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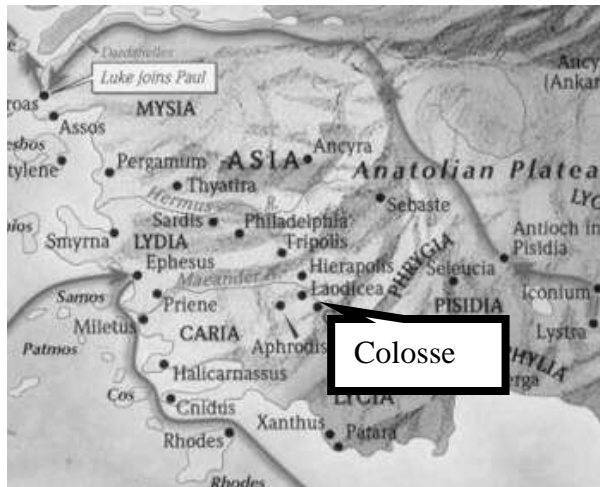
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Colossians and Philemon



Lesson 1: Background and Overview

1. Colosse – The City

- A. Relatively small town in Paul's day; eclipsed by Hierapolis and Laodicea.
- B. On the main east/west highway from Ephesus in the west to major points east.

2. Colosse – The Church

- A. Though the area historically had a large Jewish population, the content of Colossians seems aimed a Gentile audience.
- B. Who started the congregation? Apparently, a man named Epaphras, whom Paul considered a fellow-servant in the faith (Col 1:6-8).
- C. Did Paul ever visit there? There has long been debate on this point.
 - 1. On Paul's third preaching journey, after visiting the churches in Galatia and Phrygia, he came to Ephesus. The main route would have taken him through Colosse, but Luke records that Paul, "*having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus*" (Ac 19:1). This possibly refers to a route through the highlands north of Colosse.
 - 2. Paul indicates in Col 1:4, 8 and 2:1 that he is not personally acquainted with the congregation. The church was likely started during Paul's three year stay in Ephesus wherein "*all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks*" (Ac 19:10).

3. The Relation between Colossians and Philemon

- A. It appears that Philemon is a member of the Colossian church and that the church meets in his home (Phile 2).
- B. Onesimus, who is accompanying Tychicus in delivering Colossians, is called "*one of you*" (Col 4:9). Onesimus is also a slave who is being sent back to Philemon by Paul (Phile 10-13).
- C. Archippus is mentioned in both epistles (Col 4:17; Phile 2). He is said to have "a ministry" and is called "a fellow soldier." Apparently he is serving as an evangelist in Colosse, perhaps in the absence of Epaphras, who is with Paul during his Roman imprisonment.

4. Paul's Concerns for the Colossians

- A. There has been much theological debate over the precise nature of the threat to the Colossian church. Certain references by Paul seem to hint at Gnostic or Hellenistic tendencies, others to facets of Judaism. One author comments: "all the evidence points to the priority of Hellenistic thought patterns and the assimilation to them of Judaistic practices, reinterpreted in a Hellenistic way. This means that it is not primarily Judaism being influenced by Hellenism, but rather, it is Hellenism being influenced ... by Judaism" (Bradley, in *Truth Commentary on Colossians and Philemon*, Weaver, p. 297).
- B. Various warnings:
1. Paul warns against any view of Christ that diminishes His humanity or deity.
 2. Paul warns them against being deceived, cheated or defrauded away from the truth.
 3. Paul warns against philosophies and traditions of men, Jewish practices, veneration of angels and falling back into the immorality of their former lives.
- C. He expresses his great love for them and confidence in them though he has never met them. Such is the bond between people who share the same Savior, worship the same God and live according to the words of the same Holy Spirit.

Questions:

1. Who delivered Paul's letter to Ephesus?
2. Where was Paul when he wrote Colossians and Philemon?
3. Who else is said to be with Paul as he writes both Colossians and Philemon?
4. Read through Colossians and fill in the following:
 - a. List three truths about the deity of Jesus:
 - b. List three truths about the sacrifice of Jesus:
 - c. List three things about Paul's love and concern for the Colossians.
 - d. List three different ways Paul describes a Christian relative to his new spiritual life.

Colossians and Philemon

Lesson 2: Colossians 1:1-13

Basic Concepts:

1. In Paul's opening greetings he acknowledges the Colossians' genuine spiritual conversion (by the work/preaching of Epaphras). Paul labels Epaphras a "dear fellow servant" and "faithful minister"; i.e., he was a legitimate source of gospel truth (in contrast to the false teachers now plaguing them).
2. Paul prays for their continued spiritual growth which arises from the true knowledge from God. Again, Paul is directing them away from humanistic ideas about Christ (to be discussed in later lessons) and to the true concepts as he will present in this epistle.
3. Paul assures them of their real transformation from the power of darkness to the kingdom of Christ. They have no need of some other secret knowledge, some additional deeper insight in order to be *real* Christians. They are *already* God's people by simple faith in Christ.

Questions:

1. Who is with Paul when he writes this epistle? (**Warning!** This is a "trick question"! Investigate!)
2. What does he call the Christians in Colosse?
3. What terms and phrases suggest that Paul has not personally met these brethren?
4. How does Paul describe the expansion of truth geographically?
5. Describe the inner growth of the Colossians that Paul prays for.
6. Finish the phrases:
 - a. God has qualified us ...
 - b. God has delivered us ...
 - c. God has translated us ...

Special Notes:

1. Note the "triad" of qualities: faith, hope and love (1:4-5). Think of how hope undergirds faith and love.
2. A.T. Robertson calls "all the world" (1:6) a "legitimate hyperbole." That is, the gospel has not been preached to every *individual*, but it has spread among the nations in a few short decades.

3. The cure for the threat of false teaching is: *know more truth*. There will always be false notions to challenge the pure and often simpler concepts of truth. The more truth we can learn, the better insulated we will be against error.
4. True knowledge (including wisdom and spiritual understanding) shapes both attitude and action (1:9-11). It “bears fruit” as it changes our thinking and behavior, making us resemble the character of Christ.
5. Note the connection between patience/longsuffering and *joy*. This is a common theme in the NT: joy is not merely the result of happy circumstance; rather, a deep sense of well-being is available to the Christian whether in trial or triumph. Can you find another passage in the NT where joy is mentioned amid suffering or hardship?
6. Paul uses the figures of light and darkness to describe the power of good and evil. He uses the past tense – “*He has delivered us from the power of darkness*” – in order to assure the Colossians that nothing is missing in their spirituality. These false teachers created a strong appeal by suggesting that they had special insight and understanding that would take the Colossians further into spirituality. Paul says they are already where they need to be, and all they lack is continued growth in the gospel as presented by Epaphras and inspired writings. What other source of knowledge were they to consider (Col 4:16)?
7. The kingdom of Christ was then in existence: “*and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.*” This verse alone answers those today who claim the kingdom was never established but will yet be so in the future.

Colossians and Philemon

Lesson 3: Colossians 1:14-18

Basic Concepts:

1. Paul primarily speaks in this section about the unique and exalted nature of Christ. He makes it abundantly clear that Jesus is of divine nature, is the creator and sustainer of everything made, and all finds its continued existence and ultimate purpose in Him. To fully appreciate his emphasis, we must remember the backdrop of false teaching which undermines the person of Jesus.
2. Sandwiched around this sweeping vista of the nature of Christ are two verses that connect Jesus with the spiritual creation – salvation and what it produced, the church. Paul’s intent is to show the supremacy of Jesus in both the material and spiritual realms.

Questions:

1. In what two ways is salvation described in Col 1:14?
2. What do you think is the meaning of “image” in Col 1:15?
3. T/F The term “firstborn” in Col 1:15 means first created one.
4. Explain in your own words the scope of creation that Paul describes in Col 1:16.
5. What is the ground of Christ’s headship over the church, according to Col 1:18?

Special Notes:

1. While it is difficult to precisely label the false teaching threatening Colosse, Paul’s positive and negative teaching in this epistle does seemingly point to some Gnostic elements. Some basic tenets of Gnosticism (some of which more fully developed into the second century):
 - a. “Knowledge” is emphasized (Gk. *gnosis*), particularly an advanced insight into Christ that did not come from the gospel but their own humanistic speculations.
 - b. The material universe is inherently evil and could not have been directly created by God. Thus, the idea arose that a distant “aeon” or lesser being was created by God to construct the universe. This has a direct bearing on Paul’s teaching about the nature of Jesus and His role in creation.
 - c. In one form or another, Gnostic sects believed Jesus was not really God, or did not really die on the cross, or that God temporarily inhabited the body of Jesus only to flee before the crucifixion. Whatever the specific strain of Gnostic doctrine threatening Colosse, Paul is seeking to clearly and unambiguously state the true nature of Jesus and to affirm that the revealed truth on the subject is all Christians need to believe about it.

2. Col 1:14 and 1:18 both introduce interesting concepts: this great Creator that He describes also *dies*. His blood provides the redemptive price for sin, and by His resurrection He ascends to a place of spiritual preeminence.
3. Other lofty descriptions of Jesus are found in John 1:1-18; Phil 2:5-11 and Heb 1:1-4.
 - a. On Jesus being the visible image of the invisible God, see Jn 1:18; Heb 1:3 (cf. 2 Cor 4:4).
 - b. On Jesus being the creator, see Jn 1:3, 10-11; Heb 1:2. Also what is clear in this description is that the universe was not created by some aeon or “lesser being” who insulated God from evil. Jesus, the creator, was fully divine.
 - c. Jesus created not only physical substance but the invisible forces and beings described as “*thrones or dominions or principalities or powers*” (1:16). Not only did Jesus create them, Paul will go on to say He has vanquished or subdued them (Col 2:15).
 - d. Not only is Jesus the creator but He continues to sustain what He has made: “*in Him all things consist*” (Col 1:17); cf. Heb 1:3.
 - e. And a final note about creation: not only did Jesus bring it about, “*all things were created through Him and for Him*” (Col 1:16). That is, the whole purpose for the creation finds its ultimate purpose and meaning in the person of Jesus. **This clearly an attempt by Paul to establish complete sufficiency in Christ, to establish the divine nature of Christ and to direct the Colossians (and us) toward Jesus and Him alone.**
4. In the spiritual realm Jesus is “head of the body.” This is a term frequently used by Paul to describe the church as a living organism, not a lifeless structure but “living stones... built up a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:5). This figure portrays a vital and exclusive connection between the individual members (organs) and the head (Christ). While other passages describe the church as a body for different applications, Paul’s purpose here is to emphasize Christ’s authority over it.
5. People are often more intrigued by the speculative or the imaginary than by the clear truth. The false teachers in the Lycus Valley, like false teachers in all ages, knew how to exploit this unstable curiosity. Paul is trying to ground these brethren in the gospel truth about Jesus, angelic beings, hostile spiritual forces and true knowledge. As it was true then, so it is true today: Jesus is the center of everything and we must remain completely focused on Him.

Colossians and Philemon

Lesson 4: Colossians 1:19-23

Basic Concepts:

1. The death of Jesus was necessary and fundamental to God's scheme of reconciling sinful men to Himself. Paul repeats his assertion of Jesus' fully divine nature.
2. Reconciliation was necessary because of the separation between men and God by sin. Sin was the result of evil thinking and wicked actions.
3. The gospel, which presents the "nuts and bolts" of this scheme, must be firmly adhered to. There is a danger for the Colossians, indeed for all Christians, to drift away from or be deceived to abandon the hope of the gospel. All that is needed for reconciliation to God has been provided. The Colossians must tenaciously cling to these truths.

Questions:

1. What words in this section refer to the actual human form of Jesus?
2. What condition results from taking advantage of the death of Jesus? In other words, what blessings are enjoyed through Jesus' sacrifice?
3. What does Paul affirm about the scope of the preaching of the gospel? Where did he say something similar to this already?

Special Notes:

1. The term "fullness" in Col 1:19 places emphasis upon the deity of Christ. Paul has already established this but reiterates it for the sake of silencing pre-Gnostic speculations. A.T. Robertson comments: "The Gnostics distributed the divine powers among various aeons. Paul gathers them all up in Christ, a full and flat statement of the deity of Christ ... All the divine attributes are at home in Christ" (*Word Pictures*, Vol. 4, p. 480).
2. Reconciliation is a fundamental gospel concept. See 2 Cor 5:18-20 for a more full statement of it. Sin brought estrangement, disorder to God's plan of making creatures in His image who would enjoy fellowship with Him. To die in a state of estrangement or separation from God is to suffer eternal torment – the greatest tragedy that can befall man. God had to do something, for man was incapable of implementing a solution to this predicament. This God did "*through the blood of His cross*."
 - a. The terms "blood" (1:20), "body," "flesh," and "death" (1:22) all seek to establish the full humanity of Christ.
 - b. The benefit of reconciliation applies to "*things on earth or things in heaven*" (1:20). This could have several applications. It may apply to souls already departed and awaiting in

God's care for the ultimate sacrifice to be offered (cf. Heb 11:40; 9:15). It may refer to the fact that heavenly forces and human souls which have been at odds are now brought back into harmony. It may also be an exaggeration stating that there is no realm or life whatsoever that cannot potentially be reconciled by Jesus' blood, and that the *only* hope *anyone* has of reconciliation comes through Jesus and Him only.

3. The cause of sin is mentioned in 1:21: "*alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works.*" This is reminiscent of Rom 1:18-28 where Paul speaks of the pagan mind that willfully rejected God and embraced idolatry and all that comes with it. See also Eph 4:17-19. The only remedy for such a wretched state is education in the gospel and willful submission to it, including the acknowledgment of the sacrifice God provided for reconciliation – Christ.
4. Note again the emphasis on body/flesh in 1:22. The Hebrew writer says something similar: "*But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death*" (2:9); "*sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me ... by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*" (10:5, 10).
 - a. It is the death of that body that provides God's ideal for man: "*to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight*" (Col 1:22).
 - b. This is reflected in Eph 5:27. God is holy, and He can only fellowship those who are holy. Our holiness is attained not of our own effort or scheme but by accepting that plan that originated in God. There are no "new, improved" supplemental plans for us to follow.
5. Col 1:23 underscores the concern of Paul in writing this epistle. He is troubled at the prospect of the Colossians' faith being undermined, of following some false notion that nullifies the truth of the gospel.
 - a. Several words describe his desire for them: "continue in the faith"; "grounded and steadfast"; "not moved away." Compare Heb 2:1; 3:12-14; 10:26-30, 35-39.
 - b. In fact, we can be "moved away" by accepting doctrine which says we **cannot** be moved away (Calvinism: perseverance of the saints or once saved, always saved).

Colossians and Philemon

Lesson 5: Colossians 1:24-2:5

Basic Concepts:

1. Paul refers to his apostolic stewardship, attested by his hardship and suffering even for people he has never met. There is an implied contrast between himself and the false teachers who have their own interests at heart.
2. In various ways Paul declares the mystery of God *revealed*. Apparently, the false teachers are asserting that there is still hidden knowledge that only they have discovered. Paul denies this and affirms that God has made known all truth, and all men have access to it.
3. The goal of the revealed mystery and Paul's role in communicating it: "*that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus*" (Col 1:28).

Questions:

1. Find one other NT passage which teaches that the mystery has been revealed.
2. Paul calls himself a minister in relation to what two things (Col 1:23-25)?
3. Where is all wisdom and knowledge hidden?
4. What descriptive terms does Paul use of his ministry?

Special Notes:

1. The term "mystery" in the NT is always accompanied by the notion of "revealed" (or a similar term). This might even be the "catchphrase" of the false teachers: they know things hidden to others. But Paul stresses that what was *once* hidden in the mind of God has now *been made known* and is *available to all*.
 - a. Hidden from ages and generations ***but now revealed to His saints*** (Col 1:26; cf. 1 Pet 1:10-12). God was at work throughout human history preparing for the full manifestation of His redemptive plan. The redemption has been provided, and Paul and others are in the process of briefing the world on it.
 - b. The riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles ***God willed to make known*** (Col 1:27). There were hints in the OT that God's future plans involved the Gentiles, but the specifics were unknown until clarified by the apostles (cf. Is 49:6; 60:1-3; Mic 4:1-2).
 - c. ***Attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of*** the mysteries of God (Col 2:2). Paul assures the Colossians that this wealth of knowledge that stems from the very mind of God is of universal access. He is working toward this very end, to see that this knowledge remains within the public domain.

2. The goal is not knowledge for knowledge's sake but that Christ would be in them (Col 1:27) and that they might reach full spiritual maturity in Him (Col 1:28). Note the triplicate reference to "every man." This knowledge is not just for the "initiates" but for all. Further, it is not "corporate growth" that is stressed but individual progress and relationship with Christ. (Paul wrote more extensively on this in the Ephesian epistle – Eph 4:11-16).
3. The corporate aspect of this growth is "*that their hearts might be knit together in love*" (Col 2:2). False doctrines often make inroads by turning Christians against each other, injecting a competitive spirit among brethren, causing doubt and suspicion to arise resulting in the questioning or impugning motives (cf. Col 3:12-14).
4. Paul uses words such as suffering, affliction, labor, striving and conflict to describe his apostolic ministry. But he never loses sight of the fact that the ultimate power behind his work is Christ (Col 1:29; cf. Ph 4:13; 1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 12:9-10). This intimate union and fellowship with Christ even makes it possible for Paul to "*rejoice in my sufferings for you*" (Col 1:24). Can you find another NT reference to joy and suffering or hardship in the same context?
5. Paul mentions his conflict for the Colossians "*and those in Laodicea*" (Col 2:1). What did the Lord fault the Laodiceans for some 30 years later in Revelation? One wonders if these false doctrines are not the cause for later unfaithfulness.
6. Paul's concern expressly stated: "*Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words*" (Col 2:4). The NT gives several warnings along this line: smooth words and flattering speech" (Rom 16:18); deceptive words (2 Pet 2:3); speak great swelling words of emptiness/allure through the lusts of the flesh (2 Pet 2:18); idle talkers/deceivers (Tit 1:10). The antidote for this poisonous doctrine and the self-motivated teacher who promotes it is a thorough working knowledge of truth.

If a man possesses not this certainty – if the view he now cherishes differs from that adopted by him again – if what he holds today be modified or explained away tomorrow – if new impressions chase away other convictions, and are themselves rapidly exiled in turn – if, in short, he is "ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth," then such dubiety and fluctuation present a soil most propitious to the growth and progress of error. And as the mental energy is frittered away by such indecision, the mind becomes specially susceptible of foreign influence and impression (Eadie, quoted in *Truth Commentary on Colossians*, Weaver, p. 406).

Colossians and Philemon

Lesson 6: Colossians 2:6-15

Basic Concepts:

1. In Col 2:6-10 Paul recaps some previous points about the nature and sufficiency of Christ and couples them with more stern warnings against being led astray.
2. Paul then expounds upon the spiritual transformation that has occurred within the Colossians. He sets forth three principal results from the work of Christ: a) forgiveness resulting in new spiritual life (2:11-13), b) the removal of the Law of Moses (2:14), and c) the defeat of principalities and powers (2:15).

Questions:

1. How does Paul define the “persuasive words” (2:4) that threaten the Colossians (2:8)?
2. Jesus is not only head of the church (1:18) but also head of what in 2:10?
3. Paul refers to circumcision “*made without hands.*” What other spiritual realities in the NT are made “without hands”?
4. What is the true power of baptism to establish new spiritual life (2:12)?
5. What must be removed in order to receive this new life?
6. How was the Law against or contrary to us?
7. In what act did Christ make public spectacle of the defeat of principalities and powers?

Special Notes:

1. Paul begins this section with an exhortation to continue in the way they had learned (Col 2:6-7). This echoes 1:7, 23 which placed a stamp of approval on the teaching of Epaphras.
2. He then warns them not to fall victim to “*philosophy and empty deceit*” (2:8) and defines this in three ways: a) *according to* the tradition of men, b) *according to* the basic principles of the world, and c) *not according to* Christ. The specifics of these human-oriented doctrines will come later in chapter 2, but Paul has already been strongly hinting at speculations about the nature of Christ. “Cheat” refers back to their deliverance from the power of darkness (1:13): they are in danger of being taken captive again by the enemy having once escaped him.
3. Whatever special connection is being taught by the false teachers to the spirit world (principalities/powers), Paul asserts that Jesus is *head over them all* (2:10). They are merely creatures; He is the creator. People who are not satisfied with Christ will be distracted by angels, Mary, “ghosts” or other real or imagined creatures. But these are all pointless speculations if

one truly understands that “*in (Christ) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*” (2:9).

4. Beginning in Col 2:11 there does seem to be a distinctly Jewish element injected into the discussion. The only circumcision that now matters is a spiritual one, “*made without hands,*” that cuts away the sins of the past and our bondage to them. Paul seems to affirm that the old Jewish rite is meaningless in view of this spiritual “operation” performed by Christ.
5. Paul then reiterates the role of baptism in the process of spiritual regeneration (2:12-13).
 - a. He adds to the metaphor of circumcision that of burial and resurrection (cf. Rom 6:1-6). In other words, there has already taken place within the Colossians a transformation, an inner change in response to the gospel which had been preached to them.
 - b. To further emphasize the point, Paul affirms that this new spiritual life is from the power of the same God who literally raised Jesus from the dead. Point after point, Paul is driving home the idea that what they have done is sufficient; there is no ritual or secret knowledge that will make them any more acceptable to God. All they need to do is to “*walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught*” (2:6-7).
6. Note the completeness of the forgiveness: “*having forgiven you **all** trespasses*” (2:13). The blood of Jesus is complete, sufficient, copious – for the true penitent *no sin remains*.
7. Another achievement of the death of Jesus was the removal of the “*handwriting of requirements that was against us*” (2:14). By what follows, the reference seems best understood of the Law of Moses. Other passages speak of the curse or weakness of the law (cf. Gal 3:10; 2 Cor 3:6-11; Rom 8:3; Heb 7:18-19) and affirm that the law held men in sin (or in the case of the Gentile shut him out altogether). When Jesus died, the Law of Moses was fulfilled in that it foreshadowed true redemption via the Messiah. The shadow gave way to the true substance of the Son of God.
8. One final note of the accomplishment of the death of Jesus: principalities and powers were defeated, disarmed and paraded as a public spectacle (per Roman triumphs of that day). When did this occur? As Jesus hung lifeless upon the cross, it appeared by human wisdom and observation as if the demonic spirits and their master, Satan, had won. Throughout human history death had the last word, but not this time. The blood that ran from Jesus’ body, for which Satan had thirsted, became the cleansing agent that freed mankind from his power. Satan apparently could not foresee this outcome. All the hatred, lying, slander, plotting, betrayal, pride, covetousness, jealousy and other evil intentions that swept Jesus toward the cross were overcome in Jesus by His resurrection. God made a mockery of evil and sin and death when Jesus was enthroned on the cross, and He confirmed this when He elevated Jesus to His right hand. Why, then, become enamored with these defeated beings? Why the curiosity? Why the speculation? Such pointless speculations only serve to distract the Colossians from Him who really matters – Christ Jesus the Lord (Col 2:6).

Colossians and Philemon

Lesson 7: Colossians 2:16-23

Basic Concepts:

1. Paul directly tackles the false teaching that threaten the Colossians. He argues against the practices themselves and also reveals the deeper inconsistencies with the true gospel of Christ.
2. Some of the elements seem to be related to Judaism, others to ascetic practices, but in summary they are all expressions of human origin. The result is doctrines and practices which carry the appearance of “religion” but are actually worthless or counterproductive to true spirituality.

Questions:

1. What is the “shadow” and “substance” of Col 2:17?
2. “Defraud” in Col 2:18 equates to what other warnings in 2:4, 8?
3. What is the major mistake of following such doctrines as noted in Col 2:19?
4. What is the inconsistency pointed out in Col 2:20?
5. Why are false systems of worship often appealing (Col 2:23)?

Special Notes:

1. 2:16-17: “*Therefore, let no one judge you ...*”

Food	}	Shadow of things to come – cf. Heb 10:1; 9:23-24 Substance is of Christ – cf. Gal 3:23-25
Drink		
Festival		
New moon		
Sabbath		

Judaism created such a strong pull on early Christianity due, in part, to its antiquity and the fervency of its adherents. Circumcision and other elements like those mentioned above kept creeping in, resulting in the corruption of true faith and, to one degree or another, abandonment of Christ. The “judging” here involves being treated as inferior or even as illegitimate as a true Christian. Paul says the Colossians should not allow themselves to be so pressured or intimidated into observing these obsolete ceremonies.

2. 2:18-19: “*Let no one defraud you ...*”

False humility	}	Vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind Not holding fast to the head
Worship of angels		
Intruding into things (not) seen		

Those who have fallen for such false notions often project an air of piety and their words may be sprinkled with religious lingo which makes them sound devout and spiritual. They undoubtedly created this impression when they waxed eloquent about angelic beings, and such piety would be very persuasive to the unstable. But Paul dismisses such as empty speculations and false visions. Contrast Paul’s attitude toward the *real* vision he was given of heaven (2 Cor 12:1-7).

3. 2:20-22: “*Why ... subject yourselves to regulations ...*”

Do not touch	}	Basic principles of the world Perish with using Commandments/doctrines of men
Do not taste		
Do not handle		

Paul says such doctrines take men spiritually *backward*, not forward. To be so focused on physical elements, and then to adopt an ascetic posture toward them, is not only missing the point but surrendering to human doctrine – something they had been freed from by the gospel. They had “*died with Christ*” (2:20), and in so doing had not only been liberated from sin but also from ignorance and idolatry and human philosophy. Like the Galatians, they were in danger of forfeiting all of this blessing and advantage (Gal 3:1-4; 5:1-6).

4. **Summary:** 2:23 – “*These things ...*”

Appearance of wisdom	}	No value against the indulgence of the flesh
Self-imposed religion		
False humility		
Neglect of the body		

No doubt we are in a war against fleshly lusts and self-will. These forces are powerful. But if we cut ourselves off from the head, if we insist on fighting this battle on our own terms and by our own strength, we are doomed to failure. False ideas lead to false doctrines which lead to false practices. So often what appears to be a “harmless” aberration turns out to have spiritually fatal consequences when followed out to the very end. One element of wisdom is the ability to see where certain ideas and practices will eventually lead. Paul is urging this wisdom upon the Colossians so that the tendency toward apostasy will be arrested and their relationship with Christ preserved.

Colossians and Philemon

Lesson 8: Colossians 3:1-11

Basic Concepts:

1. Paul now turns to the true implications of having spiritual life. It does not consist of outward rules and regulations “*which are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh*” (Col 2:23). It does consist of developing a heavenward orientation which rests on faith in the unseen realities of that realm (Col 3:1-4).
2. Thus being oriented correctly, the Colossians are directed to the legitimate task of fighting against sin and immorality, things that genuinely corrupt the soul and disrupt relationship with God (Col 3:5-11).

Questions:

1. Where did Paul earlier in this epistle mention being “raised with Christ”?
2. Our thinking may be oriented to what two different realms?
3. What great blessing will come to Christians when Christ appears?
4. What horrible fate awaits those who are guilty of the sins mentioned in Col 3:5?
5. What image is restored in the spiritual new man?

Special Notes:

1. Paul continues to use the figures of “death” and “resurrection” to describe the spiritual change that takes place within a saved person:

If you died with Christ – 2:20 → Raised with Him through faith in working of God – 2:12
For you died – 3:3 → Made alive together with Him – 2:13
Put to death your members – 3:5 → If then you were raised with Christ – 3:1
2. Two thoughts are suggested in these figures: a) There is a definite past time/act in which the Christian enters a saving relationship with Christ, and b) there is an ongoing battle to mature into the spiritual person God would have us be.
3. Crucial to successfully waging this battle is our focus: we must “*seek those things which are above, where Christ is*” (3:1). The Christian must “set (his) mind,” i.e., his affections, conscious thoughts, intentions, awareness, on the person of Christ – His rule, His life-giving power, His spiritual headship.
4. The promise of shared glory with Christ is almost beyond comprehension. Yet it is a promise repeated several times in the NT: cf. Rom 8:17-18; Phil 3:20-21.

5. Contrasted with glory which awaits those who have life in Christ (3:4), wrath is coming to those who manifest life that is characterized by this world. Paul here may have in mind one sect of Gnosticism that believed fleshly indulgence had no effect on the soul. He emphatically disagrees. Some “members which are on the earth”:

a. Fornication/uncleanness/passion/evil desire (3:5) – Paul encompasses the whole realm of sexual and sensual passions that give rise to corruption, treachery, debauchery and animalistic lifestyles.

b. Covetousness/idolatry (3:5) – Those whose minds are concentrating on earthly possessions and accumulation will sense their uncertainty. Insecurity and exaggerated pleasure in tangible things will lead to an insatiable quest for them. That which commands our passions and evokes our ambitions at the expense of God’s will becomes an idol to us.

c. Anger/wrath/malice (3:8) – Whether inflamed by the moment, or afflicted with settled indignation, whether genuinely wronged or unintentionally injured, the Christian must act in measured, deliberate ways. The desire to harm, to vindicate oneself, to inflict pain, to demean another will only rebound against us as God finds such behavior unbecoming.

Question: According to Jas 1:19-20, what does wrath not accomplish?

d. Blasphemy/filthy language/lying (3:8-9) – The previous disposition often gives rise to speech that dehumanizes both the speaker and the hearer. Blasphemy means to speak injuriously of men or God. Filthy language would include profanity, abusive terms, morally corrupt references (as are so often used in scorn or slander). Lying comes in a variety of forms: outright untruth, exaggeration, false promises, subtle word games that lead to the wrong conclusion, etc. It can be petty or involve serious, substantive issues. Lying is insidious; it can afflict us without our realizing that the truth has been compromised.

6. Note that “put to death” (3:5) is equivalent to “put off” (3:8-9) and its opposite, “put on” (3:10). “Put off/on” refers to clothing, to strip oneself of that which adorns (and even defines) him and to replace it with something wholly different.

7. “Knowledge” and related concepts have been key terms in Colossians (1:5, 9-10, 23, 26-28; 2:2-3). The new spiritual man that God enables us to become (3:10) is patterned after our Creator. It is knowledge of the gospel that directs us in this path, and this transforming knowledge is available and applicable to all men equally (3:11).

Colossians and Philemon

Lesson 9: Colossians 3:12-17

Basic Concepts:

1. In contrast to “putting off” or “putting to death” the old man (Col 3:5-9), Paul now briefly develops the opposite: what is involved in “putting on” the new man. Since the basic analogy is to change clothes, we may picture a Cinderella, one who is no longer a slave or peasant but who has been taken by a prince to be his princess. She dresses accordingly, taking off the dirty, unbecoming rags and being fitted with radiant, royal garments which enhance her beauty and reflect her regal status. So the Christian must dress him/herself.
2. The personal qualities mentioned by Paul and the mutual activity of worship are directed toward one overriding goal: to foster unity and brotherhood among the believers in Colosse. Obviously, one great concern about the influence of the false teachers is the fracturing of the body. This is often the result when saints get caught up in some self-centered doctrinal aberration. Self-righteous individualism replaces humble submission, leading to friction, overheating and eventual meltdown of fellowship.

Questions:

1. How many references are there to deity in this section?
2. What is the standard of being willing to forgive others? Where does Jesus teach this?
3. What is the crowning quality mentioned by Paul, the “bond of perfection?”
4. What role does singing play in fostering unity and good will among brethren?
5. What concept is mentioned in Col 2:7 and 3:15, 17? What does repetition indicate?

Special Notes:

1. Paul calls the Colossians “elect of God, holy and beloved” (3:12). He has earlier called them “saints and faithful brethren” (1:2), “partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light” (1:12), “holy, blameless and irreproachable” (1:22), “made alive” (2:13), etc. There is both confidence and responsibility in these descriptions. Paul is seeking to instill a settled identity within them and to motivate them to the highest possible calling as God’s children.
2. Rather than look inwardly in pursuit of higher spiritual consciousness (via meaningless avenues already discussed), Paul encourages them to adopt principles that concentrate on the welfare of others. Many things Jesus did and taught were for the purpose of getting men to quit thinking so much of themselves and enlarge their affections for their brethren.
3. Note the contrast of the “old man” and the “new man” in the following chart:

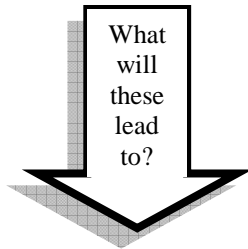
Old Man

Fornication/Uncleanness/Passion/
Evil Desire

Covetousness/Idolatry

Anger/Wrath/Malice/Blasphemy/

Filthy Language/Lying

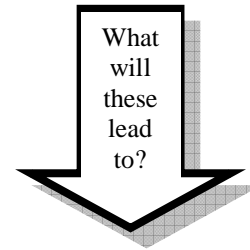


New Man

Tender Mercies/Kindness/Humbleness
of Mind/Meekness/Longsuffering

Bearing with One Another/
Forgiving One Another

Put on Love/Peace of God/Thankfulness



4. Part of the process of “putting on the new man” is what one allows to “dwell” within him. Paul says that we should strive to adopt the above characteristics, then that “the peace of God *rule* in your hearts” (3:15) and “let the word of Christ *dwell in* you richly” (3:16). Again, true spirituality is not in treating the body severely or hyped up emotionalism that fancies one to have visions or even transportations into heavenly realms. No, true Christianity is more “boring” than this: it means to do the hard work of becoming a different person with new attitudes, new outlooks, new goals, new relationships with others. This is unglamorous, hard work, but the rewards are out of this world!
5. Interestingly, Paul places a great deal of significance on singing together for the purpose of “teaching and admonishing one another” (3:16). He could have added other activities, but for reasons that are uncertain he singles out this element of worship. Evidently God considers singing to be a valuable tool in fostering unity and loving instruction, but to many Christians today singing seems to be either a dry, formal ritual or an unpleasant form of self-torture. But we must come to see singing for the spiritual value it possesses and get away from the “performance” aspect of it.
- Question:* What is to be sung?
- Question:* What makes it an act of worship?
- Question:* What is the significance of the heart in this process (cf. Eph 5:19)?
6. As a summary point to all Paul has said thus far, he urges the Colossians to make the example, character and authority of Christ the be-all and end-all of their faith and practice (3:17).

Colossians and Philemon

Lesson 10: Colossians 3:18-4:1

Basic Concepts:

1. Paul turns from general admonitions and advises specific groups. Family is addressed first followed by masters and slaves.
2. One particular theme pervades the advice: we live before and are answerable to the Lord. It is our relationship with Him that determines our attitude toward and outlook upon all other relationships and duties.

Questions:

1. What is the main reason given for wives to submit to their husbands? What is **not** a reason?
2. How does the Lord look upon obedient children?
3. What is a wrong motive for a slave (employee?) to render service to his superior?
4. Where does one's ultimate reward come from? How does this help a situation of hardship?
5. In relation to what does Paul mention God's impartiality?
6. What should govern a master's treatment of a slave?

Special Notes:

1. **Family relationships:** Paul is extremely brief in the Colossian epistle whereas in Ephesians he is somewhat more detailed. The reason for this is not known. But it seems sensible to conclude that he said what was deemed to be most important for the situation.
 - A. Wives – Submission to husbands is enjoined – 3:18; cf. Eph 5:22-24. This is a matter of respect for God's divine arrangement, not a comment on woman's inferiority: "*as is fitting in the Lord.*" This is not without challenge, and any woman who understands the divine foundation of marriage must soberly consider her husband-to-be from this standpoint. Does he *elicit* glad, confident submission by his demeanor, consideration?
 - B. Husbands – Love is commanded with the sub-point of not becoming embittered – 3:19; cf. Eph 5:25-29. It seems a general truth that the general makeup of the male, including less emotion-based thinking, more achievement orientation, etc., tends toward long-term frustration and disenchantment that breeds aloofness. The love here (*agape*) does not spring from a feeling but emanates from the mind and will. It is a *choice*.
 - C. Children – Obedience is stressed – 3:20; cf. Eph 6:1-3. For the child's own welfare, and for the good of society in general, God places heavy emphasis upon submission to the will

(i.e., rules) of parents. While it is the child's obligation to obey, it is the parents' duty to teach the need for obedience and to nurture children so as to respect their will. This process begins long before the child consciously understands the will of God.

D. Fathers – *Careful* nurturing is directed – 3:21; cf. Eph 6:4. The violation of parental duty can come from either extreme of being neglectful or overbearing. Paul warns against the latter, which creates discouragement. Correction and guidance can spill over into nagging, berating and constant criticism which destroys the confidence of the child and the desire to gladly submit. Again, Paul seems to tailor the advice according to gender tendencies.

2. **Servant/master relationships:** Paul gives greater attention to this subject than families. Walton Weaver lists various possibilities for this emphasis: 1) the fact that Onesimus, the runaway slave who had become a Christian, had just returned to Colosse (4:9; Phile. 10); 2) more problems arose from a Christian slave's relationship to his master than from any other social relationship of the time; 3) many Christians were slaves, and the slave population made up almost one-half of the Roman empire; 4) there may have been an exceptionally large number of slaves in the congregation at Colosse; 5) the essential moral dilemma of the slave in the workplace: what does it mean to have two masters, one on earth and another in heaven?" (*Truth Commentary*, p. 558).

A. Servants – Complete commitment to the master – 3:22; cf. Eph 6:5.

1. 3:22a – Obey in all things – Being a Christian does not exempt from serving and submitting to human masters (bosses). Nor can one "cherry pick" what he will do and what he will refuse to do (or only "appear" to do).
2. 3:22b; cf. Eph 6:6-7 – Not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers – Not to only work when the master is watching or to impress him with one's stamina, diligence, creativity, etc. There is a deeper level on which the Christian should be motivated.

B. Servants – Heavenly motivations.

1. 3:22c; cf. Eph 6:5 – In sincerity of heart, fearing God. It goes without saying that many slaves would have chafed under severe masters (cf. 1 Pet 2:18). But Paul puts this into perspective by emphasizing the *greater* master, God. He is to be feared more than human taskmasters, and fulfilling His expectations is of utmost priority.
2. 3:23-24; cf. Eph 6:8 – "Heartily" does not merely mean energetically but with the soul, inner being. Personal devotion, dedication, sincerity must be brought to a task that may have had many distasteful aspects. The Christian is not to be hypocritical, deceptive, slacking but should realize that his working parameters are now set by the Lord. The oppressive nature of slavery would undoubtedly present Satan with many opportunities to tempt the Christian. To do what is right from *within* would insulate the Christian from the insidious forces of depersonalization, bitterness, lack of control and any number of other unpleasant aspects of belonging to another as property. One must not focus on the this-world aspect of his vocation but on the eternal rewards of doing what is right.

3. 3:25 – It is unclear if this is said in regard to an unjust master, an unfaithful slave or both. In any case, the truth is clear: wrong will be noted and punished regardless of who does it or the circumstances in which it is done. We should not despair when others injure us or otherwise harm us. All will be revealed and recompensed in the end.

C. Masters – Justice and fairness.

1. Christian masters might also have many challenges in treating slaves properly – Col 4:1; cf. Eph 6:9. “Give up threatening” (Eph 6:9) might indicate the difficulty in sufficiently motivating slaves. Human solutions are often reactionary and counterproductive. The principles of Christ do not discriminate (in this case justice and fairness): they are *always* the best course of action, no matter if the subject is an enemy, a slave, one’s master, wife, husband, etc. Any man in any situation should remember that he serves someone greater, and he should treat his subordinates as he, himself, is subordinate to God.
2. The reality of Christian masters owning Christian slaves has come to Colosse in the persons of Onesimus and Philemon. What a great opportunity is being created for these two to display to their contemporaries the character of Christ!

Application to modern occupations:

1. List three of your biggest challenges to serving your employer in a sincere, hearty manner.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
2. What rationales do you see others using to give less than what is expected by superiors.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
3. What helps you keep perspective and avoid falling into similar rationalization?

Colossians and Philemon

Lesson 11: Colossians 4:2-6

Basic Concepts:

1. Paul, toward the end of the epistle, stresses the need for prayer. He counsels prayer in general, then asks specifically for prayer on his behalf (Col 4:2-4).
2. Paul then directs the Colossians regarding their behavior toward outsiders (Col 4:5-6).

Questions:

1. What two terms in 4:2 speak of the intensity of prayer?
2. What reference does Paul make to God's providence in 4:3?
3. What personal concern does Paul have, and request prayers for, in 4:4?
4. What special care should we take when dealing with non-Christians?

Special Notes:

1. Qualities of prayer – 4:2:
 - a. Continue earnestly – Prayer should be habitual; a part of the very fabric of life (Rom 12:12). Too often, our prayers are cyclical. Their frequency is determined by the situation rather than by genuine affection for and intimacy with God.
 - b. Being vigilant – The idea here is to be aware, conscious of what one is actually doing when praying. It should not become an empty ritual, where mindless bead-counting or meaningless repetition substitutes for heartfelt communication. Prayer should take into account the realities of life: threat, need, personal weakness, praise for God, life's unpredictability, etc.
 - c. Thanksgiving – This is the fourth time Paul has emphasized this outlook (2:7; 3:15, 17).
2. Paul's need for prayer – 4:3-4. Paul certainly did not see himself as self-sufficient or solely in need of God's blessing and protection. He leaned on fellow Christians – even ones he didn't know personally – to support and sustain him and to petition God on his behalf.
 - a. A door for the word – 4:3. Paul had a keen sense of God's direction and purpose in his life. Even now, he writes this epistle after several years in custody, and he seems fully aware of God's providence and completely content to allow it to hold sway.
 - b. As I ought to speak – 4:4. Even apostles were not unaffected by the hostility of the world. He must speak without partiality, in truth and persuasively – even if the one to whom he is speaking holds the key to his chains.

3. Behavior toward outsiders – 4:5-6.

a. **Lifestyle:** *walk in wisdom*. Take into account their differing values, objectives, motivations in life. In what ways do Christians commonly violate the principle of wise behavior among non-Christians?

1.

2.

3.

b. **Opportunity:** *redeeming the time*. “Redeeming” is a word from first century commerce and literally means “an intensive buying, a buying which exhausts the possibilities available” (TDNT, quoted in *Truth Commentary on Colossians* by Weaver, p. 585). This refers to an attitude: learn to look at each day for the opportunities it presents to model Christ before an unbelieving world, speak to the lost about spiritual realities, take a stand in moral issues of the day, etc.

Describe the spirit opposite to “redeeming the time”:

c. **Speech:** “*always with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how to answer each one.*” This admonition recognizes each human as an individual person and each situation with its peculiar features. People come from different points of the spiritual compass; they may be adamant atheists; some may be conscientious and sensitive while others may be bitter and gruff. Some antagonize; others are genuinely skeptical and confused. Whatever the case, we must try to account for the person/situation and speak so as to give the hearer the best chance to understand godly principles.

How do some violate this principle in religious discussion with others?

1.

2.

3.

How might we excuse ourselves for not being careful in this regard?

Colossians and Philemon

Lesson 12: Colossians 4:7-18

Basic Concepts:

1. In mentioning various fellow servants, Paul shows that he was not a “one man show.” He depended upon others for both the effectiveness of his work and for spiritual encouragement.
2. He also demonstrates the love and care of others for the Colossians. Greetings are sent to them, and the extent of Epaphras’ deep concern for them is revealed.

Questions:

1. What would Tychicus and Onesimus relate to the Colossians?
2. What is significant about Mark as mentioned by Paul (cf. 2 Tim 4:11)?
3. What do Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus Justus have in common?
4. What is Epaphras’ great hope for the church in Colosse? How strong is this hope?
5. What do we learn about NT epistles from Col 4:16?

Special Notes:

1. Let’s note the individuals referred to by Paul:
 - a. Tychicus – Also mentioned in Eph 6:21-22; 2 Tim 4:12. He is “*a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord.*” A special bond developed between men who not only were fellow-workers in the kingdom but who were sharing in distress together. Suffering with others not only adds strength but binds via strong emotion.
 - b. Onesimus – Likely, given the references in the two epistles, the slave being sent back by Paul to his master, Philemon (cf. Phile 10). Paul raises esteem for this man by referring to him as “*a faithful and beloved brother.*”
 - c. Aristarchus – A Thessalonian who becomes a trusted and valuable traveling companion of Paul (cf. Ac 19:29; 20:4; 27:2). He is here called a “fellow prisoner” while in Philemon he is a “fellow laborer” (Phile 24). Epaphras is referred to in converse terms (Col 4:12; Phile 23). One commentator suggests that Epaphras and Aristarchus took turns staying with Paul in prison to attend to his needs (see Weaver, *Truth Commentary*, p. 595).
 - d. Mark, Barnabas’ cousin – What a turnaround since this disciple was last mentioned (cf. Ac 15:37-40)! Apparently he has matured both in spiritual stature and in not holding a grudge against Paul for his harsh rejection. Paul mentions traveling plans that will take Mark through Colosse, but the nature of this mission is not revealed.

- e. Jesus Justus – Nothing more is known of him, but Paul speaks highly of his loyalty and assistance rendered under difficult circumstances.
 - f. Epaphras – He “bookends” Colossians (1:7-8; 4:12-13).
 - 1. He seems totally consumed by the welfare of the Colossians. Such concern is intensified when physically separated from those we love. But Paul sees this love and concern played out in Epaphras’ prayers: “*always laboring fervently*” ... note the intensity of each word.
 - 2. Epaphras (and Paul) want the Colossians to be “*perfect and complete in all the will of God*” (cf. Col 1:9-11, 28). The idea is not just amount of information but *certainty* of what is true, thus inoculated against the false notions attacked in the epistle.
 - 3. His zeal is not limited to Colosse but extends to the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. It is assumed by many that Epaphras was instrumental in planting churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis, but whether or not this is true, he certainly had great affection for them – as we do for Christians in neighboring areas.
 - g. Luke – Here only identified as a physician and a Gentile (by what method of reasoning do we know he was a Gentile?!). He is one of Paul’s faithful companions, and from his work and travel with Paul springs the great history book of the NT church – Acts.
 - h. Demas – At the time of writing, a faithful companion of Paul. But Bible students are well aware of what happens later to Demas (2 Tim 4:10).
 - i. The brethren in Laodicea – Special greetings are sent to them via the Colossians. No hint yet of their coming lukewarmness as mentioned by the Lord in Revelation.
 - j. Nymphas – A brother or sister who either hosts worship in their home (perhaps in the environs of Laodicea, or maybe elsewhere near Colosse) or a member of Laodicea who has a number of Christians in his/her household.
 - k. Archippus – Another figure mentioned also in Phil 2. A special charge is made to this fellow servant to fulfill his ministry. This is similar to what Paul will later write to Timothy (2 Tim 1:6-8). We all need periodic reminding of what our lives and true work are about. Apathy, complacency, distraction, frustration, etc. can deter us from concentrating as we should on the spiritual nature of our lives here upon the earth.
2. Paul directs an exchange of epistles in which we can see an early glimpse of circulation. Paul knew the significance of what he was writing and his authoritative position as an apostle. These letters were not merely circumstantial words of advice but divine counsel fit for wide distribution – from the present day even as far into the future as when the Lord returns.

Colossians and Philemon

Lesson 13: Philemon

Basic Concept:

This little book is rich in wisdom. It shows how a mature, wise Christian appeals to a brother in Christ to solve a potentially serious problem.

Questions:

1. How is Philemon addressed by Paul?
2. How have saints benefited from Philemon's faith?
3. What does Paul do rather than issue an apostolic command to Philemon?
4. By whom was Onesimus converted? Under what circumstances?
5. What does "receive him forever" mean?
6. What does Paul call Onesimus in Philemon 12?

Special Notes:

1. Philemon 1-3

Though Philemon is the main recipient of this short letter (most of the pronouns are second person singular – "you"), also acknowledged are "*the beloved Apphia*" and "*Archippus our fellow soldier*" (Phle 2). Perhaps these were Philemon's family members, but it is impossible to be certain. "*The church in your house*" is likely the Colossian saints who have already been addressed in a corporate epistle. The city of Colosse was overshadowed by its two more robust neighbors in the Lycus Valley, Hierapolis and Laodicea: "Long before AD 60 Colosse had already lost the race. If one was looking for health, pleasure, or relaxation, he would go to Hierapolis; if he was interested in trade or politics, he would direct his steps to Laodicea" (Hendriksen, *Commentary on Colossians and Philemon*, p. 13). Though probably small in number, the Colossian church was important to Paul. The worth of a congregation cannot be measured by numbers.

2. Philemon 4-7

Paul here sets a positive tone for the request which follows. Philemon is praised for his faithful service to the Lord and His people (cf. Mt 25:34-40). Paul has faced so much opposition and conflict that he deeply rejoices in a true ally, one who fosters rather than frustrates the work of the Lord.

3. Philemon 8-11

Paul now gets to the heart of the matter. His appeal on behalf of Onesimus is a masterpiece of kind intercession and gentle persuasion. It is a model of diplomacy, a textbook for the Christian spirit in action. People often set out to forge their own will with a hammer and anvil while forgetting that flowing water can carve canyons. Paul quickly removes the focus from the wrong done to Philemon by Onesimus' escape to the profit Paul gained by Onesimus' conversion. If Paul "*the aged*" has been well-served by this penitent fugitive slave, what would be accomplished by Philemon's prosecution upon his return?

4. Philemon 12-16

Paul makes his appeal for Philemon to do what is right by doing what is right himself: sending Onesimus back. It would have been tempting for Paul to retain Onesimus by rationalizing that Philemon would approve if he knew of the situation. But we have no right to take advantage of others by such assumptions: "*But without your consent I wanted to do nothing*" (Phle 14). Onesimus was Philemon's rightful property (for so was a slave in the first century); Paul was merely returning what belonged to another. But he offers this suggestion: in view of his conversion, perhaps Onesimus' escape was providential (Phle 15). Paul further points out that while Philemon lost a slave, Paul gained a brother in Christ. But now Philemon gains **both** (Phle 16); his slave returns **as a brother**.

5. Philemon 17-25

Paul yet ties more yellow ribbons around Onesimus as he sends him back to Philemon. Since Onesimus is counted a worthy and faithful servant by Paul, Paul urges Philemon to "*receive him as you would me*" (Phle 17). But what of the practical matter of debt? What is to be done about Philemon's financial loss due to Onesimus' escape? Paul says, "*Put that on my account*" (Phle 18). And then the coup de grace: "*not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides*" (Phle 19). Paul refers to his own conversion of Philemon (wherever and whenever that occurred) and not-so-subtly suggests that Philemon's spiritual indebtedness to Paul should compel his compliance with the apostle's request. Paul's final appeal is a vote of confidence that Philemon will not only do what is right but will far surpass Paul's request in fairness and equity. Thus with the gentle abrasiveness of running water Paul carves out a place for Onesimus in Philemon's heart. One mark of a mature, wise Christian is the ability to help brethren at odds find common ground.