

Colossians Questions & Answers

Colossians 1:1-2:

1. What do you know about Paul? In your own words, give a synopsis of his life and conversation story.

Personal.

2. Paul had never met the believers in Colossae. How could he call them “faithful brothers”? Why is it significant that he related to them in that way?

Though Paul had never met the Colossians, he called them “saints and faithful brothers in Christ,” which was purposely exalted language. They were God’s holy ones, set apart for him. They with Paul shared the same paternity, and they both addressed God intimately as “Abba.” They shared a mutual domesticity of soul. They were “family,” and they naturally called each other brother and sister.

But best of all, they were “in Christ,” which is one of the deepest and most joyous of mysteries. In barest terms it means that the Colossians, and indeed all authentic believers, partook of all that Christ had done, all that he was (and is), and all that he ever would be. This is also the essence of the great paragraph with which Paul opened the book of Ephesians. There Paul also defined the Church as being “in Christ,” believers whom “God... has blessed... with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (v.3), having chosen them “in him before the creation of the world” (v. 4), which resulted in redemption and forgiveness of sins “in him” (v.7), which in turn eventuated in the hope of glorification “in Christ” and their marking “in him” with the seal of the Holy Spirit. The first fourteen verses of Ephesians use “in Christ” or “in him” no less than ten times to describe the profundity of regeneration in Christ.

Being in Christ has always been ample reason to celebrate as Paul and the ancient Christians did, and it is the same for us today. This is a wonder of wonders! (Hughes, 16).

All believers, everywhere, are a part of the church universal. We are a family, and that’s why Paul can greet these men and women who he’s never met in this familial way.

3. Do you view the people that attend Grace as your family? Explain the significance of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Personal.

4. Paul closes his greeting with “Grace to you and peace from God our Father.” What was he communicating? Why is it important?

We must note that by sealing the above with “Grace to you and peace from God our Father,” Paul created a Christian blend of Hebrew and Greek greetings. The customary greeting in the ancient and Greek world was *chairen*, which was a form of “grace” and meant “greetings.” But in Paul’s hands, it became the freshly minted Christian salutation *charis*, “grace.” Greeting fellow-believers with this word celebrated the work of grace in their lives. “You are a recipient of God’s unmerited favor. Praise God for his grace! This is indeed wonderful!” It was also a

commissioning to live under grace. “May you be a great taker. May you have the disposition, the dependency, the humility which makes you a ready receptor of God’s grace.”

The other half of the greeting, “peace,” came originally from the Hebrew *shalom*, which meant more than simply the absence of trouble, but well-being which springs from a sense of the presence of God. Paul’s wish for the Colossians was that they would comprehend more fully their peace and enjoy it in all its depth.

It is the same for all people: there must be grace before we experience the *shalom* of God. Grace (God’s work) comes before peace (our new relationship). Among the tragedies of our time is humanity’s pursuit of personal peace apart from God’s enabling grace. That pursuit takes many forms: material, intellectual, social, even religious; but they all end in futility. When sinners find peace through God’s grace, that is beautiful, that is cause for rejoicing! “Grace and peace” is the proper Christian greeting and celebration (Hughes, 16).

5. How do you encourage your fellow believers to live life full of grace and peace? How could you begin to incorporate this into your relationships at Grace?

Personal.

Colossians 1:3-8:

1. Paul writes, “We thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you” (Col. 1:3). In your own words, what theological statements is he making in this sentence? Explain.

Personal.

2. Paul makes a reference to the familiar Christian trio of faith, hope, and love. What is he communicating to the Colossians? How are faith, hope, and love signs of genuine Christianity?

Faith, hope, and love are mentioned numerous times in Scripture as a sort of “apostolic shorthand” for genuine Christianity. None of these qualities can be manufactured by man; they all come from God.

Paul first celebrated their “faith in Christ Jesus.” Faith is always mentioned first in the trio because apart from faith there is no Christian experience. Here Paul was very specific about the object of their faith. It was “Christ Jesus.” Everybody needs faith. You gotta have faith,” we hear people say. It is considered to be a component of a balanced life – another charm on the bracelet of one’s well-being. Having faith means you’re okay. But the truth is, faith has no intrinsic value in itself. It must derive its value from its object. When someone says that he or she has faith, the question which must be asked is: “Faith in what? In reincarnation? That God is good? Faith in faith?” Salvation does not come by believing in belief, or even in a set of doctrines or a creed. Salvation comes by believing in Christ.

Paul then continues to laud the Colossians for “the love” they had “for all the saints.” For Paul, faith proved its reality by “expressing itself through love” (Gal. 5:6). Loving God is seen in how one loves his neighbor, and particularly another believer. We have all met people who claimed

to be good Christians, who were upstanding, honest, and orthodox – but unloving. They had a loveless goodness, and orthodoxy without charity, a questionable faith.

Finally, Paul celebrated their hope: “the hope that is stored up for you in heaven.” Hope is placed last because, in this instance, Paul saw faith and love as springing from it. How does hope of Heaven cause faith and love to come forth? As pagans, the Colossians had been without God and without hope in this world. Then came the gospel from Epaphras and Philemon and the wonderful, surprising joy of salvation and hope of Heaven. This joy naturally enlarged their love and faith. This new hope thrust them together as it earned them the natural enmity of the prevailing religious system. In addition, by partaking of the same hope, sharing the same secret, they were bound more closely in their love, and thus encouraged greater faith in one another (Hughes, 17-18).

3. Do faith, hope, and love characterize your life? Do you struggle in a particular area? How can you begin to grow? Explain.

Personal.

4. What was Paul celebrating when he introduced the idea that the gospel was spreading throughout the world? Was Paul speaking in hyperbole?

Here Paul engaged in a little justified hyperbole, for though the gospel had not spread “in the whole world,” it was well on its way. What he was celebrating was its dynamic power and its universality. Unlike the Gnostic elitist foolishness, Christ’s Good News was for everybody and was daily reaching new people.

The miracle of the little church in the Lycus Valley was cause for celebration. It is our celebration too, for:

- We are God’s holy and faithful ones, saints.
- We are brothers and sisters with a common Father.
- We are “in Christ,” and are part of the joyous mystery of his Body.
- The grace of God has been freely poured on us, “grace upon grace” (John 1:16).
- We have peace, *shalom*, the well-being that results from divine grace and the presence of God.
- God has given us faith, love, and hope.

Let us, in joyful continuity with the Colossian church, daily celebrate the Good News of abundance of life in Jesus Christ! (Hughes, 19).

5. Epaphras was the one who brought the gospel to Colossae. Who was the person that shared the gospel with you? Tell your story.

Personal.

Colossians 1:9-14:

1. In this passage, Paul puts forth a beautifully constructed prayer for the church at Colossae. How often do you pray for Grace? Take time right now to pray for your church family at Grace.

Personal.

2. Why was it important that Paul pray for the Colossians' knowledge? Was Paul combatting a known heresy in Colossae? How can we apply this today?

It is significant that Paul prayed for the Colossians' knowledge, because they were under siege by people who were telling them they needed a better knowledge, a *gnosis*. The Gnostics were teaching that Christ was a good place to begin, but that there was so much more they could know and experience if only they would incorporate the Gnostic system of passwords, rites, and initiations. Their superior, know-it-all air was intimidating, and some of the Colossians were made to feel they were lacking. What is more, they system, by promising a special understanding, appealed to the people's natural, elitist instinct. And some had fallen. So Paul's prayer that the Colossians be "filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" hit the problem head-on (Hughes, 21-22).

3. How should we understand Paul's language of "walking in a manner worthy of the Lord"? How would the Colossians understand this?

The Hebrews saw an absolute connection between knowledge and conduct. From their perspective, a person did not know something unless he or she *did* it. This is from where Paul and indeed all authentic Christianity springs. True spiritual knowledge means action! This strikes at the very heart of the unhealthy dichotomy, which is so prevalent today. I am speaking of the tendency of people of knowledge not to be activists, and the reverse tendency of people of action to neglect the pursuit of knowledge – thus producing unbalanced extremes.

A profound knowledge should profoundly affect one's walk. It must be understood that any doctrine which isolates the believer from the needs of the world is not a spiritual doctrine. Or put another way, if our doctrine lifts us so high that our feet cannot reach the ground, it is false. Paul prayed that the Colossians would walk their talk, that their knowledge of Christ would grow, and that this in turn would produce a conduct which was worthy of the Lord, pleasing him in all respects. This is how we should pray (Hughes, 24-25).

4. What is the result of a worthy walk?

"Bearing fruit in every good work" (v.10). Good works are the outworking of Christ's life in his people. Paul thus prayed that they would act out Christ's kind of life in every situation. Thus the reality of the Colossians' faith would be seen by the surrounding community, and Christ would be glorified and souls drawn to him. The participle "bearing fruit" is present and continuous. Paul prayed that this fruit-bearing would be a constant, ongoing reality (Hughes, 25).

5. How would you define your walk with the Lord? Do you have a lot of knowledge that's not put into action? Do you act on your faith, but refuse to pursue theological knowledge? Where are you and how can you take your next step toward Christ? Explain.

Personal.

Bibliography

Hughes, R. Kent. *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ*. Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989. Print. Preaching The Word.

Colossians Questions & Answers

Colossians 1:15-23

1. Paul writes, “He is the image of the invisible God.” What is he communicating? How would you explain this concept to a skeptic?

Jesus is literally the *exegesis* of God. The Greek word translated “image” is *eikon*, from which we derive our English word *icon*. This means “an image or representation.” Sometimes the Greek word itself meant picture. Jesus is the portrait of God. However, the meaning goes even beyond this because being the *eikon*, the image, of God also carries the idea of revealing the personal character of God. Thus, Christ as “the image of the invisible God” is not just a plaster representation of him, but the revelation of what God is really like. The writer of Hebrews expressed the same thought in very powerful language: “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (1:3). The Greek word translated “exact representation” here meant the impress left by a die on a coin or a seal on wax. He is the exact impress of the essence of God.

Christ’s supremacy in eternity is boldly proclaimed as Paul says he is the *eikon* of the invisible God. *He is supreme!* Jesus is no second-rate production from the true God. He is God. This not only tells us about Christ – it also tells us about ourselves, because as Jesus is the image of God, he is what we were meant to be in terms of character: we were created in his image (Genesis 1:26-27). Jesus is supreme in eternity, and we ought to give him first-place in our lives (Hughes, 30-31).

2. How is the supremacy of Christ challenged in our culture on a daily basis? Give an example.

Personal.

3. Paul describes Christ’s supremacy in creation in four ways: Christ is the firstborn, the creator, the goal, and the sustainer. How would you describe each of these and their significance?

The language of “firstborn” can be easily misconstrued – missing Paul’s entire point. In no way was Paul indicating that Jesus was the first person created, as some believe (Gnostics & Jehovah’s Witnesses). The term was often used to ascribe rank and honor. So when Paul called Christ “the firstborn over all creation,” he is ascribing the highest honor to him. Christ was and is completely supreme in all creation, because he is the Creator.

“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” (Col. 1:16).

What a profound verse. From nothing, Jesus is the agent of *all* creation. From the tiniest creatures – over 800,000 catalogued insects – to the expansiveness of the universe, which is millions of light-years across – all things were created by Jesus and for Jesus. Christ is not only the Creator of creation, but he is the goal of creation. In his commentary on Colossians, Kent Hughes beautifully illustrates this reality:

“Everything began with him and will end with him. All things sprang forth at his command, and all things will return to him at his command. He is the beginning and he is the end – the Alpha and Omega. One day everything will give him glory” (32).

If this is true, Jesus should be the sum focus of our life. We should live completely for him, abandoning the title of “Homeboy,” and exalting him as Lord.

When it seems like there is nothing more we can say to capture the grandeur of Christ - Paul writes, “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). This is the moment when the twenty-first century Paul would have “dropped the mic.” Christ is superior in creation because he is the sustainer of creation. Try to wrap your mind around this - Jesus is continually holding all things together, and apart from his continuous activity, all of creation would cease to exist. This is the one who put on human flesh, came to earth, and purchased our salvation through his broken body and his shed blood.

4. How does knowing that Jesus is holding all things together make you feel? Is it comforting? If so, describe why.

Personal.

5. Would you describe Jesus as preeminent and supreme in your life? What is it important that he hold this place in the life of a believer? What would that look like?

Christ chose to enter his own creation, take on a body created and sustained by his power, die, and then undergo resurrection and so be “the firstborn from among the dead” – *and first in rank in salvation*. What a wonder! The Gnostics in all their arcane speculations could never have dreamed up something as stupendous as this. Such a plan, such a dream could only come from the mind of God.

What should this mean to us? Simply this: “That in everything he might have the supremacy” (v. 18). “Everything” extends his “firstness” to as wide a scope as is conceivable and beyond. There is no room for a “Parliament of Religions” here – only Christ preeminent. He must have first-place in everything.

- First Place in our families.
- First Place in our marriages.
- First Place in our professions.
- First Place in our mission and ministry.
- First Place in matters of the intellect.
- First Place in in time.
- First Place in love.
- First Place in conversation.
- First Place in in pleasures.
- First Place in eating.
- First Place in play.
- First Place in athletics.
- First Place in what we watch.
- First Place in art.

- First Place in music.
- First Place in worship.
- Let us give him first-place!

Colossians 1:24-2:5

1. What does Paul mean when he writes, “in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church” (Col. 1:24)? That statement seems confusing.

This is one of the most debated verses in all of Scripture! Whole books have been written on its interpretation over the last 2,000 years. We know it does *not* mean that Paul made up that which was lacking in the atoning sufferings of Christ, for the whole of Colossians as well as the rest of the New Testament teaches the sufficiency of Christ in atonement (cf. 2:13, 14; 1:12-14, 19-22). Paul did not help with the Atonement; that was Christ’s solo work. But one thing that the phrase does teach for sure (and everyone agrees on this) is that a close identification develops between Christ and the Church through suffering. Before Paul’s Damascus Road encounter, Paul had been making Christ suffer in the people he was persecuting. Christ’s first words to Saul made this clear: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4). Jesus was being persecuted in the bodies of his followers. However, immediately after Paul’s conversion Jesus said, “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (9:6). Now Paul would suffer, and Christ would suffer in him – a stupendous truth!

How did Paul fill up “what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions”? No one knows for sure. Many top scholars today, such as Ralph Martin and Peter O’Brien, believe that Paul’s words have reference to the common Jewish understanding that the Messianic Age was to be preceded by a definite amount of suffering. Thus the sufferings are the sufferings of God’s people, but they are ultimately Christ’s sufferings because of his identity with his people. So Paul in his sufferings helped fulfill Christ’s and thus hastened the Messianic Age. If this is the correct interpretation, Paul was rejoicing because his sufferings (which are Christ’s sufferings) were bringing the total nearer the ultimate goal and hastening the day of the Kingdom.

However that may be, one thing is clear: Paul knew his sufferings were good for the Church and that they brought to him a special closeness with Christ. Every blow that fell on him fell on his Master, and thus bound them even closer together in mutual sufferings (Hughes, 45-46).

2. In your own words, why is it crucial for believers to be certain that Christ’s atoning work on the cross is finished, and sufficient? How would you explain this to a non-believer? Explain.

Personal.

3. What is the “mystery” Paul is alluding to, and what role do the Gentiles play? (Col. 1:26-27).

Paul’s preaching set forth a “mystery” – namely, that in some way God’s saving purpose was going to be extended to the Gentiles (Isaiah 49:6; Romans 15:9-12). From the ancient Jewish perspective, this seemed impossible because of the mutual disdain, which Gentiles and especially Jews had for one another. It was mystery indeed!

The prophesied reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles was truly a mystery. Then Christ came, and the middle wall was broken down, and Jews and Gentiles became together a new man establishing *shalom*, peace (Eph. 2:13-18).

We see this explained by Paul in Ephesians 3:4-6:

“... the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.”

Jews and Gentiles all sat down at one table and counted themselves one in Christ. It was a miracle! This had come about only because of “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (v.27). The indwelling of the Lord Jesus Christ is what made the miracle possible.

This happened in Colossae, and it can happen today. One of the greatest glories of the gospel is that it brings people who are different from each other together (Hughes, 47-48).

4. Give an example from your own life of how the gospel has brought you together with someone different from you. How has that relationship deepened your walk with Christ and ministered to your own soul?

Personal.

5. Paul was concerned that believers were being led astray by the Gnostics’ clever arguments. How did he deal with this threat? How could we apply this truth today?

Paul was motivated to say all of the above (Col. 2:1-3) because he was concerned that the Colossians were being led astray. In verse 4 we read, “I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.” The Gnostics’ clever arguments could easily lead astray those who were not knit together in brotherly love and thus fully enjoying the treasures of Christ’s wisdom and knowledge. It was an important warning in Paul’s day, and it is equally *apropos* today when the means of persuasion are so highly developed. We are subject to space-age subtleties which the apostle could never have imagined. For our soul’s sake, there must be a deep, growing knowledge of Christ and a love among us (Hughes, 56)!

Colossians 2:6-15

1. Paul instructs the Colossians to “walk in him,” as a result of receiving Christ Jesus the Lord (Col. 2:6). What is he communicating? How can we apply it today?

Paul’s point is that the Colossians had “received Christ Jesus as Lord” and that they would remain safe from spiritual seduction (apostasy) if they continued to walk in submission to him.

We too will be resistant to the Gnosticizing influences around us if we walk in the reality of “Christ Jesus as Lord.” The reason the major cults are cults is because they have defective doctrines of Christ. They Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Science, etc., say, like the Gnostics, that they believe in Christ – *but what kind of Christ?* Certainly not the Christ of the

Scriptures. This is also true of virulent forms of legalism and some of the extreme forms of the “prosperity gospel” which eat away at the fringes of evangelicalism. The safeguard against this is a perpetual bowing before Christ Jesus, the Lord, in line with our initial awareness that we are Christ’s and our sins are forgiven (Hughes, 61).

2. In what ways have people tried to convince you that the Jesus of Scripture is not intellectually tenable? Give an example.

Personal.

3. Why was Paul warning believers to not be captivated by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition? (Col. 2:8). Is there anything wrong with philosophy?

We must first understand that Paul was not putting down philosophy. *Philosophy* simply means “love of wisdom.” Everything that had to do with theories about God, the world, and the meaning of human life was called philosophy, both in the pagan and Jewish schools of the day. Both Judaism and Christianity are philosophical because they make holistic claims about the nature of reality and set values to guide life.

What Paul was warning against was a dangerous philosophy made up of both elements of Judaism and Greek Gnosticism. Greek Gnosticism taught that a person must work his or her way up a long series of lesser gods, called emanations, before reaching the ultimate god. Here, false Jewish teachers combined Hebrew rites and ascetic regulations with their philosophy, as a better way to move up the spiritual ladder. It was all very mysterious, complicated, astrological, and snooty. But worst of all, it was very deadly because it mixed some of the truth of Hebrew religion with the delectably enticing mysteries of Eastern mysticism and Greek philosophy. This was presented as “something more” which would elevate the ignorant Colossian Christians from their crude baby-faith to the truly deep things of God. Evidently some succumbed (Hughes, 68-69).

4. Have you been tempted – either in the past, or currently – to explore differing philosophies? If so, explain your journey.

Personal.

5. Paul talks about being “made alive together with him” (Col. 2:13). Is there any way to have life without Christ?

Without Christ, we can do nothing to get life. There must be a sovereign communication of life from God. When Elijah stretched himself upon the dead boy, his heart beat against the stillness of the boy’s chest until it kindled life. Even so, Christ must lay his full life on our deadness – and then come life!

All of us who are believers today were once dead. But through Christ, diving surgery was performed. We were empty, but now we are full. If you have not experienced this, let me assure you that it is real. We were dead, blind, empty. Our new relationship requires the most positive of expressions: life, light, fullness (Hughes 78)!

Bibliography

Hughes, R. Kent. *Colossians and Philemon: The Supremacy of Christ*. Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989. Print. Preaching The Word.

1. ***Where does Paul tell his readers to turn their attention (v.1-2), and how would that shape our daily lives if we obeyed that command?***

In Colossians 3:2 Paul instructs the Colossians to set their minds on things above, not on things that are on earth. This is an imperative command from the apostle. His reasoning is based solely on our resurrection with Christ stated in 3:1. If we have been raised to life with Christ then our affections, our focus, and our longings should no longer be rooted in temporary earthly things, but to Christ in eternity. This should shape the way we live every day. The center of our lives should be set towards Jesus. He should hold our affections more than our spouse, our kids, our jobs, our bank accounts, or any other earthly thing. When we set our minds on Christ above it affects not just how we live, but why we live.

2. ***Why should believers look forward to Christ's return (v.3-4)?***

Paul is pointing the Colossians to Christ's second coming in v.4 when he speaks of Christ "appearing." But Paul's purpose in doing so is to put the Colossians, and all believers, to what Christ's second coming will accomplish for them - they will appear with him in glory. What that means is that perfection in eternal life will be theirs when Christ returns. They will no longer face sin, death, pain, struggles, disease, broken relationships, but all those in Christ will be perfected when they appear with Christ in glory.

3. ***What things does God desire that we put to death? What are ways we put those to death? (v.5-11)***

We are called to put to death what is earthly among us. Paul is speaking more to sanctification than justification in this text. Justification is the work Christ did for us, Sanctification is the work He does in us. With the aid of the Holy Spirit we are to put to death the earthly things. Earthly simply means our sinful, rebellious attitudes and actions. Paul directs us to the secret sins of our hearts in v.5, he points us to more public sins v.8, and he points us to church fellowship sin in v.9. In doing so, Paul makes it clear that every part of our lives can contain sin, some our church family sees, some our actual family sees, and some only ourselves and God sees. Paul gives war language on how we are to deal with these sins. Notice, Paul doesn't say we are to take our sins captive, or even to conquer them. No, he makes it clear that sin is a serious foe and can be shown no mercy, we must kill it. We cannot kill sin by striving to be good, but only by being united with Christ. It's only when our desires and affections change through the power of the Gospel, that we will ever desire to put to death our old sinful ways. When God gives us new desires we then are enabled to put off the old self, and put on the righteousness of Christ.

4. ***Paul tells the Colossians to "put off" and "put on" certain things, as they would garments. How are we to clothe ourselves as believers?***

As Americans we are infatuated with clothing. In 2015, as a country, we spent more than \$400 billion on clothing, that more than many countries GDP. Appearances clearly matter, and they matter because what we wear tells those around us who we are. The same is true with our Christian identity. In v. 12 Paul gives a command to “put on” characteristics of Christ, the same way we would clothes. Everyday we have the opportunity to reveal who we are by how we live; by what we clothe ourselves with. Paul knew the Christian community would be defined by how they lived out their faith and how they loved one another. As followers of Christ we too must make daily strides to put on the character of Christ. Not only does it provide us peace, forgiveness, and love, but it provides it to the world around us as well.

5. *In v. 16 Paul commands the Colossians to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly. What did he mean and how are you doing that?*

When Paul wrote this command to the Colossian church the New Testament had not yet been canonized. So the “word” Paul is referring to would have been mostly Old Testament scriptures, certain New Testament letters would have been in circulation along with many testimonies contained in the Gospels. Nonetheless, Paul commands them to let the “word of Christ” dwell in them richly. Paul’s desire was for the Colossians to see that everything ever written, ever created, ever promised, ever fulfilled was for one reason - Jesus. Paul says the sum of all the scriptures is Jesus. Paul wanted the Colossians to be constantly reminded of the reason for their existence. He wanted them to invest their lives in the purpose of Christ. The way we are constantly reminded of our purpose is by having the word of Christ overflowing in our hearts. Many people long to have money richly dwelling in their bank account, but for believers the greatest desire should be the word of Christ dwelling in our hearts.

1. What are godly wives called to do? Does it make them less than equal?

Paul writes in Colossians 3:18, "Wives submit to your husband, as is fitting to the Lord." What Paul is stating is that in order for the family to function as God intends, the wife must take the position of submission to the headship of her husband. Notice that Paul does not say wives "obey" your husband. Submission does not mean a wife is a slave to her husband, but is now willingly subjecting herself to his leadership. This is not an issue of inequality for women but an issue in God's design for the the role of husband and wife in marriage.

Confusion on this verse has caused a lot of marital controversy. Confusion often leads to controversy. The reason confusion exists is because after reading this verse it is easy to believe that submission is solely the wife's responsibility. However, to say submission is only the responsibility for wives, and only for wives, is a complete lie. Submission in scripture is set for all of us, not just women. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:21-22, "*21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. (This includes wives and husbands) 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord*"

The real issue is that submission is not something we naturally do, we naturally rebel in our sinful natures. However, Christ has come and shown us how we are to submit to one another when he submitted himself to his father's will. In marriage there must be mutual submission, but for differing reasons. The wife must submit in order for the husband to lead, the husband must submit in order to exclusively love his wife.

2. What are husbands commanded to do? Can love and harshness coexist?

Colossians 3:19, "Husbands love your wives and do not be harsh with them." Singer/Songwriter, Dave Barnes has a song titled "Sticks and Stones" that illustrates the weight of Paul's command. The chorus states this, "I'd rather have sticks and stones, and broken bones, than the words you say to me. I know bruises heal, and cuts will seal, but the words you say beat the life from me." Words matter, especially to wives. There has always been a tendency for men to mistreat and abuse their wives, especially in Roman culture. Because of their strength and deeper tones men often use harsh tones, verbal threats to intimidate their wives. Paul was aware of this and knew that Christian husbands ought to have a different behavior than the world. Paul states in Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church." Christ would never speak an unkind word to his bride. Jesus humbled himself and laid down his life for the church. Husbands are called to the same for their wives. The way one sees that heart change most is in the way a husband speaks to his wife.

3. How can children become discouraged in their homes?

Parents have the ability to be too harsh and cause their children to become bitter. However, this does not mean that a parent should neglect proper and timely discipline. Hebrews 10:6 says we know God loves us because he disciplines us as his children. Proper discipline is a form of love, not a form of anger or retribution. However, many times parents use discipline as a way to get even instead of as a way to make a disciple. Paul speaks to this idea when he writes Colossians 3:21, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Christian parents should discipline out of love and to produce spiritual growth in the life of their child.

Frequently parents create unreachable expectations for their children. As a result, these children will live a life trying to please their parents instead of being built up in the gospel. Parents ought to be encouragers in the home and lay a foundation for gospel growth for years to come.

4. What command did Paul give to slaves?

Paul gives slaves multiple commands. First, slaves are to obey their masters, not as a people pleasers do, but with a sincere heart. A slave's work should be one of integrity, diligence, and faithfulness to his master. This means that they are to be honest in their efforts and their quality of work. The second command is for all slaves to work heartily for the lord not unto men, regardless of what their job might be. The Christian slaves were called to remember who they were ultimately working for. Many slaves probably worked in difficult conditions doing jobs that brought few satisfactions. However, Paul wanted to remind them that it was not about what job they had but how they did that job that mattered most. Although they were working under an earthly master, their work was actually a representation of their eternal king.

5. Is Paul an advocate for slavery?

Slave holders and slaves were prevalent in the Roman culture during the 1st Century. When we think of slaves we often do so through the lens of U.S. History. We think of slavery centered on race and oppression. However, when Paul speaks of slaves in Colossians 3 they operated more like indentured servants, that worked off debt, or used these positions to provide necessities for their families. Notice that Paul says more to slaves than masters, this is because the majority of the world was slaves during this time. Some historians even claim upwards of 90% of Roman civilizations were slaves. Indentured servitude was how many people found the necessary labor to complete tasks. Today the terminology of master and slave would be closer to our understanding of employer/employee than it would our Civil War understanding of slavery. Paul's argument in Colossians 3 is that if we are truly raised with Christ then the way we work should be transformed. At this time, most workers were slaves. This is why Paul speaks to slaver, not to condone it, but because the majority of the Colossian church were indentured servants.

Week 10: Colossians 4:1-6

1. **In verse 1, Paul instructs us to treat those in our care justly and fairly. Who has God entrusted to you and how should your treatment of them change in light of this verse?**

personal answer

What does Paul appeal to as the basis for the admonition?

Paul appeals to the fact that all Christians have a “master in heaven” and this requires that we, as Christians, execute our duties mindful of the fact that we will give an account to God for our actions and especially our treatment of other people entrusted to our care.

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Both of you stand in the same relation to the great Lord, who is in heaven and over all (comp. Ephesians 1:20, 21). Your being higher in earthly station than they will not procure for you any indulgence or consideration. You will be judged simply and solely according to your deeds. Your responsibility to the Judge and your obligations to the Savior alike bind you to just and merciful treatment. If such principles were applicable to the relations of enforced labor, they are certainly not less so to the relations of labor when free.”

2. **In verses 2-6 Paul is giving instruction to us on how to speak to God about people and how to speak to people about God. Why would he begin the instruction by telling us to devote ourselves to prayer? (v. 2)**

Paul has just given a list of commands that seem impossible to keep:

Husbands - love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

Wives - submit to your husbands

Children - obey your parents in everything

Fathers - do not provoke your children or discourage them

Servants - obey your masters in everything

Masters - treat your servants justly and fairly

Each of these commands are counterintuitive to how we normally and naturally behave. And so if we are to succeed in living in this way, we must find strength not from within, but from without. We must begin to look to a source of strength that does not come naturally, but supernaturally. And so Paul further instructs: “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

It’s fascinating, that Paul does not just say pray, he says, continue steadfastly in prayer. Continue to pray faithfully. Pray for your relationships. Pray for the people you’re called to love and serve. And don’t stop praying. Continue steadfastly.

But not only are we to pray, we are also told to be watchful in prayer with thanksgiving. Here,

we find real power. When we think of the commands Paul has given, we can undoubtedly find many reasons why we are the exception to the rule - a wife undeserving of love, a husband not fit to submit to, a parent we certainly shouldn't obey — but if we watch these people not with a critical eye, but rather with a thankful eye, our stance toward them changes and our attitude softens.

If we look at the people in our lives each and every day and ask the question: What about this person can I express thanks for today? we will most often find ourselves less frustrated by what they take from our lives and more grateful for what they add to our lives.

By following Paul's command, he equips us with prayer and gratitude which are powerful weapons against discouragement, self-pity, and frustration.

3. Considering the fact that Paul is writing from prison, what is strange about his prayer request? (v. 3-4)

Paul does not ask the Colossians to pray for the door of the prison to be open (ie. his release or to change anything about his circumstances). Rather, he asks them to pray that God would use his circumstances to open the door for word (to declare the gospel and to preach). He even goes so far as to state that this is the reason for his imprisonment.

In this we see Paul's faith in the goodness and plan of God. God is using Paul's life to further the gospel and though this means imprisonment for Paul circumstantially, he has found joy and offers thanks for the work being accomplished in spite of his conditions and invites the church at Colossae to join him in praying for the furtherance of the gospel through his present circumstances.

4. If Paul views even his imprisonment as a means to advance the gospel, what unique opportunities or experiences has God given you to advance the gospel?

personal answer

5. What advice does Paul give us about the way we live and converse with non-Christians? (v. 5-6)

First Paul instructs us to "walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time" - in other words, we are to be intentional when we converse with and live before those we know to be outside the faith. This is an important command as it bears great weight on our evangelism and capacity for missional living.

This is not a call to hypocrisy or duplicity, living one way before the world and another before Christians, but rather is a call for us — as ambassadors of Christ — to be mindful of the

reality that how we live and speak has direct correlation with how people perceive Christ, Christians, and the church.

While we cannot walk perfectly before the world - we are a sinful and broken people - we can walk wisely, repentantly, and intentionally. In addition, we can make the best use of our time with them - not only sharing Christ with our words, but demonstrating Christ through actions that match.

Second, Paul states: "Let your speech always be gracious..." - how would your speech patterns, social media posts, and attitudes change if you were to take this verse seriously? To be a Christian is to be a recipient of unmerited grace, and so Paul calls us to extend the same grace we've received to others. This is a stark contrast to the world around us which often seeks to let speech be cynical, skeptical, sarcastic, impatient, teaching us we have a right to be offended and should exercise that right frequently.

How are you challenged by these verses? Who among your family, friends, neighbors and co-workers immediately come to mind when you read these verses?

personal answer