

MYSTERY

A study of the letter to the Colossians

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Read this first

God and His ways are mysterious. Deuteronomy 29.29 says that, *“The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”*

Though there is much about God that remains shrouded in mystery, there is much He has revealed. The dictionary defines Mystery as: *“a religious truth that one can know only by revelation and cannot fully understand.”* Apart from God we cannot know His truth. Apart from God we cannot fully understand His truth. Apart from God we will believe the lies of sin. It is only through the revelation of God’s Spirit that our eyes are opened to discern truth; that our hearts are softened to receive the life-giving truth; and that our bodies are moved to respond walk in His truth.

God’s truth not found in a set of precepts, its complete expression is found in a man, Jesus Christ. For thousands of years, God’s plan for the redemption remained mysteriously hidden in His relationship with Israel. At His resurrection, Jesus Christ proved to be the supreme and sufficient revelation of the mysteries of God. Heretical teachers with claims that Jesus is only part of the answer to our spiritual problems threaten the faith of this young church. Paul’s letter is a brilliant and timeless response written to authoritatively set forth the preeminence of Christ, our new life in Him, and the means of spiritual growth which comes through continual dependence on His work and not our own.

How this all works is a bit of a mystery. What is not a mystery is that living a life like that, one radically shaped by Jesus, is challenging to do. Other priorities—even important and good ones—compete for our attention. Temptations and opportunities to live for ourselves abound. Worldly philosophies distract us and the false promises of sin attract us. The urgency of living here and now seems all too often to trump the urgency of living for Christ. This reality makes the study of a 2000 year old letter to the Colossians important for us today

Our prayer for this study is that God will use it to make us more Christ-Centered than when we began.

Prepared by Sam Ford

On behalf of the Elders of 3Strand Churches

The Format of this Book

Each study begins with a key verse that summarizes the truth found in the entire section. If memorized, these verses will provide an important mental resource for the main ideas of Colossians. Each verse is followed by a brief and general summary of the passage to help individuals or families prepare before Sunday or track with the series if a Sunday is missed. Next, there are a few questions for individual or groups. The first questions focus more on understanding the text while the second set of questions on application of the truths to daily life. Finally, each section concludes with space for sermon notes in case you want to write things down during the sermon or your group discussion.

Occasionally, sections will raise controversial issues or challenging topics related to the text. Written answers will be made available for these “other issues” at service on the day of the sermon and online at the pastor’s blog.

Forpreparing your family for Sunday

The Bible teaches us that parents, not pastors, are responsible for the biblical and spiritual training of their kids. As you are studying and learning, you need to teach your kids, share with them how God is challenging you, and impart to them a passion for Christ, His Word, and His Way (See Deuteronomy 6.4–9).

The letter to the Colossians provides some foundational truths. Parents, we encourage you to spend the week preparing your family for the public gathering and sermon on Sunday. The leadership will make an effort to provide a mid-week email with

more details about the sermon and the content of the service to provide more guidance (e.g. songs, illustrations, etc.). Here are some specific ways to prepare your family for worship:

Family preparation should always include the reading of the passage that will be preached on Sunday. Following the reading, begin an age-appropriate discussion using the booklet as a guide. Remember, the intent is not to teach them everything about the passage, but expose them to the Word and let them ask questions. It will prove helpful to review previous passages and the overall context of the letter.

Family preparation should always include prayer. This should be done as a family and individually. As a family, pray for the church family, the pastor, the mission, and the larger needs for your family. Individually read and pray with each of your children throughout the week and try to dialogue with them as individuals about the passage. Ask probing questions that fit their specific maturity as they look forward to sitting under the preached Word on Sunday.

Family preparation should always include singing. The book of Colossians is one that reminds us to sing hymns together. Get your family in the practice of singing songs that will be sung at Church. This is especially for young children who cannot yet read well so that our songs on Sunday will feel familiar. Your children will sing more confidently and have a greater sense of participation when Sunday comes.

This is a simple way for parents to begin to pastor your family. Your efforts, not your expertise, will set an example for your children, will make the worship gathering more meaningful, and will help your family to feel more cared.

Forstudy as an individual

Before you begin, pray that God would open your eyes to see what he is saying in the Bible and give you the spiritual strength to do something about it. Work through the study and write out answers to the comprehension questions. Resist any temptation to skip over the application questions. It is important to ponder how the truths apply to your life. Though these questions are sometimes the most penetrating and difficult, they are designed to help you think seriously about your life.

After you have spent time on your own studying the text, it is important for you to share with other who are wrestling with the same text. The Bible is meant to be read and studied in community. So take the time to do it on your own first, and then come to group ready to discuss and be accountable to one another.

For study in groups

It is recommended that you study the passage after it has been preached. Though each section in the book is intended to complement the sermon, sometimes the preacher ends up being led by the Spirit toward a different emphasis. Studying after the sermon will ensure you can discuss both the issues raised by the sermon as well as the study guide itself.

In your time together, focus on the implications for your lives individually and as a group. Share with one another how you sense God calling you to change, pray for one another about these things, and invite one another to encourage you and hold you

accountable to apply the truth. Use this guide as a launching point for discussion and genuine care for one another. Resist the urge to have to discuss every question or “get through the material.”

Remember, our groups are more than just a place to study the bible or rehash the sermon. They are smaller expressions of our larger church body. It is in these “mini-churches”, that we work to build deeper relationships with God as we love “one another”.

For Questions or comments

If you have feedback or questions about the series or studies, please feel free to email them to

life@damascusroadchurch.org.

Introduction to Colossians

The Author & Title

In Acts 9, we read the story of a self-described “Pharisee of Pharisees” named Saul who steps onto the road to Damascus hell-bent on finding and imprisoning Christians. With every zealous step he unwittingly walked closer to a face-to-face encounter with the one true God he thought he was serving. Without warning, there appeared a light, a voice, and finally a name...Jesus. It was on this road that Saul the Persecutor of Jesus became Paul the Apostle of Jesus, converted from Christian murderer to Christian martyr.

After his powerful encounter with Jesus, Paul spent the rest of his life proclaiming the gospel. Acts 25–28 records the final years of Paul’s tumultuous gospel work—from his arrest in Jerusalem to his two year imprisonment in Rome. Throughout the duration of his ministry, Paul spent over five years as a prisoner or in prison. Yet, despite being crushed, persecuted, and imprisoned, Paul never ceased in his gospel work. As a prisoner, Paul preached to the imperial guard. As a prisoner, he continued to teach all who came to him about the kingdom of God and Jesus. As a prisoner, Paul wrote the letters of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon.

The church has historically recognized the apostle Paul as the author of this letter, titled Colossians because it is written to the church in the city of Colossae. In the very first verse, Paul and Timothy are both identified as sharing in authorship. At the end of the letter, Paul’s direct claim to authorship affirms that all the first person references throughout the letter are attached to

him. Most likely, Timothy acted as Paul's secretary helping him transcribe the letter. In light of some differences in language, theological emphasis, and style, some scholars have questioned Pauline Authorship. Today's majority opinion (and that of the early church) finds nothing theological inconsistent with what he wrote elsewhere. And though there is also a strong continuity in style, any language or stylistic variations can be expected between letters to different audiences often for different purposes.

The City & Setting

The ancient city of Colossae was located on the southern bank of the River Lycus in the province of Asia, what is modern day Turkey. It is situated approximately 100 miles east of Ephesus in Phrygia, resting in the fertile Lycus Valley known for producing figs and olives. Once a populous and wealthy metropolis, during Roman times the city declined in commercial and social importance (possibly due to a devastating earthquake in A.D. 61). At the time of the letter, this once thriving city exists as little more than a small unimportant town. Colossian culture remained very diverse resulting in the mixing of the religious elements from Greek, Asian, Jewish, and Pagan cultures. In its time of decline, Colossae was surpassed in prominence by two neighboring cities, Hierapolis and Laodicea.

Paul usually concentrated his gospel work on larger cities. That is probably why the church at Colossae had not been planted by Paul himself. It presumably came into existence during his ministry in Ephesus for three years (Acts 19). His lectures in Ephesus at the Hall of Tyrannus were so effective that Luke could say, "All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Many works were launched by those who heard and believe the gospel. Among them were two Colossians named

Epaphras (4.12) and Philemon (Philemon 19). Epaphras led the mission to plant a church Colossae, as well as evangelize the area around the Lycus Valley. Philemon, it seems, hosted the Colossian church in his home for a time (Philemon 1,2). It is Epaphras who most likely visits Paul during his Roman "house arrest" to report on some major problems in the infant church.



The Date & Timing

The traditional date for the letter is that Paul wrote it during his Roman imprisonment recorded in Acts 27–28, around A.D. 61. Most likely he wrote the letters to Philemon and the Ephesians at the same time. It is also possible that all three letters were sent together with a man named Tychicus who would eventually deliver them to a believer named Onesimus in Colossae (Eph.6.21). This

idea is further evidence by Paul's identification of Epaphras as a "fellow prisoner" at the end of Philemon.

The Purpose & the Colossian Heresy

The epistles of Paul are not all written to the same people for the same purpose. Against the historical background of the book of Acts, we see that each letter is written to address unique issues in order to further establish churches at different stages of maturity. Paul's early letters focus on establishing churches in their gospel identity. Beyond the facts of the gospel, Paul proclaims the life-transforming nature of one's new life in Christ—a life of self-denial. He writes to refute false gospels that give rise to either self-righteous legalism or self-indulgent licentiousness. His early letters end with what amounts to a full theological treatise on the gospel (Romans).

In his middle letters, Paul shifts his concern to further establish believers in Christ and unify the church in their shared gospel identity. His goal is to develop gospel communities who understand the family at the center of the church, and the church at the center of God's plan for salvation. In essence, it is Paul's attempt to bring a sense of corporate calling, unity, and one-minded purpose that comes from Christ's power in their midst.

In his final letters, Paul concerns himself with those who will follow after him, as he prepares to "finish the race set before him". He uses these letters to fully establish the churches he has planted under godly leadership, in godly order, pursuing a godly mission. Using the household (family) as a model, he proceeds to establish order for roles and relationships in God's household (church). It is Paul's hope that this order will enable faithful men and women to continue working on mission together when he is gone.

Colossians is one of Paul's middle letters, written to establish a young church as a Christ-centered life and community in contrast to the life and community offered by the world. Though he has not ever met this young church, Paul writes with all authority as an apostle chosen "by the will of God"; in other words, the letter carries some weight to it. Paul makes it clear that Epaphras had not failed in his preaching of the gospel; on the contrary, they had been equipped with everything they needed. Instead, his letter would be read as an affirmation of Epaphras' ministry and an indictment on false teachers who were beginning to argue that the Colossian faith was "incomplete".

Apparently, Epaphras had come to Paul with disturbing news about the church at Colossae. Their devotion to and faith in Christ alone is being threatened by false teaching heretics. Scholars disagree on exactly what the "Colossian heresy" is or who is spreading it. This is probably because Paul's letter reveals the heresy to be like some sort of spiritual buffet with a variety of elements. More than likely, it is some sort of Gnostic system that borrows from Jewish legalism and Christianity with a sprinkling of Eastern Mysticism in the form of angel worship. Whatever the exact nature of the teaching is, it is clear that someone or some group is spreading false truth in the Lycus Valley aimed at challenging the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.

In response, we find Paul presenting Christ as the Creator, Christ as Ruler, and Christ as the all-sufficient answer for every problem or pursuit in life. His letter is a theological assault on anyone, past or present, who attempts to offer Jesus Christ as only part of the answer.

The Theology & the Colossian Hymn

*15He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth,
visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or
authorities—all things were created through him and for him.
17And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
18And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning,
the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be
preeminent. 19For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to
dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things,
whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his
cross.*Colossians 1.15–20

All the teaching in Colossians, concerning what to believe or how to live, finds its beginning and end in Christology (Theology of Christ). Christology is the study of who the Bible says Jesus is and what the Bible says He did. It makes sense then that Colossians is packed with doctrine concerning the identity and work of Jesus Christ. Colossians 1.15–20 is a passage that everyone should memorize in order to answer the question, “Who is Jesus?” Essentially, these verses declare that:

- *Jesus Christ is fully God.*
- *Jesus Christ is fully man.*
- *Jesus Christ is Creator of all things.*
- *Jesus Christ is Sustainer of all things.*
- *Jesus Christ is Lord over all things*
- *Jesus Christ is Head of the Church*
- *Jesus Christ is Preeminent in all things*
- *Jesus Christ is Reconciler of all things*
- *Jesus Christ is Peacemaker through His blood*

These six verses overflow with praise exalting theology about Jesus like few others do in all of Scripture—it is almost poetic. In fact, though there is little agreement about the number of stanzas or even content, the rhythmic structure and compressed truth of these verses have led scholars to believe it is an early hymn—a *song of praise*. The hymn is not simply a parenthesis to Paul’s thoughts; rather, its themes represent the very the heart of what he wants to say and we find them systematically applied throughout the rest of letter. Colossians 1.15–20 tells us exactly what the letter, and our lives, is all about.

MYSTERY

A 15 WEEK STUDY GUIDE

Week 1 – Colossians 1.1–2

Introduction to Colossians

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. (1.1–2)

Summary

On the road to Damascus, Saul the Persecutor of Jesus became Paul the Apostle of Jesus. A powerful encounter with the resurrected Jesus transformed this man from Christian murderer to, eventually, a Christian martyr. Paul devoted his life to proclaiming the gospel, most of which came with suffering. Acts 25–28 records the final years of Paul’s tumultuous gospel work—from his arrest in Jerusalem to his two year imprisonment in Rome. Unlike many of us, Paul viewed difficult circumstances as an opportunity to do more gospel work (Phil.1.12–14). Despite being crushed, persecuted, and imprisoned, Paul never ceased in his gospel work. As a prisoner, Paul preached to the imperial guard. As a prisoner, he continued to teach all who came to him about the kingdom of God and Jesus. And it from this imprisonment that Paul wrote the letters of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon.

Every one of Pauls’ letters has its dominant theme. In Romans it is justification by faith. Ephesians focuses on the church, and Philippians describes the joy found in Christ. In his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes to declare the Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ. More than one of the strongest Christological treatises in Scripture, Paul proceeds to offer a comprehensive alternative to the dominant worldview of the day.

The view he puts forward contrasts starkly with the Roman world's value system emphasizing selfishness, power, and isolation. Instead, Paul emphasizes self-denial, suffering, and community (bringing even his own imprisonment into a different light). Like to our own culture today, a universal understanding of ideas such as faith, family, love, and maturity had been lost in the global expansion of Rome. Now, as the Colossian's are assaulted by new truths, traditions, and technologies, all claiming supremacy and necessary to faith, Paul writes to establish their faith once and for all in the gospel of Christ they first believed..

Questions for Understanding

1. Read the introduction materials in this study guide (pages 4–11). What impresses you about Paul, Colossae, his times, or the book? What questions do you have? What are you curious about?
2. In what ways do you think the state and culture of ancient Colossae compares with the state and culture of our own city?
3. How might our culture respond to Paul's first statement about being chosen "by the will of God?" What does that imply about the authority with which he speaks?

Questions for Application

1. How did Paul view his imprisonment? Why did Paul feel this way? How do you view your own unjust, unfair, or uncomfortable circumstances? Why do you feel this way?

2. Read Philemon 23–25. Who is with Paul in prison? What impact does community have on suffering and mission? In other words, why is it essential to have "fellow" prisoners and partners?
3. Consider the various spiritual influences of our day, religious, philosophical, or pagan. Discuss what you feel is the most threatening "heresy" competing for supremacy with Christ today?
4. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

Week 2 – Colossians 1.3–8

Mystery of the Gospel

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel (1.3–5)

Summary

Paul begins this passage with expressions of gratitude for what he has heard, from Epaphras, about the Colossians' faith in Christ. He also thanks for God the reported evidence of their faith—a love for fellow Christianshe knows is motivated by hope of beyond their earthly life. In essence, Paul identifies three essential components of a Christian worldview –belief, action, and motivation. When we struggle in our walk with the Lord, one of those three is typically lacking. Such a deficiency is usually not a pragmatic issue fixed through the power of positive thinking or better behavior. Any perversion of our faith, our love, or our hope, begins with a perversion of the truth of the gospel.

A disciplined commitment to gospel purity is the key to fruitfulness and growth. There are many gospels and many saviors offered as alternatives to Christ. Faith in any one of these false saviors will lead to a perverted view love and a hope in something that will ultimately fail. False gospels have no power to produce anything but more sin. The truth of the gospel is so powerful that it begins to transform the individual and produce fruit the moment on hears and believes. A strong, productive, and joyfullifedoes not come fromman-made philosophy, religion, human traditions, or secret handshakes. It comes by the grace,

through trusting in Christ's sacrifice, living in His love, and hoping for His return.

Questions for Understanding

1. What kinds of things have Paul and Timothy heard about the Colossians spiritual health?
2. What does Paul assert is the reason for their faith and love? Where does Paul say all three of these came from?
3. Who did the Colossian church first hear the gospel from? What is the gospel—the truth that they “learned”?

Questions for Application

1. Where are you being most challenged right now—in your faith, in your love, or in your hope? Consider the following:
 - *What is the object of your faith? What is the one thing, or person, you fear losing most? Beyond sadness, how would you feel if that thing or person were gone tomorrow? (What would such a loss do to your life?)*
 - *What or who do you love above all else?What is that one thing you want, that you don't have, that you believe will make your life complete? (What do you hate above all else?)*
 - *What gives you hope for the future? What, or who, do you trust to give you security in an uncertain*

future?(Where do you think people should not put their hope?)

2. Paul says that, all over the world the gospel is “bearing fruit and growing.” Has the gospel been bearing fruit and growing in your life since the day you heard and believed? Is it growing now? How can you tell?
3. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

Week 3 – Colossians 1.9–14

Mystery of Prayer

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God(1.9–10)

Summary

Even since the apostle Paul first heard Epaphras' report about Colossae, he has not ceased to pray for brothers he has never met. If we're honest, most of our prayers are for ourselves and our families. Scriptures encourage us to present all our needs to God but most people are reticent to do so, choosing instead to depend on themselves. When we humble ourselves and actually pray, it is still proves difficult to be selfless so we naturally appeal to God only for ourselves. There are, of course, those who say they will pray for you. Many of us will use, “I'll pray for you” as a way to avoid people we don't like or to sidestep conversations we don't want to have. Then there are those non-believing “spiritual” people who, strangely, use the “Our prayers go out to you” mantra as a means to express sorrow for something bad that has happened, but in not in a way that is an actual appeal to a Holy God for help

Even if we are willing to pray for ourselves, our friends, or even strangers, our requests are often short, sweet, and directly related to the perceived crisis or material need. Paul actually prays real prayers. And his unceasing prayer for the Colossians not only demonstrates HOW we should pray, but it also directs us in perhaps WHAT we should pray for. Though Christians have a

responsibility to pray for our material needs, and those of our friends and neighbors, we must be even more eager to pray for spiritual needs. Unlike our own prayers, Paul's words are not characterized only by material needs or requests for changes in circumstances. Instead, his prayer focuses largely on the relationship between the Colossians and their Savior. Having confirmed that the gospel has been received, his greatest desire is to see them established in the truth, and for the gospel to go deeper into their hearts.

Questions for Understanding

1. What have Paul and Timothy been praying for on behalf of the Colossians? (List as many as you find)
2. What do you think it means to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord?”
3. Read verses 13 and 14 again. This is a succinct explanation of the gospel. What has Jesus done for his people?

Questions for Application

1. Even though Paul had never met the Colossians, he appears to have a strong commitment to their growing faith—evidenced by his unceasing prayers for them. Why is it important for Christians to pray for each other?
2. Consider for a moment “what” you typically offer in prayer to God for both yourself and for others. How does the content of your prayer differ from Paul's?

3. In verses 9 through 12, Paul describes what a commitment to following Jesus looks like, namely, it is marked by an insatiable desire to be:
 - Being filled with spiritual wisdom and understanding
 - Walking in manner worthy and fully pleasing
 - Bearing fruit in every good work
 - Increasing in knowledge of God
 - Being strengthened by power for endurance and joy
 - Giving thanks to the Father

Which of these specific prayer requests stands out most as something that you desire to see God develop more in your life?

4. Take a moment to reflect the quality of your prayer life. Do not evaluate how often or how much you pray, rather, consider the content of what you pray most often for yourself and for others. How do you sense God wants you start changing (or adding to) how you pray?

Sermon Notes

Week 4 – Colossians 1.15–20

Mystery of Jesus' Supremacy

He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rules or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. (1.15–16)

Summary

Following his expression of gratitude for God and a heartfelt prayer for the Colossians, Paul moves to establish Jesus as central to all of life, worthy of all worship. These six verses overflow with praise exalting theology about the identity Jesus like few others do in all of Scripture—it is poetic. In fact, though there is little agreement about the number of stanzas or even content, the rhythmic structure and compressed truth of these verses have led scholars to believe it is an early hymn—a *song of praise*. This simple is a relative theological treatise on the identity and work of Jesus Christ is written to acknowledge Jesus as superior over all other teachers, governments, philosophies, or traditions. The reason Jesus is supreme is because Jesus is more than a man, He is God. The only satisfactory response to him is humble devotion.

Questions for Understanding

1. Based on this passage, who does Paul say Jesus is? List all of the different qualities, attributes, or titles of Jesus.
2. Was Jesus created? How do you know this?

3. What kinds of things did Jesus create?
4. What do you think it means that in Jesus, “...all things hold together?” What does Paul mean by all things?
5. The does the word reconcile mean? What do you think it means that God was pleased to “reconcile to himself all things”?

Questions for Application

1. Why is it essential to hold firmly that Jesus is God? What is dangerously wrong about rejecting this truth? How might you respond to someone who says, “Jesus was a great spiritual teacher who did many great things, but I don’t think he was God!”
2. Paul says that Jesus is preeminent, or supreme, in all things. What do you think it means for Jesus to be Supreme in all things (e.g. life, career, finances, relationships, etc.)? What “thing” are you regularly tempted to make more important than God?
3. In verse 19, Paul says, that Jesus has the “fullness of God” dwelling in him. Is there any part of God that does not dwell in Jesus? What does it mean to say that not only is Jesus “God-like”, but that God is “Christ like?”

4. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

Other Issues: “The Firstborn Controversy”

Week 5 – Colossians 1.21–23

Mystery of our Reconciliation

And you, who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh, in order to present you holy and blameless, and above reproach before him (1.22)

Summary

Following his amazing song of praise about the supremacy of Christ, Paul reminds the Colossians of how their faith in Him has transformed them from what they “once were.” What they once were was estranged from and hostile toward God. What they claimed as freedom and celebrated as self-reliance was in fact rebellion against the one true God. The gods they worshipped were false and their outward commitment to them changed nothing within them. As false gods reigned supreme in their lives, they remained condemned sinners, perpetually dissatisfied with life, actively engaging in evil deeds.

But God did not abandon the Colossians in their sinful idolatry, rather, he sent Jesus to die for the sins of those He loved. The Colossians, as with every believer, did not choose to turn to the one true God, nor did they reconcile themselves to Him. By grace and in love, God took the initiative first through Jesus then by sending Epaphras to preach the gospel of Jesus. Through faith in the gospel, their relationship with the one true God was restored; and once dirty, guilty, rebellious men were made holy, innocent, and free from accusation, immediately and forever. It is, therefore, a trust in the grace of God to create and preserve *that* holiness, and not a trust in our own efforts, that causes us to persevere in faith. In other words, we are not saved by Jesus

because we work hard to continue in the faith. Held and guarded by grace, we continue in the faith because we are saved by Jesus.

Questions for Understanding

1. Read Ephesians 2.1–3. According to verse 21, how did everyone who is ever born begin in their relationship toward God?
2. In what three ways does Christ present those who believe Him to God the Father?
3. What do you think it means when Paul says we will be presented holy and blameless “if indeed you continue in the faith”?
4. What does Paul charge us to remain stable and steadfast in, so as to help us continue in the faith?

Questions for Application

1. Paul describes non-believers as “alienated” and “hostile in mind” toward God. They have no desire to be close to God and, in fact, they hate Him and remain indifferent to His commands. In contrast, the affections of those whom Jesus has saved are completely transformed. How would you characterize your closeness to and passion for God right now? Have you always felt this way?
2. We are not saved by Jesus because we work hard to continue in the faith. Held and guarded by grace, we continue in the

faith because we are saved by Jesus. How does belief or lack thereof, in this statement change everything about how we live?

3. Do you believe that someone can lose their salvation? How does your understanding change if you consider whether Jesus can “lose” anyone that He reconciles? Explain.
4. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

Week 6 – Colossians 1.24–2.5

Mystery of our Maturity

Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. (1.28–29)

Summary

Paul begins this section by rejoicing over the sufferings he is experiencing, as a prisoner, in ministry. After years of physically and emotionally trying ministry that would discourage most, Paul rejoices at the opportunity to suffer for Jesus again. This kind of joy in suffering is unique to Christianity and completely offensive to the world. Despite his Roman imprisonment, Paul views his afflictions as a tool to bless the church and proclaim Christ. He knows firsthand that Christians are called to suffer like and for Christ. He also knows that suffering is more than something for the individual to piously endure without purpose; it is the means through which the cross is fully revealed. So Paul continues to toil continually, with the energy God affords him, in order to bring as many people as he can to maturity in Christ.

Through preaching, warning, and teaching the gospel then, Paul gives all that he has, even his very life, to allow others to experience the riches of maturity that come only through a deeper intimacy with Christ and His Bride. This is not a ministry he chose, rather, it is a mission that he was entrusted with by God. To stop or give up is to sin in stewarding God's gift. As part of his "mission of maturity, Paul also stresses unity in community as essential to this growth—both in the visible church of Colossae and in the invisible Church of God. To that end, he hints to his

mission extending beyond the maturity of those present in Colossae by expressing his concern and joy also for the faith of the church at in neighboring Laodicea and all those he will not get to meet face to face.

Questions for Understanding

1. In chapter 1 verse 26, then again in chapter two verse 2, Paul mentions "the mystery" that has been hidden and now revealed. What do you think is the mystery? (See also Ephesians 3.7–10; Romans 16.25–27).
2. What words does Paul use to describe his ministry? What are the different elements of Paul's ministry—what does he do?
3. Paul states that the goal of his ministry is to "present everyone mature in Christ." What does the text indicate this means?
4. Read verse 29 again. How does God work his energy through our effort? What implications does this have for ministry or our own maturity?

Questions for Application

1. Many Christians evaluate "spiritual maturity" on how many verses someone has memorized or Bible knowledge one possesses. How can this be a good or bad indicator of spiritual maturity?

2. In verse 28, Paul identifies the catalyst for maturity—the proclamation of Christ. Why is it important to preach the gospel to ourselves and others constantly?

3. Paul seems to hope that the Colossian Church will be “knit together in love” so that they will mature. What role do you think gospel community should play in one’s spiritual maturity? What role has it played in your life?

4. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

Week 7 – Colossians 2.6–15

Mystery of Life in Jesus

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. (2.6–7)

Summary

The gospel provides a foundation of basic principles for living that is set against the basic principles of the world (elemental spirits). These principles do not complement each other, they are in conflict. The Roman world, much like our own, offers fleshly principles that promise liberty and prosperity. The Bible teaches that the only thing a sinful world has to offer is slavery and depravity. We see then, that Paul’s concern for the Colossians extends far beyond intellectual ascent to some facts about Jesus that does not lead to life in Jesus beyond words. Paul is deeply concerned about the Colossians living under the Lordship of Jesus in all aspects of their lives for both God’s glory and their joy. While their faith in Christ saves them eternally, that same faith is supposed to guide them in all their decision-making now.

Living in a Roman world, the Colossian Christians have been assaulted by a barrage of different gospels and different saviors, all taught by a various evil spirits from philosophy, religion, and paganism. This onslaught of idolatry has captivated their attention, brought the sufficiency of Christ into doubt, and led them to pursue worldly wisdom. In response, Paul once again stresses the supremacy of Christ and the sufficiency of faith in Him. The image of Christ as a “triumphant” conqueror would be received well by Christians in a Roman world. On the cross, Christ destroyed removed all self-righteous and humiliated any ruler or

authority one might be tempted to worship or fear more than God.

Questions for Understanding

1. Paul charges the Colossians to walk in Christ in the same way they “received Christ”. What do you think this means?
2. What do the images of rooted, built up, and established communicate concerning progressing in our faith?
3. In verses 13–15, what does Paul say are the different things that God did for us through Christ?

Questions for Application

1. Read Psalm 1. Since you first received the “seed” of the gospel implanted in your heart, how would you describe the growth of your faith? Are you a seedling, a sapling, or a tree? How do you account for this?
2. What, in today’s culture, are some popular “human traditions” with “the “appearance of wisdom” that Christians are taken “captive” by? What are some of the false promises these “elemental spirits” make?
3. How does it make you feel to know that God has already won a decisive victory against Satan, sin, and death for you? How would your life look different if you stopped believing this truth (or if it wasn’t true)?

4. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

Other Issues: “Disarmed rulers and authorities”

Week 8 – Colossians 2.16–23

Mystery of our Death to the World

These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. (2.23)

Summary:

In light of the supremacy of Christ and the sufficiency of the cross to deal with sin, Paul points out the foolish insufficiency of man's proposed solution. More than any other time in the letter, Paul appears to address some of the teachings of what has come to be known as the "Colossian Heresy." Scholars disagree on exactly what the "Colossian heresy" is or even if one person (or group) is spreading it. This is probably because Paul's letter reveals the heresy to be like some sort of spiritual buffet, possessing an assortment of Gnostic, Jewish, and pagan elements. We read Paul addressing everything from Gnostic asceticism to Jewish legalism, in addition to a sprinkling of Pagan angel worship.

The consistent theme in all of his response is a charge not to be enslaved to the false promises of false teachings. Laws and rules may be helpful, but they cannot save. Mysticism or Charismatic tendencies may be emotionally satisfying, but they often lead to idolatry. And abstinence or other forms of self-discipline may be healthy, they may even be wise at times, but they must never be connected with holiness. All of these are inventions of men endeavoring to position some creation above or beside the Creator, so as to worship it and make the cross of Christ insufficient. Though many of these things look spiritual and are celebrated by what look like "spiritual" people, the truth is that these man-made precepts and teachings have no power to

restrain the desires of the flesh. In contrast, our identity and position in Christ does that and more—it gives a man completely new desires. This passage closes out the 2nd chapter of Colossians, a chapter of warnings, where Paul establishes Christ as the all-sufficient provision of that which legalism, mysticism, and asceticism work to obtain.

Questions for Understanding

1. In verses 16–23, what are the different commands Paul gives? What do these commands have in common?
2. What (or who) is the "HEAD" Paul refers to in verse 19? In what three ways does Paul say Christians are able to grow spiritually? (See Ephesians 4.15–16).
3. What impact does "self-made religion" and "asceticism" have on spiritual growth? Are rules and regulations ever helpful for living a godly life? Why or why not?

Questions for Application

1. Read Galatians 3.1–6. Why do you think so many Christians who are saved by grace try to grow their faith through self-righteous effort?
2. What are some of the most common "Christian" legalisms that captivate people today?
3. In this passage, Paul encourages the Colossians to "hold fast" to Jesus, be "nourished" in the word, and to be "knit together" with other Christians. What are some ways that you do this on

a weekly routine? How do you protect yourself from allowing these things to become “self-made religion?”

4. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

Other Issues: Self-righteousness vs. Self-Denial vs. Self-Indulgence

Week 9 – Colossians 3.1–4 Mystery of a JesusMindset (Pt.1)

If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. (3.1–2)

Summary

After establishing the doctrinal foundation of our identity, Paul proceeds to explain how those doctrines are applied to practical living. Having affirmed the truth of the Supremacy of Christ and our position in him, Paul now exhorts the Colossians to “set their minds on things that are above.” Paul should not be understood here as one campaigning for the power of positive thinking or moralism. On the contrary, Paul is not presenting a mean through which we can obtain holiness by new ways of thinking. On the contrary, Paul advocating for complete devotion of all that we think, say, or do in response to the holiness we already have—a radically different way to pursue godliness than the false teachers in Colossae.

In truth, what we think will determine how we feel which will dictate how we behave. That is why renewed thinking is essential for transformed living (Romans 12.1–2). Renewed thinking does not come through the philosophies of men, it comes through focusing on the word of Christ. We live in a world at war, with an enemy seeking to destroy us by distracting us from doing this. The noise of our culture is deafening and our minds are will be easily captivated by the “words” of the world. If we approach our spiritual maturity passively, we will waste our lives by focusing the wrong things—we will begin to believe that our meaning, purpose,

and joy in life will be found apart from Christ. Paul reminds us that our lives begin, endure, and end in Christ.

Questions for Understanding

1. How many times does Paul use the word “Christ” in this passage? What do you think it means when he writes, “Christ who is your life?”
2. What does it mean to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth?”
3. In your own words, how would you summarize Paul’s main idea for this passage?

Questions for Application

1. Paul roots our practical living in deep theology (i.e. being raised with Christ; being hidden in Christ, etc.). Many Christians, unfortunately, view theology as unimportant or abdicate its pursuit to scholars. Why is deep theology essential to practical living?
2. What are some earthly things that you tend to “set your mind” on in a way that is unhealthy? What are some practical ways that a person could set his or her mind on Christ?
3. Read 2Corinthians 5.14–15 where Paul identifies the controlling force in his life. Does this sound like the cry of

your heart? What do you adore Christ? If you don’t feel this way, why?

4. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

Other Issues: Idolatry and Earthly Things

Week 10 – Colossians 3.5–17

Mystery of the JesusMindset (Pt.2)

Do not lie to one another, see that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. (3.9–10)

Summary:

God is holy. His very nature is separated from sin, pure, and eternally perfect. Man is sinful and therefore, by nature unholy. Yet, God demands our holiness, something that is impossible for man to achieve by their own efforts. Sadly, that doesn't stop men from trying to solve their internal sin problem with external solutions. The holiness God requires is made possible by the sinless sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Believers obtain this holiness through faith in his work. As a justified sinner released from the curse of sin, but one still subject to the weakness of the flesh, believers grow to love Jesus more and love sin less by living a life of repentance.

There are two parts to repentance, both motivated and empowered by one's eternal identity in Christ. First, we fight to stop delighting in sin. Second, we start fighting for delight in God. Unlike the heretical teachers in Colossae taught, our pursuit of righteous living is not rooted in rules, secret handshakes, or self-deprivation. Instead of focusing on reformed behavior for a better life, Paul charges the Colossians to focus on the reality of a transformed self and an entirely new life. In truth, our delight in and obedience to God's commands comes less through measuring what we do, and more through a deeper realization of who we are (not will be) in Christ.

Questions for Understanding

1. What things does Paul say should be “put to death” or “put off”? What reason does he give for doing this?
2. What does Paul say should be “put on?” What does Paul indicate is the motivation for this?
3. What do you think it means to “let the word of Christ dwell in your richly?”

Questions for Application

1. Why do you obey God? What is the difference between obeying *so I will be* accepted, and obeying *because* I am accepted?
2. Why is important to understand repentance as both a fight against delighting in sin and a fight for delighting in God? What happens if we only emphasize one of these?
3. Read verses 16 and 17 again. How do these verses make you feel? Do they feel like an affirmation of what you do, or a bit of a condemnation of what you don't?
4. In light of what Paul teaches about our identity in Christ, why would you tell someone they should AND should not obey the commands in this passage?

5. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

Other issues: If I am saved by grace, does it matter if I obey?

Week 11 – Colossians 3.18

Mystery of Family (Wives)

Wives submit to your husbands, as is fitting to the Lord. (3.18)

Summary

Having established what an individual's life in Christ should look like, Paul begins to explain how that identity should affect how those individuals should live relationship with others. Specifically, the health of relationships within our families is directly dependent upon a deep belief in the gospel—who Jesus is and what He did. In verses 18 and 19, Paul addresses the relationship between a husband and a wife. The truth taught here should not be treated as a disconnected topic from what Paul has already written. In fact, the life of Christ serves as our primary interpreter to understand some of the controversial words Paul states here, many of which are often misunderstood and misapplied.

His first command is for “Wives, submit to your husbands.” Because the concept of submission has been so abused historically, many try to avoid this truth all together. It is essential that we understand what Paul means because his words are God's words and, therefore, they are commands and not suggestions. Many women find it difficult to imagine that they could ever delight in following such a command. And while the failure a husband to love and lead does not excuse a wife's reluctance, it certainly helps to understand it. We do not look to culture or our experience to correct our understanding what God means by submission—we must look at Christ. And in Christ we see how a wife's submission to her husband can be both God-glorifying and, in fact, a joyful way to live.

Questions for Understanding

1. What do you think Paul means when he commands wives to “submit” to their husbands? How does this make you feel?
2. How does the second part of the verse enlighten the first part?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 11.3 and Ephesians 5.18–22. How do both of these passages impact our understanding of submission here?

Questions for Application

1. In your opinion, how does our culture generally respond to ideas of authority and submission? Why do you think this is?
2. How has the concept of biblical submission been misunderstood and misapplied? Discuss the differences between *biblical* and *unbiblical* submission.
3. Women, how might you respond to another woman who voices disgust at any notion of “submission” to her husband? Men, how might you respond? How is this actually a gospel discussion?

4. Consider your own life stage and answer the following questions:
 - Married women: How well do you fulfill the command of Colossians 1.18 with joy? What is this easy or difficult for you?
 - Married men: Why might your wife want/not want to submit to you? What is one thing you can do or change that might encourage your wife your wife’s desire biblical submission?
 - Single women: If you are to be married in the future, how can you better prepare yourself now to follow Colossians 1.18?
 - Single men: If you are to be married in the future, how can you better prepare yourself to be a man that a Col.3.18 would want to marry?

Sermon Notes

Other Issues: Submission vs. Blind Obedience

Week 12 – Colossians 3.19

Mystery of Family (Husbands)

Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. (3.19)

Summary

Paul's second command concerning the gospel's implications in marriage is, "Husbands love your wives, and do not be harsh with them." There are few, if any, who will argue that men should not love their wives more. Unfortunately, the controversy surrounding a clear definition of submission often overshadows the more important conversation about husbands loving their wives. A wife's refusal to follow her husband is usually rooted in the husband's refusal to follow Jesus' example of love. Christ's love for the church extended far beyond romantic sentiment, though many women mistakenly believe that is solution to all of their issues. In other words, men's failure to love their wives like Christ, to provide for their physical, emotional, material, and spiritual well-being is the primary reason all marriages fail or continue without joy.

Paul's command to love is supplemented with a charge not to be harsh. This is because emotional abuse and cold demands for obedience are often the marks of sinful leadership. Husbands must realize that, through their behavior, they are constantly preaching something about "the husband", Jesus Christ—either truth or lies. Christ's husbandry demonstrated humility, service, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment to love his bride in her sin and to present her to God in all purity. For today's husbands, a call to love is a call to take Christ-like responsibility to lead their homes without pointing fingers or making excuses. This can

often be difficult and even painful, but failure to work toward this is not just regretful, it is sinful. Scriptures teach that God holds husbands responsible for their marriages, whether they choose to assume that responsibility or not. This is not a call to be Superman. It is a charge for husbands to submit themselves fully to the Lordship of Jesus so that He might love through them.

Questions for Understanding

1. Paul gives one command and one warning in this verse—to love and to not be harsh (lit. to make bitter). What can husbands do to heed this warning?
2. Based on Colossians 3.18–19, it has been said that men need respect and women need love. Does that mean that women don't need to respect and men don't need to love?
3. Read Ephesians 5.25. How does this passage bring more understanding to Colossians 1.19?

Questions for Application

1. Men: What do you think it means for a husband to "love" his wife? Women: What do you think it means for a wife to be loved by her husband?
2. Relative to love, what does it mean for a man to study and cultivate his wife like a gardener his garden? How does and receiving love change the longer we are in relationship? How does it remain the same?

Week 13 – Colossians 3.20–21

Mystery of Family (Pt.3)

3. What does it mean for men to live in a state of “escapable headship?” Do you feel it unfair or unreasonable that men are held accountable and responsible for the family?

4. Consider your own life stage and answer the following questions:
 - Married women: What is one way you can encourage your husband’s obedience to love and care for you?

 - Married men: Do you think your wife feels loved? What is one thing you can do, improve, or change to cultivate more?

 - Single women: If you are to be married in the future, what kind of man does Colossians 1.19 say you should be looking for? How can you evaluate this is someone?

 - Single men: If you are to be married in the future, how can you better prepare yourself to be a Colossian 3.19 man?

Sermon Notes

Other Issues: Inescapable Headship

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers do not provoke your children lest they become discouraged. (3.20–21)

Summary

Paul’s third application of the gospel in the family focuses on the relationship between parents and their children. Similar to the previous sections dealing marriage, Paul here details the obligations for both parties in the parenting relationship. The relationship between children and their parents is one of the most difficult to navigate. The conflict that arises, especially between Father’s and their children, has driven a multitude of parents to pursue a multitude of solutions aimed at bringing their children into obedience that is not often harsh and not pleasing to the Lord. Partially this is because many of the books and the techniques they promote are not necessarily rooted in gospel truth.

Many of the parenting alternatives offered by today’s culture do little to affect the heart. Instead, they are dedicated to working for behavioral reformation in the flesh. Like false gospels, these works based parenting methods are tempting to adopt because they are easy and self-glorifying. This exchange of the truth for a lie is further encouraged by the apparent lack of in-depth and explicit teaching about parenting in Scripture. But God has much to say about parenting, and it extends far beyond a few simple techniques to mitigate conflict. Beginning with God the Father’s own name, through the giving of the Law to Israel (5th Commandment), to the modeling of His Church after the family,

we see that the parenting relationship is fundamental to the story of redemption. It is passages like this that challenge us to see how our relationship with our parents and our children, help us to understand our relationship with our God.

Questions for Understanding

1. What are the two commands given in this passage? What are the reasons given for each of these commands?
2. What does think it means to “provoke” your children?
3. Why do you think Paul seems to address only (primarily) Fathers in a command about Parenting?

Questions for Application

1. The 5th Commandment handed down by God, directed children to honor their Father and Mother. It can often seem like an awkward commandment as it follows four commands speaking directly about God’s relationship with man. What foundational concept do you think God wants all people to learn (beyond good parenting) from this commandment?
2. Are there ever times when it would be appropriate for a child to disobey his or her parents? If so, when?
3. What is Gospel–parenting”? In other words, how does Jesus relationship to His Father give us a picture about what our parenting relationships should look like? Parents, how would

you evaluate the centrality of the gospel in raising your children—what does or should it look like?

4. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

Week 14 – Colossians 3.22–4.1

Mystery of Work

Slaves obey in everything those who are earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord, and not for me. (3.22–23)

Summary

In this passage, Paul speaks to largely to slaves and briefly to their masters. For the most part, we read him establishing expectations for people who, by every measure, possessed the lowest status in Roman society. It might seem odd for Paul to include words to slaves in a passage about family. But in ancient times, his words would be suitable because slaves functioned largely as members of the family only with fewer rights and privileges. What we do not read is Paul pitying their lowly position or decrying their abusive masters (should they have one) so as to justify their lack of obedience in a difficult situation. Instead, we see Paul speaking less to hardship in particular circumstances and more to the heart attitude of both the slaves and the masters in all circumstances. His words are aimed at turning their focus away from either despair (slave) or pride (master), all of which is motivated by allegiance to self, toward one that is submissive to the Lordship of Christ.

Because this passage specifically addresses slaves and their masters, many find it difficult to find a modern day application. The truths of Paul's words here can easily apply to any setting where work takes place. Most of us spend nearly a 1/3 of our time working whether that is in a typical career, a role as a stay-at-home mom, or some other job. Some of us work under people, some of us work over people, and all of us work hard.

Before the fall of man, God designed work to be a gracious blessing and not a burdensome curse. Now, the sin in us often makes work to be less of a grace and more of a source of discontent. Usually that occurs because we are tempted to find our identity, value, and hope in our unfinished work on the jobsite and not in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Here, Paul shows how the gospel, and our renewed identity in Christ, completely transforms our understanding of work and provides us with a new sense of meaning, purpose, and joy as we work.

Questions for Understanding

1. What command does Paul give to slaves? What command does he give to masters? What is similar about these commands?
2. What motivations does Paul give for obeying these commands?
3. What kind of obedience does Paul expect from slaves? What are the differences between two different ways to “obey” he identifies?

Questions for Application

1. Describe what you do for work. How you feel right now about your work? Why do you think you feel this way?
2. What are some wrong motivations for work that Christians can often adopt? What is the primary motivation behind all of your work? How do you know this?

3. A good Christian friend of feels frustrated by their work situation. From their perspective, they have been overworked and underappreciated for years. Recently, they were overlooked for a promotion and shared how they are becoming increasingly bitter. How can you help this person to begin to think differently?

4. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

Other Issues: Does the Bible approve slavery?

Week 15 – Colossians 4.2–6

Mystery of Evangelism

Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (4.6)

Summary

Through chapter three, and now into chapter four, Paul has endeavored to explain the practical outworking of a mind set on Christ. Over the last two chapters, Paul has unfolded how a new identity in Christ transforms relationships with God and relationships in families. Now, he addresses the change in a believer’s relationship with and community to the world.

Evangelism is the communication of the gospel to those who would believe. Evangelism is both a gift that some Christians are uniquely blessed with and an essential characteristic of every Christian. In other words, everyone is required to proclaim the gospel and some are very good at it. Unfortunately, many Christians today have abdicated their individual responsibility to evangelize. Overwhelmed by the fear of men, they refuse to do the work of an evangelist and, instead, work hard to get people in church. What Christians fail to realize is that “evangelists” God typically used in our lives were those in ordinary people we already had relationships with—not “professional” Christians.

Paul’s words here challenge the evangelist in all of us. They also remind us that prayer is the essential component in all communication with non-believers. In reality, we are not able to save everyone no matter how wise our conduct or persuasive our

words. At best we are broken and weak tools through which God can do his mysterious work.

Questions for Understanding

1. Paul tells the Colossians to “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” What do you think it means for us to be watchful?
2. Why does Paul ask for prayer that he would make the gospel “clear”? What is this so important for us?
3. In verses 4–6, what different commands does he give the Colossians in relation to outsiders? Why does Paul say obedience to these commands is so important?

Questions for Application

1. Paul seems to indicate the prayer is the key to better communication, especially with non-Christians. He also seems to imply that those same “outsiders” will be approaching to questions about why they live how they do. How would you compare your own approach to outsiders? What about their approach to you?
2. Paul speaks about speaking the gospel clearly. In your own words, can you explain the gospel clearly? Use Scripture references if possible.

3. Who are two or three people you interact with on a regular basis that you would like to see God bring to faith in Christ? Spend some time praying like Paul does here, for these people (i.e. open doors, good conduct, gracious speech, etc.).
4. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

See Appendix 3: 7 Ways to Get on Mission

Week 16 – Colossians 4.6–18

Mystery of Mission

And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received from the Lord.” (4.17)

Summary

The mission of God requires more than one person—it requires a family of missionaries. Paul did not lead the mission to bring the gospel to the Gentles. From the very moment of his conversion, God supported Paul in community so that he might fulfill his ministry. At the close of this letter, Paul identifies some of the many fellow workers, brothers, and prisoners on his team. As every good leader ought, Paul minimizes his own importance and maximizes the importance of those who have helped him.

The church is a body with many parts. Each part helps to make the body more effective in completing its mission. Without an arm, leg, or eye, the body will survive but remain deficient. Without the head begin Christ, the body will die and the mission will never get off the ground. Not everyone is going to play a leading role in God’s mission like Paul did—not many should want to. But everyone has a role to play in God’s mission, whether it comes by leading, serving, or even encouraging others through suffering. The Holy Spirit has given every individual a ministry to fulfill. This is individual gift does not mean we become individualistic. On the contrary, we are called to be a part of a team of ministers working together for the glory of God in Christ in others.

Questions for Understanding

1. How many people are on Paul’s team? Identify all of the different names the differ titles he ascribes to them (e.g., fellow _____).
2. Read Acts 13.13 and 15.37–40. Who is Mark? What might this teach us about relationships, reconciliation, and the mission of God?
3. According to verse 16, where else should the letter to Colossae be read? What does this reveal to us about the relationship among the churches?

Questions for Application

1. Paul writes to encourage believers with news of his gospel work and sufferings. Sadly, the news of other’s success, or suffering, can often discourage us. Why do you think this is? Can you remember a time when you heart felt encouraged by such news?
2. Paul tells Archippus to, “fulfill the ministry that YOU have received from the Lord?” Do you know the ministry that you have received? Are you fulfilling the ministry you have received? Why or why not?
3. What does Paul’s “team roster” tell us about how God completes gospel work? Do you feel part of a team at our church? Do you feel a sense of unified mission at the church? Why or why not?

4. What verse, idea, or discussion comment had the greatest impact on you throughout this series? Where did you receive the greatest encouragement? Where were you challenged to change? What is one step of obedience or application God is asking you to take?

Sermon Notes

Appendix 1 – Gospel Truth

Christology for Kids

1. **What person of the Trinity came to earth and lived as a man?**
A – God the Son
2. **What is His name?**
A – Jesus
3. **Is Jesus fully God?**
A – Yes
4. **Did He begin to exist in the past or does He exist eternally?**
A – He exists eternally.
5. **Has He always been the same or has He changed in any way?**
A – He has always been the same.
6. **What does the name Jesus mean?**
A – Savior
7. **What is His full title?**
A – The Lord Jesus Christ
8. **Why is He called "Lord"?**
A – Because He is to be obeyed as our Master.
9. **What does the word "Christ" mean?**
A – "Christ" is the Greek form of the Hebrew "Messiah." It means "Anointed One". He is anointed by God the Father to be

the Master and Savior of the world.

10. How did God the Son become a man?

A– By becoming a tiny baby in the womb of the virgin Mary and being born as a child.

11. Was Jesus tempted to sin like we are?

A – Yes, "He was tempted in all things as we are." (Hebrews 4:15)

12. Did He ever yield to temptation and commit sin of any kind?

A – No, "He was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15)

13. Did Jesus, having never sinned even once, deserve to die?

A – No

14. What is the gospel?

A – The news of what God has done in history, through Jesus Christ, to save us from sin and reconcile us back to him. Specifically, Jesus came, lived a sinless life, willingly died on a cross, was buried, and rose again three days later (1 Corinthians 15:3–8).

15. Why did He die?

A– He died in our place, as our substitute, to pay the penalty for our sins, and to enable us to have eternal life.

16. What happened to Jesus after He was crucified and buried?

A – He rose again. (1 Cor. 15:4)

17. What does His resurrection from the dead prove?

A – He conquered death, hell, and the grave.

18. Does the fact that Jesus died for the sins of the world mean everybody goes to heaven automatically?

A – No, many will go to hell. (Matt 7:14; 25:41,46)

19. Then what must we do to be saved from hell and have our sins forgiven?

A – Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 16:31)

20. Is "belief" the same as "faith" in the Bible?

A – Yes. These words translate the same Greek word.

21. What is saving faith?

A– 1) We must know the facts, as given in scripture about God, Christ, ourselves, and sin. 2) We must accept these facts as being true. 3) We must commit ourselves to Jesus, trusting Him and only Him to save us.

22. Is it not enough to realize that He really is the Son of God and accept as true what the Bible teaches about Him?

A – No. Demons "believe" in that sense, yet they do not go to heaven. (Jms 2:19; Mark 5:7)

23. Can we get to heaven by trying extra hard to be very good?

A – No. No one is good enough to earn heaven. Jesus and Jesus alone is the way to heaven. (John 14:6)

24. Once a person truly puts his trust in Jesus, can he lose salvation and go to hell after all?

A – No. (Jn 10:28–30; Eph 4:30; Rom 8:28–39; 5:8–9)

25. Name 7 things that happen when one trusts the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

A– 1) Jesus comes to live inside us. 2) We are immediately

justified. 3) We are sanctified. 4) We are given eternal life. 5) Our old inner man dies. 6) We become new creatures. 7) We become children of God.

26. Name 7 different ways we refer to the experience of trusting the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

A – 1) Being saved. 2) Being converted. 3) Becoming a Christian. 4) Receiving Christ. 5) Being born again. 6) Trusting Jesus. 7) Being regenerated.

27. Do all these phrases refer to the same experience?

A – Yes

28. How does it feel to have this experience?

A – It does not feel any particular way. Some people weep. Some simply have an inner joy to know what Jesus has done for them.

29. Does the Bible teach we should feel a certain way when we are saved?

A – No

30. Can a person be saved and not feel anything?

A – Most certainly. When we trust Jesus we are saved, regardless of feelings.

31. What does it mean to be "justified?"

A – It means God has forgiven all our sins and has declared us to be righteous because of Jesus.

32. What does it mean to be "sanctified?"

A – To be set apart for God's use; to be set apart from sin to

obey God; to be made "holy".

33. Is sanctification something that has already happened or something that is still happening to a Christian?

A – Both. We were set apart for God's service when we trusted Jesus, and we are still being daily set apart from sin in order to obey Him. (1 Thes 5:23; 1 Cor 6:11)

34. What is another way of expressing the idea of sanctification?

A – Growing to be more and more like Jesus.

35. What is glorification?

A – We are glorified when we receive new eternal bodies which cannot perish.

36. When will we be "glorified"?

A – Glorification refers to the final aspect of our salvation. It occurs at the resurrection when Jesus comes back to earth again.

37. What happens to one who dies without trusting Jesus Christ?

A – He (or she) goes into hell.

38. What is hell like?

A – It is a place of everlasting punishment, a place of torment, a place without the love of God.

39. Was it prepared for man?

A – No. It was prepared for the devil and his demons. (Matt 25:41)

40. How can a God of love send people there?

A – He does not. He has done everything possible to keep us out of hell. Men go there by refusing God's means of salvation.

Appendix 2: Gospel Community

Pastoring your Family

Deuteronomy 6 teaches that the parents of children, not the church, are primarily responsible for teaching their children about God. Many of us have failed in our God-given responsibility to pastor our homes, abdicating it to other people, institutions, or groups. As a result, worship has become something we do for 20 minutes on a Sunday and prayer something that we do at meals or bedtime. As part of this study, we're encouraging families to become more intentional in their worship of God together during the week.

Family Rhythm vs. Pharisaical Routine

An important part of leading your family is to develop a rhythm of worship for your family otherwise, it simply feels forced and unnatural every time. It is important to start implementing new practices slowly, especially if this is a new concept for your family. Without doubt, you can make a commitment each week to organize your schedule around a ONCE A WEEK family worship and Sabbath time. You might find it *more effective*, however, to weave some of the suggested practices throughout your already established routines (e.g. family meals, movie nights, etc.).

In other words, don't ignore God's command, but don't become a Pharisee about following them either (though legalism about such things aren't necessarily our problem today). Jesus said, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" In other words, an intentional time of Sabbath is a gift to be enjoyed. Jesus will not love you more if you practice the Sabbath...but be warned...you might start to enjoy and love Him more if you do!

Here are some suggestions for different rhythms, there are certainly others:

Rhythm of *Reading Together*

Read the passage of 1John that we are studying in church. This can be accomplished during the morning, before dinner, or even during the meal! Read the verse (s) and discuss 1) what it says, 2) what it means, and 3) how we can apply it to our lives. Obviously, the depth of these discussions will depend on the ages and personalities of the children. The point is not that you learn everything there is to know in a given passage. *The point is that you demonstrate it is important to spend time discussing God's Word together.*

Rhythm of *Learning Together*

Obviously, reading the same passage each day or night can quickly lose its allure. You can always read other Scripture, but consider going over the verses your children get from KIDS ROAD, memorizing a verse as a family, OR even teaching some theology through a KID'S Catechism found online (www.reformed.org) Be sensitive to the ages of your children, it may be difficult for younger children to sit for long periods of time if they are not used to it. If you have older children, also be flexible.

Rhythm of *Eating Together*

It is important to eat together as a family as much as possible because you can use this natural gathering time to talk about God. Occasionally, it is fun to eat a special meal together. Set apart a Saturday every now and then, as a special "FEAST" day.. The intent of this part of the day is to enjoy creation, specifically, the amazing foods that God has given us. This part of the day will

require pre-planning but it should be something you look forward to all day—smelling the aromas, seeing the colors, feeling the textures, etc. It can be a special BBQ outdoors, a dinner the family makes together, your family's favorite meal, a unique experience (Fondue), or something simmering in a crock-pot all day.

Rhythm of *Singing Together*

Worship through Song together, even if you're not musical.

Encourage your children to worship God with their voice by singing one or two short songs. Choose a song familiar to everyone OR teach them one. Try and sing this same song every week for a month so they learn it. You do not need instruments as God has given us all a powerful one. If you cannot think of any songs, allow your children to make some up. Write them down and sing them next week.

Rhythm of *Playing Together*

It has been said that the families that "pray" together stay together. I believe it is equally important to PLAY as a family together. Like the feast, this will require some pre-planning. It should be something the family will look forward to, something you talk about all week even if cryptically ("Sabbath is coming this Saturday!"). Your play time together can happen in the morning, afternoon, or evening. It can take the form of going on a field trip to Deception Pass, flying kites at a local park, riding a ferry, building a fort in the woods, watching a family movie, dancing together, playing a board game...anything! It does not need to take up the entire day, though it may sometimes. The activities don't have to be expensive adventures, but some special ones might. They don't have to be elaborate, but they do need to be consistent.

Rhythm of *Praying Together*

Pray over your family together. There are many ways to have a prayer time beyond just bowing our heads and hoping for the Spirit to move us to say something. Children, old and young, like a little structure to give them direction. Here are a few suggestions:

Pray Praises and Hopes: Kid's enjoy hearing how much you love them. One way to have a prayer time is to speak truth to your children. Tell them what you appreciate about them but also how you hope they grow in their obedience to Jesus. Lay hands on your kids and pray over them together. The kids may want to do this for each other and for you. Let them.

Pray Needs and Desires: Allow your children to share prayer requests. Write down the requests and revisit them every time you get together. Be sure the requests are not ALL self-focused but speak to the mission of God as well. Additionally, make sure they are expressing their gratefulness for answered prayer.

Pray the Lord's Prayer: If they are very young, lead them in the recitation of the Lord's Prayer found in Luke 11 or Matthew 6. This might feel repetitive but it is teaching them important truths.

Pray through the aspects of the Lord's Prayer: If they are older, use the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6, Luke 11) as a model to pray. For example, take time to express praises for God's attributes, pray for God's Will to be done in a difficult situation, pray for provision, for protection from temptation, forgiveness, etc.

Pray through the 10 Commandments: Pray through one, two, or all of the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20. Each of the commandments represents a different aspect where we fail to love

God. Praying through the commandments should not only reveal our sin, but lead us to the cross.

Pray a Psalm: One of the best ways to pray, especially when you can't find words, is to pray God's OWN Words back to Him. Pray a Psalm back to Jesus.

A FINAL WORD

Remember that having a family Sabbath time does not make your family less sinful. What I mean is, you will find that some nights will be incredible and others will be terrible. Some nights little Johnny will behave like an angel while during other times, he may act and sound like a Demon. The successful leading of your family is not always going to end in a perfectly planned and organized road to spiritual formation.

The value is in your commitment to lead your family because it honors God to do so. From your commitment, or lack thereof, your children will see what is valuable to you. Every family will plan, approach, and implement their rhythms differently. And while everyone's experiences may not all work out the same way, everyone must work them out.

Appendix 3: Gospel Living

7 Ways to Get on Mission

For the next 16 weeks of our Colossians study, we hope that everyone will become more intentional than you are now about living on mission. But what does that mean exactly? It means that you make a tangible effort to love others in the same way that God has loved you. It means that you begin to view yourself as a missionary sent on a mission to share the gospel. For some it means approaching the comfort of your context differently. For others, it means stepping into an unfamiliar and uncomfortable context deliberately.

For everyone it means coming to believe that we are who Jesus said we are: a sent people. Each of us has been sent into particular context with unique people and situations. In every context, God expects us to live as missionaries devoted to proclaiming His glories through sharing the gospel. This kind of sharing requires a commitment to building relationships with non-believers near us in order to gain the opportunity to share the gospel through what we say and how we live.

Below are seven simple ways to start thinking missionally. On paper, these are easy steps to talk about but many will find they are very difficult to act upon. Feel free to create your own steps to get on mission, or to simplify these for younger children. The only hope is that you do something and that, whatever you choose, it is something intentional and tangible.

7 Prayers for Non-believers

Identify seven different people and pray for them, every day, for the next 16 weeks. These may be people at work, people at the coffee shop you frequent, or your next door neighbors. Do not worry about talking them about God at this point, simply talk to God about them! Whether you know their names or not, pray that God will open their eyes to the truth and, God willing, give you the opportunity to share your own faith with them.

6 Introductions to Neighbors or New People

Step out of your comfort zone and walk next door to meet your neighbors. Begin to know your neighbors by being friendly. Tell them about your family and ask them about theirs. If you already know your neighbors, then introduce yourself to others you meet, and ask some questions to learn more about who they are.

5 Calls to Dinner at your home

Demonstrate some Christian hospitality by inviting your neighbors for dinner over the next four months. This means that almost once a month, you have someone over for a meal. The “agenda” for these dinners is not to save anyone, only to befriend them. If you have children, this is also an opportunity to teach them about mission by example. For starters, if this proves difficult, feel free to invite some believers in your own church over to bless and enjoy. The hope is that this kind of hospitality will become a normal rhythm in your life.

4 Invitations to Gather in Gospel Community

Each of these steps assumes a deeper level of intimacy in relationship. The more time you spend with your non-Christian friends and neighbors, the more you will begin to share details about your life and what is important to you. At some point,

invite your non-believing friends to gather with other believers. This might mean inviting them to a church service or another less formal gathering of believers. The hope is that you and your community will give them a clear image of what a gospel-centered Christian looks like (as opposed to a religious/irreligious one).

3 Places or People to Serve

As an individual or a family, choose to serve others. Exhibit a love for Christ by loving those in need. This can mean service at an organization or choosing to bless someone you know.

2 Gospel Conversations

Share the gospel with two people over the next 16 weeks. Not only tell them the facts of the gospel (1Cor. 15.3-8) but also how the story of God (the gospel) has changed you.

1 Person to teach to do the same

Choose one person to share the commitment you've made over the last 16 weeks. Then, informally instruct them in how to be a missionary, whether they are a friend, coworker, or individual in your family.

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0849938619/104-2246253-7081533?ie=UTF8&tag=acts29network-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=0849938619>

Mystery...

*a religious truth
that one can
know only by
revelation and
cannot fully
understand.*

