbands, and children and parents, Paul tells Christians of their duty as slaves and masters or, in our terms, as employees and employers.

THE CHRISTIAN _____

When Paul's letter was read in the church at Colossae, Christian slaves and Christian masters would be gathered together. In keeping with the "subordinationist ethic" given to wives and children—and embraced by all Christians in submission to God—Paul has a message for the back row. In giving them Christian instruction, he was conveying significance and respect to those who are considered least in the world. As far as God is concerned, servants do not take a back seat to anyone.

It is conventional for Paul's teaching to ancient slaves to be applied to Christian employees today—and for good reason, since "slave" can also be translated as "servant." So what Paul wrote to ancient slaves benefits virtually all believers, since few of us will ever reach the place in life at which we do not work for some other person. So much of our work—and thus of our lives and our Christian witness—takes place as servants under the authority of some earthly boss. Furthermore, and in any case, our workplace conduct is under Christ's rule.

Paul's instruction is clear and direct—a Christian servant should first be obedient: "Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters" (Col. 3:22). The apostle's word for "obey" is the same one given to children with regard to their parents. It means to "pay attention to" or "follow instructions." As with children, servants are to obey "in everything," yielding obedience to all commands, whether pleasant or not. The obvious limit on

this obedience occurs when a master gives commands that involve sin, since God is the highest authority for everyone. Therefore, if a boss urges a Christian to lie to customers, to use foul language, or to engage in sexual sin, the Christian must refuse, even if he or she will suffer unjustly (Matt. 10:28). Keeping this limitation in mind, Christian workers are to be willing subordinates, showing initiative in accomplishing their tasks and in working toward goals assigned to them. A boss who hires a Christian should be able to expect an honest day's work for an honest day's pay.

Furthermore, Christians are to show respect to their employers. Paul tells the slaves to obey, "fearing the Lord" (Col. 3:22), meaning that believers offer respect out of reverence to God. At least some of Paul's enslaved readers would have been owned by cruel, unjust, or inept masters, just as many Christians work for similar people today. Paul would not be unaware of this. Furthermore, slaves were usually integral parts of the master's household, so they would have seen him without his socks on, so to speak. The slave would have heard the master's wife nagging, his children complaining, and his quarrels with his neighbors. Some would have been better educated, more able, and more moral than their masters. This is why in 1 Timothy 6:1 Paul tells slaves to "regard their own masters as worthy of all honor." Their showing of honor, or respect, was to be a conscious act, just as soldiers in the army salute the uniform regardless of the person who wears it. Paul explained why we should show such respect, according to a person's station in life: "so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled" (1 Tim. 6:1). If Christianity was seen to promote revolution and disrespect, then an excuse would be given to suppress or despise its teaching.

The Bible provides excellent examples of obedient, godly servants. Think of Joseph, who worked as a slave in Potiphar's household, and later as a servant to Pharaoh. These were wicked men, but Joseph served them loyally and well. Because of God's blessing on Joseph's work, Potiphar placed all his affairs into his hands and Pharaoh showed favor to God's people. Such elevation should be common among Christians. Daniel served faithfully in the court of the Babylonian king who had destroyed Jerusalem. He reasoned that God had put him in that place and that he represented the Lord. Christians should exercise the same reasoning today, and our work ethic should reflect positively on the Christian faith. When Naaman the Syrian presented himself to the prophet Elisha for healing, he explained that he had learned about the Lord from an Israelite slave girl in his household who showed him mercy (2 Kings 5:2–3). Likewise, our work as Christian servants should create openings for a receptive hearing of the gospel.

Paul next uses an expression that he may have coined himself, warning Christians to work not "by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord" (Col. 3:22). Non-Christian slaves might justify halfhearted labor by their unfair lot in life. But the Christian knows that his or her lot has been apportioned by a wise and holy God, who loves his children and always knows best. Believers therefore offer their labor up to God and give their very best, as Paul urges: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men" (v. 23). R. Kent Hughes comments: "Eye-service results in half-done jobs. The room is swept, but the dirt is brushed under the carpet. Work breaks extend until the boss returns." The Christian, in contrast, offers up sincere and well-done work, as a way of honoring the Lord, whether or

not the boss will ever notice it. Our work has the dignity of being offered up to God, no matter what work it is. William Hendriksen points out that by working heartily to the Lord, and not merely for men, the Christian “slave was promoting the cause and honor of his Lord.” Hughes notes that this honor to God was seen in the fact that “Christian slaves invariably brought higher prices in the slave market.”⁶ Today, the experience of an employer in having Christians work for the company ought to make him or her eager to hire Christians again.

Paul sums up the perspective of ancient slaves and today’s employees: “You are serving the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:24). This is the honor that the Christian faith gives to every believer, whether slave or free. When William Carey was asked what his business was, he replied, “My business is serving the Lord, and I make shoes to pay expenses.” This reasoning explains why Paul called employers our “earthly masters” (Col. 3:22). Christians are to obey fleshly masters, but we really serve our heavenly Master, Jesus Christ, who loved us and died for our sins. Thus, Christians devote themselves not so much to gaining riches or promotion, but to “doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will” (Eph. 6:6–7). John Calvin points out the infinite dignity of even slave labor when offered in faith to Jesus: “their services are acceptable to Christ, as though they had been rendered to him.”

In addition to calling for our very best, our service to Christ will have an aim at winning a hearing for the gospel so that fellow workers and bosses may be saved by believing in Jesus. In Titus 2:10, Paul called Christians to work “so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.” In short, Paul urges Christian slaves and employees to adopt an eternal perspective on their work.

This eternal perspective provides the motivation of “knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward” (Col. 3:24). The Bible teaches rewards in heaven for service to Christ on earth (Matt. 6:20). How wonderful Paul’s words would have sounded in the ears of Christian slaves, since he offers them not merely a “reward” but “the inheritance.” Roman slaves were not permitted to inherit; they had to be set free first. But in Christ, believers are all given the status of firstborn sons, and thus we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:17) of the glory of the age to come.

Paul further points out that God’s justice will win out in the end: “For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done” (Col. 3:25). Scholars debate whether this comment is made with respect to disobedient slaves or to harsh masters. In both cases, the point is well made. A Christian slave may submit to cruel treatment, knowing that God’s judgment will avenge his suffering. More likely, however, Paul is warning Christian slaves not to think that the Lord’s sympathy relieves them of their duty. Paul writes that “there is no partiality,” a claim that suggests that slaves will be held to the same standard by which God will judge their masters.

How many reasons Christian servants have to offer wholehearted work to our earthly masters as it is offered in faith to our heavenly Lord! We have the dignity of honoring God, the pleasure of serving Christ, the blessing of commending the gospel, an anticipation of heavenly reward,

and the accountability that comes from divine discipline. To a slave in Paul's time, this appeal to obedience offered true emancipation from the dehumanizing effects of bondage. To Christians today, the biblical perspective on work gives us a sense of purpose in all labor, whether menial or exalted.

THE CHRISTIAN _____

We can imagine that when Paul's letter was read in the Colossian church, a sense of conviction and resolve spread over the faces of the slaves he had addressed. Now he turns to their Christian masters, commanding them in the presence of their slaves, whose faces must have shown a joyful interest, "Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven" (Col. 4:1).

In the parallel passage of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells masters to "do the same to them" (Eph. 6:9), indicating that employers should treat their employees in the manner that they would also want to be treated. Hughes calls this the "Managerial Golden Rule," to treat employees as you wish to be treated. He writes: "If you want *respect*, show respect. If you want *sincerity*, be sincere. If you want *conscientiousness*, you be the same. If you want *pleasantness*, model pleasantness." Hendriksen summarizes Paul's meaning: "Promote the welfare of your slaves as you expect them to promote yours. Show the same interest in them and in their affairs as you hope they will show in you and your affairs."¹⁰

We noted earlier that Paul challenged prevailing views about slavery by insisting on human rights for slaves. We see this insistence as Paul commands masters to "treat your bondservants justly and fairly" (Col. 4:1). The word "justly" means "righteously," in keeping with God's law. Remembering the second table of the Ten Commandments, which teaches us how to love our fellow men and women, bosses are to be caring and honest, while fairly compensating their workers. Just as an honest day's pay calls for an honest day's work, so it works the other way: the worker deserves his wages. Here is one way that Christianity challenges the tenets of capitalism: workers are not merely to be paid what the market bears, but their compensation should reflect the value of their contributions. A just boss will further ensure that workers are not mistreated and that they are given the tools to succeed. Paul adds that workers should be treated "fairly," meaning "equally." Here was a radical challenge that must have raised the slaves' eyebrows! Paul means that the servants are the equals of their masters, and therefore worthy of humane treatment and goodwill.

Whenever we are given authority over others, we tend to think ourselves superior to them. "Power corrupts," it is said, and many people become abusive when they are given authority. Paul therefore points out not only that masters are equal with their slaves but further that they both stand in a place of submission to God: "knowing that you also have a Master in heaven" (Col. 4:1). Here is the difference between Christian teaching and the similar advice given today by secular management consultants. Both recognize that enlightened leadership is more effective, but the Bible adds the dimension of divine accountability. Just as the Lord holds his slaves to account for their obedience, he also holds the master to account for his treatment.

In Colossians, Paul warned the slaves that “there is no partiality” (Col. 3:25), but in Ephesians it was the masters who were told that “there is no partiality with [God]” (Eph. 6:9). God is not concerned with human differences; he expects all of us to do what is right according to his will. No luxury office suite, no badge of rank, and no stock portfolio impresses the Lord of glory. God calls on everyone, high and low, “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic. 6:8). Indeed, God reserves a particular measure of wrath for cruel and unjust masters. James 5:4 says, “Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.”

CONCLUSION

No doubt, Paul would prefer for Christian masters to free their slaves. When he sent back the runaway Onesimus, he asked Philemon to receive him “no longer as a bondservant [or “slave”] but more than a bondservant [or “slave”], as a beloved brother” (Philem. 16). Yet more important than the removal of this or any other social injustice is the transformation of all of life through the love and the grace of God.

One place to see this reality is Romans chapter 16, where Paul gives personal greetings from Corinth to various people in Rome. At one point, Paul must have taken a breather, for the scribe taking his dictation inserted his own greeting: “I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord” (Rom. 16:22). In the next verse, Paul resumes: “Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you.”

This little gathering tells us much about the early Christians. Gaius must have been a rich man, since he hosted the apostle and the church met in his home, and since he evidently had at least four slaves. As city treasurer, Erastus was a high government official. Archaeologists have found an inscription of his name on a public sidewalk in Corinth. What about Tertius and Quartus? It turns out that slaves in Roman households were named according to their position. The top-ranking slave was Primus (one). Secundus was number two, followed by Tertius (three), Quartus (four), Quintus (five), and so on. This tells us that Tertius and Quartus in Romans 16:22–23 were the number-three and number-four slaves in Gaius’s house. Yet they were not left out by Paul, just as the slaves in Colossae are not left out of this epistle! In the flesh they might be master and slave, but in Christ it was “our brother Quartus”! No wonder Paul could say that in the church there is “neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

Imagine what a difference Christ made in this one household, just as Christ will change our homes and workplaces. Donald Grey Barnhouse imagines an interview with Tertius and Quartus about the difference it made to them. He has them answer this way: One day Paul came into the house of our master, Gaius.... Gaius was transformed. He began to be kind to us. Soon he had Paul tell us about Christ. For two years Paul lived in Corinth, and he came to our house often. We got the bread and the wine ready when the crowd came on Sunday. It made more work for us, but it was delightful. They broke the bread, and we began to eat from the same

loaf as our master. They filled a chalice with wine, and our master sipped it and smiled as he handed it to us. Day after day everything was transformed. He put his hand on us and cried as he spoke of the grace of God that had saved us all. He said that he was our master, but he realized that he had a master, Christ. He wanted to treat us the way Christ treated him. Love transformed our lives.

Where Christ is Lord, all are free and all are servants. Shouldn't it be this way? After all, Jesus himself, who is the Son of God from heaven, declared of his own mission: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28).

Lesson 20 (8-23-26)

Watch and Pray (Colossians 4:2-4)

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

- Colossians 4:2-4 ESV

Summary

Paul begins and ends his letter with an emphasis on prayer. The opening of the letter modeled prayer through his intercession on behalf of the Colossians and his petition for them to know and fulfill God's missional purpose for their lives (1:3–14). The conclusion invites them to join him in prayer, interceding on his behalf in the same way—with a missional purpose in mind.¹

Observation Questions (*What does the text say?*)

1. What command does Paul give concerning prayer?
2. What attitudes are believers to have in prayer?
3. What are believers instructed to do “with thanksgiving”?
4. What specific prayer request does Paul make?
5. What does Paul ask God to open?
6. What is the purpose of the “open door” Paul mentions?
7. What message does Paul want to proclaim?
8. What does Paul call the gospel message?
9. Why does Paul say he is in prison?
10. What does Paul ask prayer for regarding the way he speaks?

Interpretation Questions (*What does the text mean?*)

1. What does it mean to “continue steadfastly” in prayer?
2. Why is watchfulness important in prayer?
3. How does thanksgiving strengthen a believer's prayer life?
4. What does Paul mean by an “open door for the word”?
5. Why does Paul ask for prayer even though he is an apostle?
6. What is “the mystery of Christ” in this passage?
7. Why is bold and clear proclamation of the gospel important?
8. How does this passage connect prayer and evangelism?
9. What does Paul's imprisonment reveal about the cost of following Christ?

¹ R. Scott Pace, “Colossians,” in *Exalting Jesus in Colossians and Philemon*, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2021), 118.

10. How does this passage demonstrate dependence on God for ministry success?

Application Questions (*How should this change us personally and as a church?*)

1. How consistent and steadfast is my prayer life?
2. Do I pray with alertness and thanksgiving, or mainly out of routine?
3. How can I become more intentional in praying for gospel opportunities?
4. Do I regularly pray for pastors, missionaries, and others who proclaim God's Word?
5. Am I willing to speak about Christ when God opens doors for conversation?
6. How can our church grow stronger in corporate prayer?
7. Does our church actively pray for evangelism and gospel advancement?
8. What distractions or attitudes keep me from persistent prayer?
9. How can believers encourage one another toward faithful prayer and witness?
10. What would change in our homes, church, and community if believers devoted themselves to prayer and gospel proclamation?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *Richard D. Phillips, Colossians & Philemon, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2024), 286–295.*]

Starting in Colossians 2:6, the apostle Paul began his practical instruction in this epistle. If we look at the topics that Paul covered, we gain a good idea of what he saw as essential to a healthy Christian life. In Colossians 2:6–15, Paul emphasized doctrinal fidelity by trusting Christ as God's Son and looking to the blood of his cross for forgiveness. In a long section from Colossians 2:16 to 3:11, Paul next covered Christians' turning from sin: not suppressing our lives through a rigid behaviorism, but putting to death sinful desires. Having believed sound doctrine and turned against indwelling sin, Christians further cultivate God's inward grace so that we grow in love and peace through God's Word (Col. 3:12–17). Paul's fourth main practical topic called for biblical order in the home, with family members living together submissively under the rule of Christ (3:18–4:1).

Experienced Christians may wonder whether anything is missing from this compendium of practical Christianity. If we are sound in faith, repenting of sinful desires, and cultivating inward grace through God's Word, and if our families are living under Christ's rule, what else really is there? Paul answers in his final practical section, from Colossians 4:2–6, by urging believers to look outward evangelistically to the unbelieving world through prayer and God's Word.

An example of a church that was doing well in most areas apart from evangelism is the Ephesian church to which Jesus spoke in Revelation 2:1–7, about twenty years after Paul's death. Christ praised this church for its good works, its opposition to sin, and its commitment to sound doctrine. These are all marks of a good church. But Jesus had one issue against the

Ephesians: “you have abandoned the love you had at first” (Rev. 2:4). This likely refers to the believers’ losing their fervor for spreading the gospel. Jesus calls the Ephesians to repent, warning, “If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place” (v. 5).

Paul’s final charge to the Colossians anticipates this problem by urging the church not to become inwardly focused but to look outward in zealous prayer and bold preaching so that sinners will be saved. Mark Johnston notes that the Colossian situation “was not dissimilar to what happens in many churches ... [that] become so caught up with the internal affairs and problems of the church that they lose sight of their calling to be salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13–16).”

PRAYER-EMPOWERED

Paul’s approach in Colossians 4:2–6 indicates that he saw the gospel outreach of a church centered on its witness of God’s Word. In all his letters, Paul consistently shows a reliance on prayer as the means by which Christians empower their witness. It is with the preaching of the church in mind that he adds, “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2).

Throughout his letters, Paul highlights his own prayers for the blessing of God on his gospel ministry and on those to whom he is writing. In Romans 1:10, Paul wrote of praying for the opportunity to travel to Rome in order to preach. In Ephesians 1:16–19, Paul concludes his remarkable teaching on God’s sovereign grace by telling of his prayers for the spiritual enlightenment of his readers: “that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.” After delivering his important teaching on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:10–18, Paul asks the believers to labor in prayer for God’s power to attend his preaching. His example, as well as his writing, argues that prayer is simply essential for the success of a gospel ministry.

Paul understood prayer as necessary for the simple reason that he labored toward a supernatural work in the lives of his hearers that only God can accomplish, and that God is pleased to perform in answer to prayer. In Colossians 4:12, the apostle cites the notable example of Epaphras, who was the founder of the Colossian church, “always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.” Dick Lucas summarizes Paul’s understanding: “Effective evangelism begins with persevering prayer.”

Given the necessity of prayer for any successful gospel ministry, Paul invites his readers to enter into this work by praying for him and his fellow laborers: “At the same time, pray also for us” (Col. 4:3). By “us,” Paul refers to those men called by God to the ministry of the gospel. John Davenant writes, “Many things are to be prayed for from Almighty God, both on our own account and that of others: but the Apostle ... excites the Colossians to seek one great and necessary thing, namely, the propagation and increase of the Gospel.”

It is telling that Paul includes himself among those servants of God who can accomplish his work only through the prayers of fellow believers. If there was one person who we might think would conquer in his preaching of God's Word sheerly through his passion, his force of argument, and even a special divine calling, it would be the famous apostle. But he disabuses us of any such notion. Paul knows that for all our other resources, success in preaching the gospel relies on God's sovereign blessing for which the church must pray. He wrote to the Corinthians, "You also must help us by prayer" (2 Cor. 1:11). Johnston correctly states, "No preacher of the gospel or leader in the church is beyond needing the help of all God's people as they pray."

Paul specifies two prayer requests for his ministry, both of which are amplified in other letters. First, the believers should pray "that God may open to us a door for the word" (Col. 4:3). Paul mentions later in Colossians 4:3 that he is writing from prison, but notice that he does not focus his readers' prayer on his physical release or any other personal need. He urges prayer, instead, for opportunities to bear testimony to Christ. Paul used similar language in 1 Corinthians 16:9, where he related that "a wide door for effective work has opened to me." Jesus likewise said to the church in Philadelphia, "Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut" (Rev. 3:8). Paul asks for prayers so that the Lord will give the same blessing in Rome: an open door for the gospel.

Churches today—especially those in metropolitan areas—are in a similar situation to Paul in that only prayer will open doors to ministry in the city. A church may be surrounded by people without any effective means of gaining a hearing from them. A fervent commitment to prayer is therefore as essential for evangelism today as in Paul's time. And what is true of the church in its ministry is equally true of Christians in their personal evangelism. Many Christians who desire to share the gospel with friends and family have no idea how to create an opening for a serious spiritual conversation. The first step is to pray for God to give us the opening. If every Christian had at least one person for whom he or she was praying fervently, asking the Lord for an evangelistic opening, our success in spreading the gospel would dramatically improve.

Paul's second prayer request is for the ability "to declare" with boldness and clarity (Col. 4:3). Here is the combination for which Christians should constantly pray: that the Lord would give openings for the gospel and that his servants would capitalize on these opportunities with a faithful, courageous witness of the gospel. Paul spells out this request in more detail in Ephesians 6:19–20, asking for prayer "that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, ... that I may declare it boldly." In praying both for an open door and for bold declaration of the gospel, Paul is asking, more than a mere opportunity, for spiritual power that will be supernaturally effective. If we are to be similarly effective both in the preaching of the church and in the personal evangelism of Christians, we must likewise pray and solicit prayer for God's sovereign blessing on our labors.

Experience concurs with Scripture in showing that God's most useful servants not only were committed to prayer but also were greatly prayed for. R. Kent Hughes tells of how the missionary leader Hudson Taylor observed that one of his mission stations in China was especially effective in reaching people for Christ. He sought to understand why, since many less

successful missionaries were just as able and devoted as this leader. Then, one day in England, Taylor was approached by a man who inquired about the missionary in question. The man had been his college roommate and had committed to praying daily for his work of the gospel. Taylor commented, “Then I knew the answer.” Uniquely effective ministries typically enjoy unusually faithful prayer support. On the other hand, Davenant comments, “Ministers often fail in the work of their vocation, because the people fail in the duty of prayer for them to God.”⁶ Since prayer is the key to gospel success, Paul appeals, “Pray also for us” (Col. 4:3).

TO PRAY FOR

Having noted the necessity of prayer for gospel outreach, we should more briefly reflect on the kind of preaching for which Christians should pray. Paul expands his prayer that he may “declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak” (Col. 4:3–4).

Notice that Paul prays for a general boldness not only in ministry, but specifically in proclaiming “the mystery of Christ.” It is possible for a minister or church to gain the appearance of success by means other than the faithful preaching of Christ and his gospel. But Paul would have preachers declare only what God has disclosed by revelation—which is in part his meaning of “mystery”—as it sets forth Christ in his person and work. B. B. Warfield elaborated: God has not sent us into the world to say the most plausible thing we can think of; to teach men what they already believe. He has sent us to preach unpalatable truths to a world lying in wickedness; apparently absurd truths to men, proud of their intellects; mysterious truths to men who are carnal and cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God.... [We must] assert to the world that it is lost in its sin, and rushing down to an eternal doom; that in Christ alone is there redemption; and through the Spirit alone can man receive this redemption.

Earlier in Colossians, Paul wrote of “the mystery of Christ” as particularly involving the ingathering of Gentile believers into Christ. He wrote in Colossians 1:26–27 that he was called to proclaim “the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints ... 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.” This statement means that faithful preachers must not only declare the gospel facts of sin and redemption but also press upon hearers the opportunity for personal communion with Christ through the marvel of saving faith. Paul seeks spiritual power to preach nothing less than the glory of what it means to know God’s Son in faith and to enter into union with the divine heir of eternal glory.

Notice, further, that Paul prays “that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak” (Col. 4:4). For all his passion, the apostle relies on the exposition of Scripture and the clear explanation of its meaning. Since he depended on God’s sovereign power to save the lost, he explained his method: “We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor. 4:2).

In speaking of clarity, Paul does not mean that he shrinks from teaching doctrine. Some practitioners conclude that a preacher should never use theological terminology, which is presumed to be too difficult for simple listeners. But Christians need to know and should be taught the meaning of biblical terms such as *justification*, *sanctification*, and *atonement*. In fact, those who are excited about God's Word will want to be taught the meaning of biblical theology. What Paul does mean, however, is that Christian preachers should cultivate simplicity in the use of common speech. Consider the Gospel of John, which contains some of the most elevated theology in all of Scripture but employs a relatively small range of vocabulary and uses simple words. Paul urges Christians to pray for preaching that is Christ-centered, biblical, and fervent, and that makes clear the message and meaning of the scriptural text.

Finally, speaking of the preaching for which Christians should pray, Paul notes his total commitment to gospel ministry, "on account of which I am in prison" (Col. 4:3). During this first imprisonment in Rome, Paul was subjected to a form of house arrest that afforded him some liberty. Luke concludes the book of Acts, "He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:30–31). Still, it was because he was preaching Christ that Paul was in confinement at all. His point is not the hindrance of his imprisonment; he wrote instead that "what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ" (Phil. 1:12–13). Faithful gospel ministers will always suffer, and they embrace their trials as the platform from which they declare the unsearchable riches of Christ. G. K. Beale summarizes, "Paul's imprisonment is not a hindrance to the gospel but part of the instrumentation by which Paul is able to spread the gospel in fulfilling his apostolic commission."

Paul therefore urges Christians to pray for preachers who proclaim Christ from the Scriptures, with clarity, and also with a deep personal commitment. John Calvin says of Paul and others like him: He is contented with this one thing, that he may, unconquered and undaunted, persevere in a confession of the gospel; nay more, he fearlessly makes his own life a secondary matter, as compared with the glory of Christ and the spread of the gospel.

HOW TO PRAY _____

In this cause of the gospel, Paul describes the true spirit of prayer that Christians should cultivate for every need: "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2). These instructions apply not only to evangelistic prayer, but also to prayers for every kind of need that Christians face.

First, Paul calls for us to be *persevering in prayer*: "Continue steadfastly in prayer." The Greek word *proskartereō* means to be "devoted to" something. Paul means that Christians should pray and keep on praying, persevering through disappointments, distractions, and fatigue. The Lord calls not merely for fleeting prayers in which we have little investment, but for a persevering commitment that manifests confidence in prayer. College football fans are devoted

to their school team, showing up to every game, following the players, and investing their heart and soul each season. Paul summons Christians to this same attitude toward the missionary work of the gospel, both near and far, showing up in our fervent assault on the treasury of heaven through prayer. Jesus encouraged his people “always to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1) with a parable of a widow who pestered a corrupt official for justice until he relented (v. 3). How much more will the faithful God yield blessings, Jesus urged, when his people do not give up praying for the saving work of his gospel!

That Paul so frequently speaks of persistence in prayer illustrates how hard it is to keep praying. To strengthen weary hearts, Charles Spurgeon supplies four reasons why Christians can be motivated to persist in praying in accordance with God’s will. First, the church should continue in prayer because “God will answer her. It is not possible that God should refuse to hear prayer.... [God] can reverse nature, but he cannot reverse his own nature, and he must do this before he can forbear to hear and answer prayer.” Christians should persevere in prayer, second, because by our prayers “the world will most certainly be blessed.” Spurgeon tells of walking up to a building on fire, reflecting: “The world is as it were wrapped in flames of the fire of sin, and the Church of God must quench those flames” through our gospel witness and prayer. Third, you must persist in prayer because “souls shall be saved as the result of your entreaties.” I recently learned that after a believing cousin visited me in my early twenties, he committed to pray for my conversion and kept praying for a decade. How grateful I am that he did! And what a debt I owe to a family member who prayed constantly for my soul! Fourth, Spurgeon concludes that we must persist in prayer “because prayer is a great weapon of attack against the error and wickedness of the world.” James 5:15 says: “The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” How great is the calamity when the verse that more accurately describes our prayer commitment is James 4:2: “You do not have, because you do not ask.”

In addition to persevering, Paul calls believers, second, to be *alert in prayer*: “being watchful in it” (Col. 4:2). Paul means that we are to pray with an alertness to the situation around us, with its opportunities and threats. Christians are to be informed about the evangelistic and missionary labors of the church, supplying prayers in the cause, as well as attending to the gospel situation surrounding our personal lives. Are we aware of the way that unbelief is advancing in our city or family? Then let us pray against it. Are we alert to stresses and fears that are prompting our neighbors to seek for answers? Let us pray that God will enable us to tell them about Jesus.

When Christians pray, we should especially be alert to see God’s answer, for which we have been waiting expectantly. As Psalm 130:5–6 puts it, “I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, ... more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.” By contrast, an example to avoid occurred when the apostle Peter was arrested with the threat of execution, and the church gathered to pray for his deliverance. God heard their plea and sent an angel to deliver Peter. But when the apostle showed up at the prayer meeting, the believers were so shocked that they thought he was a ghost! When the servant girl who tended the door kept insisting that it was Peter, the believers responded to God’s answer to their prayers by saying,

“You are out of your mind” (Acts 12:15). If we are in our right mind, we will pray with an eye at the door, waiting for God’s answer to knock.

Third, Paul summons his readers to be *thankful in prayer*: “with thanksgiving” (Col. 4:2). We should be motivated to pray in grateful remembrance of how God has previously showered us with blessings, chief of which is the gift of his Son. Davenant adds that we should be thankful as well for prayers that have so far remained unanswered: “For when those things which we seek are deferred, it is done that they may be conferred at the most advantageous time for us; that we may esteem them more when bestowed.” Moreover, knowing that God is loving, mighty, and faithful to answer prayer, we should thankfully pray when God’s answers remain hidden to us, confident that our compassionate Lord is caring for us according to his infinite wisdom and mercy.

CONCLUSION

When Christians read Paul’s appeal for steadfast, watchful, and thankful prayer, we cannot fail to recall the scene with Jesus and his disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus was entering into prayer with his Father, in anguish over the cup of wrath for our sins that he would drain the next day. He therefore exhorted his disciples, “Watch and pray” (Matt. 26:41). Jesus returned from the ordeal to find his disciples not praying but asleep. He commented, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (v. 41).

Are we asleep, distracted, or simply disinterested in the gospel cause by which alone sinners in our time will be redeemed? If so, we can rest assured that Jesus is not distant, but continues to summon his servants under the missionary banner of his gospel to fulfill his Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19–20). So will Jesus be faithful to answer our prayers? He assures us that he will, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (v. 18), and concluding, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (v. 20).

Lesson 21 (8-30-26)

Grace Seasoned With Salt (Colossians 4:5-6)

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.

- Colossians 4:5-6 ESV

Summary

Paul's final exhortation to the Colossians was that they would use wisdom in their interaction with unbelievers (1:9–10). The phrase **making the most** comes from a verb meaning "to buy up," as if finding a bargain. Here it conveys the idea of making the most of one's time spent with unbelievers.¹

Observation Questions (*What does the text say?*)

1. What command does Paul give concerning believers' conduct?
2. Toward whom are believers to walk in wisdom?
3. What does Paul instruct believers to make the best use of?
4. What command does Paul give regarding speech?
5. How often should believers' speech be gracious?
6. What metaphor does Paul use to describe speech?
7. What purpose is given for gracious and wise speech?
8. What type of interactions does Paul seem to have in mind?
9. What relationship exists between wisdom and speech in these verses?
10. What themes are emphasized throughout this passage?

Interpretation Questions (*What does the text mean?*)

1. What does it mean to "walk in wisdom" toward outsiders?
2. Who are the "outsiders" Paul refers to?
3. What does "making the best use of the time" mean in this context?
4. Why is wise conduct important in a believer's witness?
5. What does gracious speech look like in everyday life?
6. What does the phrase "seasoned with salt" suggest about Christian speech?
7. Why should believers be prepared to answer each person appropriately?
8. How can speech reflect the character of Christ?
9. What connection exists between evangelism and everyday conversations?
10. How do these verses challenge believers to live intentionally before unbelievers?

¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Colossians," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1898–1899.

Application Questions (*How should this change us personally and as a church?*)

1. Do my actions and attitudes display wisdom before unbelievers?
2. How do I usually speak to others when I am frustrated, rushed, or challenged?
3. Are my conversations marked by grace, truth, and kindness?
4. How can I better use my time and opportunities for gospel influence?
5. In what situations do I struggle most to speak wisely and graciously?
6. How can I become better prepared to answer questions about my faith?
7. Does our church encourage believers to live as faithful witnesses in everyday life?
8. How can our church better engage outsiders with wisdom, kindness, and truth?
9. What practical habits could help believers communicate more like Christ?
10. What would change in our homes, workplaces, schools, and community if believers consistently lived out these verses?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *Richard D. Phillips, Colossians & Philemon, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2024), 296–305.*]

Having set forth a rich feast of Christology in defense against the Colossian heretics, Paul has offered a primer on the topic of living by grace. In Colossians 3:12, Paul urged us to reason about our lives from the grace that God has shown to us as “chosen ones, holy and beloved.” Because of God’s grace for us in Christ, there should be grace in our hearts (Col. 3:12), in our relationships with fellow believers (vv. 13–15), in our marriages and homes (vv. 13–21), in our working life (3:22–4:1), and finally in our witness to non-Christians (4:2–6). In short, as believers committed to the doctrines of grace, we are to display in our lives the grace of our doctrines. As Paul concludes his portrait of a gracious Christianity, he makes points of special significance to us today for living in a contentious and bitter world when it comes to differences of belief and ideas.

A _____ WITNESS

The image of a Christian’s lifestyle as a walk is pervasive among the apostles, no doubt reflecting Jesus’ own emphasis. Therefore, when Paul calls us to “walk in wisdom toward outsiders” (Col. 4:5), he means that we adopt a lifestyle that is intended to portray the Christian faith in an attractive way.

In promoting a “lifestyle witness,” we must note that a verbal witness to Jesus is always necessary to faith and salvation. First Peter 3:1 speaks of winning converts “without a word” by our conduct, yet Peter clearly intends a gracious life to lead to a conversation in which we give “a reason for the hope that is in [us]” (1 Peter 3:15). A popular expression today urges us, “Always preach Christ, and when necessary use words.” On the positive side, this statement rightly points out that the Christian’s entire life is a commentary on who Jesus is and what he

offers the world. Its danger, however, is in failing to note that the whole point of a Christian's "living witness" is to open a door to a verbal witness to the person and work of Christ.

Once we realize that our witness must always aim toward "speech" (Col. 4:6) about Jesus, we can rightly emphasize the importance of a Christian's living witness—what Paul characterizes as a *walking witness* "in wisdom toward outsiders" (v. 5). Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal noted that people are usually "led to believe not through proof, but through that which is attractive." The Christian's calling in this regard is not to *make* the gospel attractive to outsiders but merely to *display* the wonderfully attractive nature that God's grace already possesses. The way for Christians to win converts in a combative society is to conduct our lives in such a way that weary worldly people will seek an explanation for the better way that we live.

J. C. Ryle notes: There are many quiet, gentle, consistent Christians, who make no show and no noise in the world, and yet insensibly exercise a deep influence for good on all around them. They "win without the Word" (1 Peter 3:1). Their love, their kindness, their sweet temper, their patience, their unselfishness, tell silently on a wide circle, and sow seeds of thought and self-inquiry in many minds. Neither Paul nor Ryle is describing a personality type; instead, they write of a lifestyle that is permeated by the grace that God has shown to us in Christ. Martyn Lloyd-Jones comments: The first Christians conquered the ancient world just by being Christian. It was their love for one another and their type of life that made such an impact upon that pagan world.... That is something to which we are all called and something which we can all do.

Paul speaks of a Christian's walking "in wisdom toward outsiders" (Col. 4:5) in just this spirit. For believers living in the Roman Empire, this wisdom considered the need both to minimize danger from authorities and to maximize the evangelistic impact. John Davenant therefore urged believers to be careful "not to cast any spot of disgrace upon that God whom they worshipped, and the religion which they professed, by living badly." A bad example was given by Israel's King David, who brought disrepute upon the Lord when he committed adultery with Bathsheba. In Romans 2:24, Paul charged Jewish legalists with leaving a similarly poor example by breaking the law that they preached: "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." In our time, the moral corruption and blatant hypocrisy of well-known Christians hinders our witness to the world. By contrast, N. T. Wright observes, "Blameless life lays the foundation for gracious witness."

Wise Christians aim to present the gospel to full advantage by living according to its teaching. Early church apologists such as Justin Martyr and Tertullian were able to argue that, though persecuted, Christians were the Roman emperor's most moral, productive, and loyal servants. Likewise, in a society where the basic structures of society are rapidly collapsing, Christians today should cultivate such a fruitful harmony in our marriages, between parents and children, and in the workplace as to make the ungodly envious. Throughout his letters, Paul does not advise close relationships with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14), yet he knows that we live in near proximity to them. Therefore, non-Christian parents on the Little League baseball team, unbelieving college friends, and neighbors on our streets or in our apartment buildings should be moved to ask about the servant-hearted love on display in our relationships. Harry Ironside

summarizes, “Men ... will not read their Bibles, and we are called upon to live Christ so that as they read us they will see that there is reality in the gospel and the message we preach, because of the change that has come in our lives.”

Paul’s idea of a wise walking witness involves such a gracious display of the gospel in our lives that we give answers to inquirers. At the same time, wisdom urges that opportunities will be presented that we must seize, “making the best use of the time” (Col. 4:5). This phrase translates a Greek word that older versions rightly rendered as “redeem.” The word uses the language of the marketplace in “buying up” opportunities for the gospel. Here we see a corollary to the emphasis on prayer in evangelism made in Colossians 4:2. Christians who are praying for witnessing opportunities to particular people, and for people in general, will be quick to notice when a door has opened for them to speak the saving message of Jesus Christ. We consider what it is like for our friends and neighbors to live in ignorance of the grace that God offers through his Son, and while not forcing Jesus into every conversation, we are more than eager to tell the good news to those who might be interested. Moreover, Christians will learn of events in the lives of friends and neighbors that call for an urgent gospel witness: an impending death, the loss of a job, or some other crisis that “outsiders” to the gospel are unable to handle with genuine hope. In short, Christians realize that conversion to Christ is a supernatural work of God that requires more than a gracious example, but happens always by the power of God’s Word that we are pleased to speak (1 Peter 1:23)...Of all the ways that we can use our time, sharing the gospel is the very best.

A _____ WITNESS

Because a witness to the gospel must eventually involve words, Paul next turns to our speech. He calls us to advance from our walking witness to a *gracious witness* in telling others about Christ: “Let your speech always be gracious” (Col. 4:6)...A literal translation of Colossians 4:6 would be for our “speech always to be in grace.” Various translations render “in grace” as “pleasant,” “attractive,” or “charming.” This nonredemptive grace mirrors the beauty of Christ’s person and the love that motivated his saving work.

When Jesus began his ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth, proclaiming the promised work of the Messiah, “all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth” (Luke 4:22). Around the same time, Jesus came upon a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. While she spoke out of her ignorance of God and from the prejudices of her people, Jesus graciously invited her into salvation: “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again” (John 4:14). When a woman who had been caught in adultery was brought to Jesus, he asked where the witnesses were: “Has no one condemned you?” When she answered, “No one, Lord,” Jesus replied, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more” (8:10–11). Or consider how Jesus spoke to his disciple Peter, after he had denied Jesus three times. Instead of berating his disciple for what they both knew was an abject failure, the resurrected Jesus gave him an opportunity to be fully restored. Jesus asked, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter answered, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus replied, “Tend my sheep” (21:16).

These examples from Jesus did not all involve direct evangelism. They show, however, the gracious kindness that permeated Jesus' speech so that his life bore the fragrance of heaven. In Colossians 3:12–13, Paul urged Christians to cultivate an inner grace that includes “compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,” along with forbearance and forgiveness. Since, as Jesus emphasized, what is in the heart will come out of the mouth (Luke 6:45), our ordinary manner of speaking should display the grace of God within us. Paul thus urged in Ephesians 4:29, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

Boice has worked out practical suggestions for cultivating gracious speech. First, he notes, “our words should be kind.” Most Christians who have followed Christ for some time have encountered believers—often Christian leaders—who treated people disrespectfully and used their words to tear people down. There is something deeply repellent about an abusive mouth speaking to others of God's grace. The apostle James is direct in his rebuke: “From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so” (James 3:10).

Second, Boice notes, our speech should not be arrogant, as if we knew things that we do not or by “pretend[ing] to have answers to questions that we do not actually have.” Job's so-called friends were accused by God of speaking “words without knowledge” (Job 38:2), causing Job to complain, “How long will you torment me and break me in pieces with words?” (19:2). With this aim in mind, Christians should practice the art of listening as well as of speaking. Returning to the image of a dinner conversation, believers should be warned of arrogance if our companion has finished his or her meal but we have talked so much that we have scarcely taken a bite.

Third, a Christian's words “should not be divisive.” Boice writes, “Some people think that in order to defend truth they have to be argumentative.” Yet the aim of a Christian's speech—or internet posting!—is not to win the argument but to win the sinner's mind and heart to Jesus. While we legitimately tear down false doctrines (2 Cor. 10:5), when it comes to our adversaries themselves, we aim to build them up into saving faith.

Notice that Paul calls believers to cultivate gracious speech “always” (Col. 4:6). William Hendriksen comments that this “always” applies “both in addressing a group or in talking to the neighbor, both when conversing with an equal or when replying to someone in authority, to rich and poor alike, not only in proclaiming the message of salvation but also in discussing the weather.”

Christians who are zealous as witnesses for Christ can sometimes lose the ability to talk normally with other people. But Paul urges us to place our effort on the graciousness of our manner in order to facilitate opportunities for our message. The goal is not merely to recite a gospel formula but to engage people as Jesus did, connecting with their humanity and extending a personal grace that will lead to a testimony to the saving grace of God in his Son.

Experience shows that many believers are far from attaining to gracious speech, since this is, in reality, an expression of advanced Christian faith. The apostle James highlighted how dangerous

our speech can be, calling the tongue “a fire, a world of unrighteousness” (James 3:6)—a problem compounded by the reality that “no human being can tame the tongue” (v. 8). James meant that if our hearts are not filled with grace, there is no way to make our speech sweet and uplifting. The only way to fulfill Paul’s call to gracious speech is to submit our hearts to the rule of Christ, asking him to change us inwardly so that we communicate his loving manner outwardly. For this reason, the gospel way to grow in gracious speech—and in effectiveness in gospel witness—was given earlier in Paul’s urging to cultivate the Lord’s inward grace: And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col. 3:15–16)

A _____ WITNESS

In pursuing gracious speech, there is a danger, however, that our witness to Christ would fail to be as pointed as necessary. Paul therefore concludes that a walking witness and a gracious witness must also be a *salty witness*: “seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Col. 4:6).

Paul refers to salt as a seasoning that adds flavor and bite to both food and conversation. Peter O’Brien explains that our “words must not be dull or insipid but should be interesting and judiciously chosen.” Our speech should be thought-provoking and should cut through the grounds of unbelief in a graciously challenging way. F. F. Bruce quotes the salty wit of the second-century apologist Justin Martyr as he engaged a pagan culture. “No right thinking person turns away from true belief to false,” Justin asserted. When it came to persecution, he spoke with spice: “Do what you will, for we are Christians, and Christians do not sacrifice to idols.” Salty Christians speak with conviction in boldly confronting unbelief.

An example of Jesus’ well-seasoned speech came in his nighttime meeting with Nicodemus. The Pharisee had come to Jesus to say how impressed he was and to offer his help. Jesus courteously received him but brooked no thought of needing Nicodemus’s help. Instead, he bluntly informed the scholar that he needed a spiritual rebirth: “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Jesus shows us that our witness must cut to the issue and speak words of truth that apply directly to the situation at hand.

Boice points out three characteristics of speech that is seasoned with salt. First, it should be serious. Boice writes that Jesus “knew that what we say is important and that spiritual matters are of the utmost importance.” For this reason, Paul asked the Colossians to pray for him to boldly and clearly “declare the mystery of Christ” (Col. 4:3). While Christians should be cheerful and kind, we believe that what we say about Christ is desperately important.

Second, Boice notes that “our conversation should be interesting.” Christians have something to contribute to the world, so we should become able to speak about the contemporary situation from a gospel perspective. A mature Christian does more than “reflect the warmed-

over view or hackneyed clichés of the gray, dull world around them. Their minds are alive with new ideas, and their conversation is provocative and intriguing.”

A third feature of seasoned speech is that it should be discerning. Paul concludes with this exhortation: “that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Col. 4:6). When I was a young tank officer in the Army, I was taught always to consider how I would defend or attack any piece of ground I came upon. Likewise, Christians should be thinking about the right way to introduce the gospel to a particular person. What a difference there is between a proud person and someone who is downcast when it comes to gospel proclamation. Is a person caught up in worshiping the idols of the world? Is he growing bitter over the hardships of life? Is her unbelief driven by false intellectual philosophy? Has he simply never thought deeply about the real issues of life? By taking the time to consider the grounds of a person’s unbelief, praying to God for wisdom and insight, we may present a bright witness that is calculated to shine the gospel on the unbelieving heart.

Of course, every Christian must know how to communicate the biblical gospel of Jesus in order to apply it wisely to particular people. Peter thus urges us to always be “prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). Do we know the essential gospel truths of Jesus as God’s Son and as the Savior sent into the world to atone for our sins by his blood? Can we cite biblical claims that we stand in judgment before God because of sin but are freely justified by God’s grace through faith? Can we explain to others our hope for eternal life? If we cannot present the basics of the gospel, we will never exert the saltlike influence in our world that will enable our speech to lead sinners to Christ.

CONCLUSION

As Paul concludes his basic Christian instruction before his final comments and greetings, we realize how much every Christian counts to God and to the work of the gospel. Do you realize that the Lord has prepared appointments for you to share the gospel that no one else can or will provide? How urgent, then, is Paul’s call for us to cultivate gracious, seasoned speech that seizes the opportunities before the day when every person stands in judgment before a holy God. Your witness matters! This means, of course, that your manner of living matters. And it means that the grace in your heart that you either cultivate or do not cultivate by the Word of God and in prayer will in large part determine the significance of your witness for eternity.

Lesson 22 (9-6-26)

How to Invest in God's Kingdom (Colossians 4:7-18)

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

¹⁰Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹and 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. ¹²Epaphras, 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. ¹³For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. ¹⁴Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. ¹⁵Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.”

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

- Colossians 4:7-18 ESV

Summary

As Paul closes Colossians, he encloses with his letter a verbal group photograph. He includes in it a number of those who helped him in his ministry while he was imprisoned at Rome. He gives recognition to some of the unsung heroes of the New Testament, and by so doing uses them as an encouragement to those who read this letter. This section adds a warm, personal touch to what has been largely a doctrinal letter...That many of those mentioned had stuck with Paul for years indicates the tremendous loyalty he inspired. To Paul, these people were indispensable assets to his ministry. He knew well that he could not do it alone; no one can. God's leaders have always depended on others to support them in their work.¹

Observation Questions (*What does the text say?*)

1. Which individuals are mentioned by name in this passage?
2. What descriptions does Paul give of Tychicus?
3. Why is Tychicus being sent to the Colossians?
4. What does Paul say about Onesimus?
5. Which fellow workers are identified as being with Paul?

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Colossians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 190.

6. What is said about Epaphras and his prayers for the church?
7. Which individuals send greetings to the Colossians?
8. What instructions are given regarding the reading of Paul's letter?
9. What message does Paul give to Archippus?
10. How does Paul conclude the letter?

Interpretation Questions (*What does the text mean?*)

1. What do Paul's descriptions of Tychicus and Onesimus reveal about Christian service?
2. Why is encouragement an important ministry within the church?
3. What can we learn from Epaphras's commitment to prayer?
4. What does it mean that Epaphras is "struggling" or "laboring" in prayer for believers?
5. Why was it important for Paul's letters to be shared among churches?
6. What does Paul's instruction to Archippus teach about faithfulness in ministry?
7. How does this passage demonstrate the value of teamwork in gospel ministry?
8. What can we learn from the diversity of people serving alongside Paul?
9. Why does Paul mention his imprisonment at the end of the letter?
10. How does this closing section reinforce the themes of Christian community and mutual care?

Application Questions (*How should this change us personally and as a church?*)

1. Am I known for faithfulness, encouragement, and service like the believers Paul commends?
2. How can I better encourage and strengthen fellow Christians?
3. How consistent and earnest am I in praying for the spiritual growth of others?
4. What ministry or responsibility has God entrusted to me that I need to fulfill more faithfully?
5. Do I view myself as part of a team working together for the gospel?
6. How can our church better recognize and support faithful servants who work behind the scenes?
7. Does our church prioritize prayer for spiritual maturity as Epaphras did?
8. How can our church strengthen partnerships in ministry and missions?
9. In what ways can we encourage one another to persevere through hardship and opposition?
10. What would change in our church if every member sought to serve faithfully, pray fervently, and encourage others as seen in this passage?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *R. Scott Pace, "Colossians," in Exalting Jesus in Colossians and Philemon, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2021), 130–143.*]

Over the years our nation's investment market has demonstrated its volatility through several notable downturns. Historical references like "Black Thursday," with regard to the stock market crash of 1929 that spawned the Great Depression, or "Black Monday," in 1987 when the global economy suffered massive losses, are reminders of its instability and unreliable nature. Other significant occurrences, like the "dot-com" setback of 2000, the economy collapse in 2008, and even the major losses due to the coronavirus pandemic provide more recent examples of the ephemeral nature of earthly investments.

While cautionary reminders of the fleeting nature of wealth and the importance of wise financial planning are appropriate, perhaps there is a more significant investment strategy to consider. In God's economy the foundational principle of reaping and sowing is as reliable as the law of gravity (Gal 6:7–9). Concepts like *return on investment* are not random or theoretical (2 Cor 9:6), and God provides the ultimate *investment protection* from the unforeseen and unfortunate circumstances of this life (Matt 6:19–20). Beyond these important distinctions, perhaps the greatest differences are the commodities and measure of success in God's economy. Instead of investing in products, we are called to invest in people. We are not building a company; we are building a kingdom. Rather than marketing to recruit people, we are mobilizing to rescue people. And instead of yielding earthly revenue, we are harvesting an eternal return!

As in the case of the stock market in our country, many people are aware of God's economy but are not exactly sure how to maximize their investments. Paul's letter to the Colossians offers some insight since it represents a deposit of spiritual capital into their personal growth fund. The concluding passage essentially provides the strategic model for success as they learn how to invest in others to produce fruitful returns.

The primary thrust of the passage, in both style and substance, is summarized by Paul's "purpose" for sending Tychicus, "that he may encourage your hearts" (v. 8). Paul's tone is uplifting and motivating, and the content of what he shares is a clear expression of sincere love and support. The evidence of his pastoral concern would provide the Colossians with the inspiration they needed to denounce the heresy of the false teachers and to affirm their loyalty to the lordship of Christ. His pastoral instruction would ensure their continued growth and success as they learned to invest in others the way he and his ministry team invested in them.

Structurally, the passage has four primary components that sequentially flow together to form the conclusion: an introduction of the messengers (vv. 7–9); greetings from Paul's coworkers (vv. 10–14); instructions and greetings to others (vv. 15–17); and a final salutation (v. 18; O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 246). In total Paul mentions nine names, and each segment includes multiple individuals that occupy a particular role. These verses follow the typical closing pattern of personal salutations in a biblical letter while also accomplishing a final instructional purpose.

While his attention is directed toward others, Paul begins and ends this concluding section of his letter with a reference to his imprisonment (vv. 7, 9, 18). The apostle simultaneously

provides an update for the Colossians on his circumstances and delivers one last word of exhortation. By way of example, Paul's life and ministry reflect a selfless heart through his sincere concern for them, provide a tangible invitation for the church to join him in suffering for the cause, and offer them assurance of Christ's faithfulness no matter what lies in store for them. In addition, his affirmation of others establishes the paradigm for personal investment that God desires each of us to follow. As members of the body of Christ, we are called to cooperate and collaborate as we serve Jesus and partner with others to fulfill his mission and build his kingdom.

We Should _____ Others to Serve Christ (4:7–9)

The sign of any good leader is knowing how to motivate and mobilize others. It requires an organized understanding of the mission, an insightful awareness of the people around you, and the character credibility to lead them. Paul's dedication to the mission and his personal investment in others attracted willing servants who partnered with him in a variety of ways.

In these verses Paul specifically mentions two such partners whom he enlisted to serve Christ—Tychicus and Onesimus. Their descriptions parallel each other as he identifies three attributes of each that affirm their value and endorse their acceptance. In addition, their shared responsibility to update the Colossians on Paul's situation highlights their significance and bookends the passage (vv. 7, 9). For contemporary believers, his endorsement of these two "faithful" brothers underscores the importance of our responsibility to enlist others to serve Christ.

Enlist Others to Be Ministers of Christ (4:7–9)

The Great Commission is the primary marching order from King Jesus for every Christian (Matt 28:18–20). While this command is most commonly associated with our evangelistic efforts, the responsibility to "make disciples" cannot be reduced to sharing Christ and inviting others to respond. Jesus's invitation to those he encountered began with a spiritual conversion (John 3:3) that resulted in a call to "follow [him]" through a pattern of service (Matt 20:26–28) and personal surrender (Matt 16:24–27).

Paul helped Tychicus and Onesimus understand the practical outworking of their salvation by enlisting them to serve as ministers for Christ. Tychicus was from Asia and accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). He spent considerable time with Paul during his Roman imprisonment and was a close enough associate to be able to "tell ... all the news about [him]" (Col 4:7). Paul's description of him as a "dearly loved brother" communicated his personal affection for him and the familial depth of their relationship as siblings in the Lord. Most importantly, it commended his status to them as an adopted member of God's family (cf. 1:2) and co-laborer in Christ.

He also characterizes Tychicus as a "faithful minister" and "fellow servant in the Lord" (v. 7). These phrases describe his tireless devotion and dedication to the cause of Christ as Paul enlisted him as a helpful partner in various ministry contexts (2 Tim 4:12; Titus 3:12). Through

his almost identical description to the Ephesian church (Eph 6:21–22), along with a description that paralleled the founder of the Colossian church, Epaphrus (cf. Col 1:7), Paul’s endorsement validated Tychicus as a trustworthy leader. Beyond simply updating them with Paul’s situation, he was also sent to “encourage [their] hearts” (Col 4:8). This ministerial purpose speaks to his abilities beyond delivering a letter. His servant heart and accompanying gifts would be evident to the Colossians and were being employed as Paul enlisted him as a minister of Christ.

Onesimus had previously lived in Colossae and accompanied Tychicus to deliver the letter. Paul’s parallel inclusion and honorable description of Onesimus is especially significant given his prior status as a bondsman. As the former servant of Philemon, the Colossian church host, Onesimus unlawfully fled from his domestic role. Upon meeting Paul in prison, he became a follower of Christ (Phlm 10) and was sent back to Philemon, “no longer as a slave, but ... as a dearly loved brother” (Phlm 16). His redeemed identity made him “useful” in a new and more valuable way (Phlm 11).

In his description of Onesimus, Paul most likely avoided using servant/slave terminology to describe him in order to avoid any unintended confusion. Instead of describing him in terms of his previous status, he focuses on his redeemed character and his confirmed position in Christ, “a faithful and dearly loved brother,” while also identifying him as “one of [them]” (Col 4:9). His salvation had redefined him as a “brother” (cf. 3:11), and his new identity provided the basis for his restoration as a member of their local community. This would enable him not only to serve according to a domestic role but also to minister as a servant for Christ (3:22–25).

In many ways Paul’s letter to the Colossians is a manual for discipleship. His goal was to emphasize the practical implications of living under the lordship of Christ and the Colossians’ continued growth in him (2:6). Paul had identified his own role as one of a “minister” (1:23, 25 ESV), and by sending Onesimus and Tychicus to them, he was encouraging the Colossians to adopt the same mindset and enlist others to be ministers for Christ.

Enlist Others to Be Messengers for Christ (4:8–9)

Letters as the primary form of correspondence in the first century required couriers who would deliver an epistle to the intended audience. Tychicus was a coworker and frequent companion of Paul who was authorized to deliver multiple letters for the apostle. In addition to the letter to the Colossians (v. 7), he most likely carried the letter to Philemon (v. 9) and to the Laodiceans (v. 16), to the Ephesians (Eph 6:21), to Titus (Titus 3:12), and Paul’s final letter to Timothy (2 Tim 4:12).

In the first century messengers were more than mail carriers; they were personal emissaries who also served as official representatives of the senders. Their role included delivering the letter, publicly reading the message (1 Thess 5:27), and providing oral commentary on behalf of the author (Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 309). Paul deputized them in this way by noting, “[Tychicus] will tell you all the news about me” (Col 4:7), and together with Onesimus, “they will tell you about everything here” (v. 9).

In addition to carrying the mail and serving as personal representatives of Paul, these particular disciples of Christ also doubled as messengers of Jesus. The Colossians had received the gospel, and it continued to spread throughout the world (cf. 1:5–6). Just as they were invited to participate in God’s global mission, the Lord commissions all believers as “ambassadors for Christ” to carry “the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19–20). We have been entrusted to deliver the good news of Jesus to a world in desperate need of him. And as the Spirit of God leads people to place their faith in Christ, we must enlist them as fellow messengers who participate in his mission.

We Should _____ Others to Serve Christ (4:10–14)

In addition to enlisting others to trust Christ, we should also encourage others to serve Christ. Long-distance relationships, difficult circumstances, and uncertain outcomes were all part of Paul’s situation as he was writing to the Colossians. As a church they were continuing to wrestle with the implications of their new faith and also dealing with the overbearing false teachers. The combination of all of these factors would have been a recipe for division and discouragement. So Paul sent ministers and messengers to “encourage” the Colossians (v. 8). Within the letter he attempts to bolster their faith further by sharing personal greetings and testimonies from other faithful servants. In these verses Paul’s focus shifts from those he is sending to them to those who were staying with him.

We Must Support One Another (4:10–14)

Paul’s letter to the Colossians is an effort to affirm his support for them. He writes with an encouraging tone throughout, and as he concludes his letter, he broadens their support network through the affirming acknowledgments of six additional co-laborers for Christ. The first three associates Paul mentions—Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus (vv. 10–11)—are identified as Jews; they are “of the circumcised” (4:11). The second set of three—Epaphras, Luke, and Demas (vv. 12–14)—by lack of designation are understood to be Gentiles (Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, 302). These two parallel lists are deliberately chosen to make several intentional points by Paul.

First, Paul commends the intrinsic value of each individual by including them in this group that includes persons of high standing and prominent connections. Aristarchus was a Jew from Thessalonica and a traveling companion of Paul who helped deliver the collection for the Jerusalem offering (Acts 19:29; 20:4). Mark, “Barnabas’s cousin” (Col 4:10), certainly was noteworthy as he accompanied Paul on his first missionary journey (Mark was called John in Acts 13:5). He also served with Peter (1 Pet 5:13), and, at the end of his life, Paul would personally request his presence (2 Tim 4:11). By contrast, this is the only place where Justus (Col 4:11) is mentioned in the New Testament, and the text does not include any additional commentary.

In the second set of co-laborers, Epaphras most likely helped establish the Colossian church (vv. 12–13; cf. 1:7) and was sent by them to be a supportive encourager for Paul. Luke, “the dearly loved physician” (4:14), was clearly known as an integral part of the early church. He

accompanied Paul at various times on his missionary journeys throughout Acts and awaited his final trial with him (2 Tim 4:11). Conversely, like Justus in the previous list, “Demas” (Col 4:14) was far less recognizable and possibly abandoned the faith later (cf. 2 Tim 4:10). Still, they are mingled into the list and thereby equated in essence and value to Paul. By contrast, we live in a culture where celebrity status is acclaimed and famous people are elevated. But in Christ and in the local church, we should affirm that every believer is significant in God’s kingdom and plays an important role within his plan.

In addition, their diversity emphasizes the unity that is possible through the gospel when formed around its mission. Ethnically they were different. The inclusion of Jews and Gentiles conquered the greatest barrier for discrimination. Socially and economically they also differed. But the assumed affluence of Epaphras and Luke did not elevate them above the other partners. And spiritually they also exhibited different gifts and levels of maturity (i.e., the noted diligence and devotion of Epaphras; Col 4:12–13). In the same way, because of Christ’s work on the cross, the superficial distinctions that divide us have been demolished, and we have been established as one family and one spiritual army in Christ (cf. 3:11).

These realities and the people mentioned in these verses are the perfect expression of the body of Christ that Paul has repeatedly referenced throughout his letter. As the church, Christ is our “head” and we are his “body” (1:18, 24); and as members of the body of Christ, we are united to him, “nourished and held together” by the supporting “ligaments and tendons” of one another (2:19). As Paul’s partners with all of their diversity were demonstrating, we are called to operate and support one another as “one body” (3:15).

Support for one another may come in a variety of forms—spiritual, relational, emotional, physical, or financial. What is amazing about these dynamics is that the same categories used by the world for segregation actually become useful to the Lord for affirmation. In other words, those things that would otherwise divide us, God uses to unite us. It is through the diversity of the body of Christ in these various areas that we are able to build one another up.

Therefore, if we are going to support one another in the mission, we cannot allow any form of preferential or prejudicial treatment to interfere with our cooperation and collaboration. In addition, we must also recognize that the individual distinctions that make us unique are strategically organized and used by the Lord to accomplish his plan. Unity with diversity models the universal availability of the gospel to everyone, the equal essence we all share in Christ, and God’s desire to use each one of us for a particular purpose as a member of the body.

We Must Strengthen One Another (4:12–14)

In addition to the church members’ mutual support for one another, Paul also describes their responsibility to strengthen one another. In particular he elaborates on Epaphras and his ministry. The previous mention in the letter identified him as a “dearly loved fellow servant” and “faithful minister of Christ” (1:7). His abbreviated description here references his Colossian roots, “who is one of you,” and reinforces his character and value as “a servant of Christ Jesus”

(4:12). Like the other coworkers in the passage, he sends his “greetings,” but Paul also describes his additional efforts.

Even though he had been sent by the church for the purpose of supporting Paul, Epaphras was continuing to serve the Colossians through the strengthening work of prayer. His diligence and persistence are communicated by Paul’s description of his intercession as “always wrestling for [them] in his prayers” (v. 12). His commitment to the discipline of prayer reflects both the strength of his faith in God and the depth of his love for the Colossians.

His affection for them compelled him to pray based on the severity of the issues he knew they were facing. Because of the cultural challenges and the false teachers, Epaphras prayed so that they could “stand mature” and be “fully assured in everything God wills” (v. 12). His prayer reflects elements of Paul’s intercession for them, particularly with regard to divine strength for perseverance (1:11) and for their complete understanding of God’s plan for them (1:9). In addition, based on Paul’s stated ministry goal of presenting “everyone mature in Christ” (1:28) and his challenge for the Colossians to continue to be “rooted ... built up ... and established in the faith” (2:7), Epaphras’s prayers were likewise focused on the firmness and fullness of their faith.

In addition to his spiritual labor in prayer, Epaphras also exerted himself through physical labor on their behalf. Colossae was in close geographical proximity to “Laodicea” (cf. 2:1) and to “Hierapolis,” and those cities shared many of the same cultural and commercial characteristics. Epaphras was likely instrumental in establishing all three congregations and probably continued to exercise some level of pastoral oversight over each (Moo, *The Letters*, 347). He adopted Paul’s work ethic and philosophy of ministry as he toiled and “work[ed] hard” for their sake (4:13; cf. 1:29–2:1). This phrase speaks to the strength and energy he was exerting in his ministerial efforts, but it indicates much more. Epaphras’s level of physical sacrifice revealed the extent of their personal value to him, his passionate zeal for the gospel, and his total reliance on divine strength to serve.

As we strengthen one another, we must learn to rely on these same driving forces. We must allow our sincere care for others and for Christ’s church to be a true labor of love (1:24). In addition, the transforming power of the gospel and the glory of Christ must serve as the ultimate motivation for our sacrifice (1:25–27). And our faith must be totally dependent on his strength that allows us to accomplish more than what we are capable of on our own (1:29). These motivating factors will not only enable us to serve Christ; they will also encourage others to do the same.

We Should _____ Others to Serve Christ (4:15–18)

In addition to enlisting and encouraging others to serve Christ, Paul also demonstrates the responsibility we have to help empower others to serve Christ. These final verses conclude with a personal statement and signature that authorize and authenticate the letter in its entirety (v. 18). This not only certifies the doctrinal convictions and practical instructions he asserts

throughout the epistle, but his personal autograph also doubled as an official endorsement of these young believers. The apostle's handwritten greeting was a personal validation to inspire them to the end, and it serves a similar purpose for us as well. In these final verses, by way of example and instruction, Paul models for all believers the importance of empowering others to serve Christ.

We Must Be Faithful to the Ministry of the Church (4:15–16)

After sending messengers to the church (vv. 7–9) and conveying greetings from his coworkers in Rome (vv. 10–14), Paul extends his own personal acknowledgments to members of the surrounding community and the church in Laodicea (vv. 15–16). The integral connection between the Colossians and Laodiceans is obvious through their common association in the letter (2:1; 4:13). His personal request for the Colossians to share his “greetings” with those in Laodicea (v. 15) assumed collaboration between the churches in neighboring communities. He also extended a personal greeting to “Nympha and the church in her home” (v. 15). To ensure their interaction, Paul further instructed them to read their letter to “the church of the Laodiceans” and for the Colossians to “read the letter from Laodicea” (v. 16).

Paul's intentionality to foster cooperation between the congregations exhibits several important aspects of his empowering efforts and the ministry of the church. For example, his instruction for them to read each other's letters demonstrates a relevance that was not limited to a specific context. Instead, the content of the letters included timeless truth that was empowering and applicable for both congregations. At the same time, the desired collaboration also assumes a common experience for the believers in both communities even if their situations were not identical. God's people may face various forms of opposition (e.g., false teachers, cultural hostility, etc.), but the supremacy of Christ is universal and can empower all Christians to overcome every obstacle (John 16:33).

Perhaps most importantly, Paul's directed cooperation between the churches reinforces their collective need for mutual support and encouragement. While he references Nympha as an example of an individual leveraging her resources for the church as a whole, his ultimate emphasis is intended to be congregational. The churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col 4:13), along with the Colossians, needed each of their individual members to be faithful to the ministry of the church at large. Their cooperation with other congregations would help remind them that the gospel mission is a global mission (1:6–7) that extended beyond their community. Paul maintained this mindset throughout his ministry, and he desired for them to adopt the same mentality. His devotion to individual congregations like the Laodiceans and Colossians (2:1–5) was always part of a much broader understanding of his ministry to the church (1:24–29).

The emphasis throughout the letter has been on the corporate and universal body of believers. From the earliest verses, God's people are defined as a spiritual family (1:1–2) that has been established as redeemed citizens of Christ's kingdom (1:13). As the church, we are members of his body (1:18; 2:19), and we are called to dwell in unity under his lordship and leadership (3:15). The reality of our individual memberships within the broader corporate identity of

believers only serves to emphasize the privilege and personal responsibility we have to participate in God's redemptive plan. Our personal value and worth as contributing coworkers in the global purpose of God should empower us to serve Christ by being faithful to the ministry of the church.

We Must Fulfill the Ministry of Our Calling (4:17–18)

The individual responsibility of every believer to the church at large is highlighted in Paul's final words of commendation. He directs an admonition to Archippus that could easily be addressed to every believer: "Pay attention to the ministry you have received in the Lord, so that you can accomplish it" (v. 17). While Archippus is identified as a "fellow soldier" and recipient of the letter to Philemon (Phlm 2), there is no other textual evidence that indicates the specific nature of his calling. The term used for "ministry" does not designate it as a reference to any official capacity, but perhaps the general understanding of Christian service actually serves the enduring purpose of the Scripture even more.

While Archippus would have certainly had a specific task that Paul was referencing, the ministry he had received was ultimately the same role of service that all believers are assigned "in the Lord." The personal role may be particular to an individual, but all Christians are called to serve Christ in a given capacity to further the gospel mission. Paul had reflected on his personal calling (1:23, 25), and he had encouraged the Colossians with the assurance of God's will for each of them (1:9). Similarly, he instructed Timothy, "fulfill your ministry," while also exhibiting his unwavering commitment to complete his own "race" (2 Tim 4:5–7).

Paul's concluding autograph in this letter is a further demonstration of this same devotion as he entreats them, "Remember my chains" (Col 4:18). This expression was undoubtedly meant to prompt them with a prayer reminder, but it also served several other purposes as well. His chains were a tangible example of what was involved in fulfilling the ministry entrusted to him. For the Colossians, their devotion would certainly be tested, and Paul wanted them to be empowered to remain faithful. In addition, his chains signified the partnership they shared as fellow servants of Christ. While their callings may have been different, their involvement in the same gospel mission qualified them as fellow participants in his suffering for Christ. And finally, his chains were also a testimony of the depth of his love for Jesus and for them. God's unfailing love epitomized in the gospel ultimately constrained Paul to sacrifice himself for the mission (cf. 2 Cor 5:14), and it was the reason for his imprisonment (Col 4:3). But he also recognized his suffering as a sacrifice he willingly made on behalf of the church (1:24). The simple phrase, "Remember my chains," would have served as an empowering refrain as they sought to fulfill their own ministry.

Paul concludes his letter with a benedictory blessing: "Grace be with you" (v. 18). This phrase is consistent with his typical closing and perfectly completes his letter that began by commending them to "grace" from "God our Father" (1:2). But the empowering nature of God's grace (cf. 2 Tim 2:1) would be particularly important for their continued growth in the knowledge of the Lord (Col 1:10; 2:6; cf. 2 Pet 3:18). As they endeavored to fulfill the ministry of their callings, it

would only be possible by the saving and sanctifying grace of God that had done the same for Paul (1 Cor 15:10).

Like the Colossians, we must empower others to serve Christ by exhorting one another to fulfill the ministry of our callings. The echo of Paul's challenge to Archippus must resound within our own hearts as we pursue God's will for our lives. In addition, the reminder of Paul's chains should empower us as fellow participants in the gospel who are motivated by Christ's love to fully devote ourselves to his people through sacrificial service. Finally, the preeminence of Christ throughout the entire letter points us to the source of divine grace that we desperately need in order to fulfill the ministry of our callings.

Conclusion

The entirety of Paul's farewell is saturated with an others-focused mentality. While he may be suffering in chains, he makes every effort in each aspect of his conclusion to equip the Colossians to succeed in their service to Christ. He sends others to encourage them (vv. 7–10), he shares greetings from those they know (vv. 10–14), he instructs them to mutually build others up through edification and exhortation (vv. 15–17), and he commends them with God's grace (v. 18; Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 349–50). In other words, Paul embodies and exemplifies his concluding message to the Colossians through his own efforts to enlist, encourage, and empower them to serve Christ.

The pattern of Paul's model and the approach he endorses for us ultimately follow the strategy established by Jesus himself. Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus enlisted others to serve him. From his initial apostles to improbable outcasts, Jesus issued personal invitations to follow him (Matt 4:18–22; Luke 19:10). As he enlisted others to serve him, he commissioned them as his ministers and his messengers so that they might enlist others to be his followers (Matt 16:24; 28:18–20). The ministry of Jesus and his disciples was never one of passive observation; it was always one of active obedience.

In addition to enlisting others to serve him, Jesus also encouraged others to serve him. The incarnation of Christ was the ultimate display of sacrificial service and epitomized the humble demeanor we are called to adopt (Phil 2:3–11). Jesus's invitation to follow him included embracing this same disposition of meekness (Matt 11:28–30). His attitude extended into his actions; and as he washed the disciples' feet, he commended to them a lifestyle of serving others (John 13:13–15). Ultimately, acts of service should be a distinguishing mark of Christ's followers as we encourage others to serve him through intentional efforts to support and strengthen one another (Matt 20:26–28).

Finally, Jesus also empowered others to serve him. As Peter and the disciples were beginning to understand the truth about Jesus's identity, he introduced them to his plan to establish the church as his covenant community (Matt 16:18). The assurance of its victory through his death and resurrection provided them with confidence to overcome every form of opposition and fulfill his mission. But he also empowered them with the promise of his abiding presence

through the person of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). His power would enable them to be faithful to the ministry of the church and to fulfill the ministry of their callings.

Our confidence is found in these same assurances—that Christ continues to enlist, encourage, and empower his followers to serve him. As his ambassadors, we can adopt this same approach as the investment strategy that pays spiritual dividends in the lives of others and ultimately builds God's kingdom.

Appendix: Answer Guide

Lesson 12 (6-28-26)

Putting Off, Putting On (Part 2) (Colossians 3:12)

PUTTING ON SAINTS' CLOTHING (v. 12)

Lesson 13 (7-5-26)

The Responses of Grace (Colossians 3:13)

NA

Lesson 14 (7-12-26)

The Outer Garment (Colossians 3:14)

THE OUTER GARMENT OF LOVE

Lesson 15 (7-19-26)

The Peace of Christ (Colossians 3:15)

CHRIST'S RULE OF PEACE

Lesson 16 (7-26-26)

The Word That Brings Peace (Colossians 3:16)

NA

Lesson 17 (8-2-26)

The Art of Holy and Happy Living (Colossians 3:17)

Holy Method: "Whatever You Do"

The Holy Rule: "Do Everything in the Name of the Lord Jesus"

Holy Music: "Giving Thanks to God the Father"

Through Him

Lesson 18 (8-9-26)

Grace in the Home (Colossians 3:18-21)

FITTING SUBMISSION

PLEASING OBEDIENCE

LOVING HUSBANDS, KIND FATHERS

Lesson 19 (8-16-26)

Grace in the Workplace (Colossians 3:22 – 4:1)

SLAVERY AND CHRISTIANITY

THE CHRISTIAN SERVANT

THE CHRISTIAN MASTER

Lesson 20 (8-23-26)

Watch and Pray (Colossians 4:2-4)

PRAYER-EMPOWERED EVANGELISM

PREACHING TO PRAY FOR

HOW TO PRAY EFFECTIVELY

Lesson 21 (8-30-26)

Grace Seasoned With Salt (Colossians 4:5-6)

A WALKING WITNESS

A GRACIOUS WITNESS

A SALTY WITNESS

Lesson 22 (9-6-26)

How to Invest in God's Kingdom (Colossians 4:7-18)

We Should Enlist Others to Serve Christ (4:7–9)

We Should Encourage Others to Serve Christ (4:10–14)

We Should Empower Others to Serve Christ (4:15–18)

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