

Colossians

A Study in Colossians 12 weeks

- 01 - By Will 1:1-2
- 02 - Report of Our Walk 1:3-8
- 03 – Endurance 1:9-14
- 04 – Things 1:15-23
- 05 - God's Strength 1:24-29
- 06 - Unite In Love 2:1-7
- 07 - See To It 2:8-12
- 08 - A Right Perspective 2:12-23
- 09 - Rid Yourself 3:1-10
- 10 - Clothe Yourself 3:11-25
- 11 - Use Wisdom 4:1-6
- 12 - Minister As Team 4:7-18



This was originally an expository series of sermons given in the church where I was serving as Pastor. A few years later, they were edited to be used as a Bible Study. There are a few things I feel I should share with you before using this material:

First: I had no intent of sharing or publishing this material until encouraged to do so by some friends. While I did consult several commentaries as I was preparing the original sermon series, I did not make notes of the references used in the messages. There was not in the beginning, nor is there now, any intent to plagiarize. Should you see anything you feel is the original thought of another, I ask for your grace and mercy.

Second: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I tend to spell certain words phonetically for the purpose of emphasis. When transforming these notes from sermon notes to teaching notes, I felt inclined to leave a number of these phonetic spellings. They help me to make emphasis in the lesson at particular points.

Third: In my notes for teaching (or preaching), I make little effort to conform to rules of grammar. One example is that I often use a hyphen (-) to indicate a point where I may want to pause slightly and to keep certain thoughts connected as I speak. Another example is that I will use local colloquialisms to make points in the message.

Please accept that these notes are not an academic work. But I do hope they will help the preacher or teacher to be able to more quickly prepare their own sermon or teaching.

There are so many ministers and ministries in the United States today - and they are many differences! Have you ever looked at some minister and asked, "Why do they do what they are doing?" - "What makes them think they have the right to do the things they are doing?"

Have you ever seen someone actually campaign and ask for a certain ministry job within a local church? Have you ever been just a little upset because the church didn't elect you to a certain ministry place within a local church?

Have you ever watched as some local church tried desperately to get someone to accept a particular ministry position within that local church - and that person, who wasn't ministering in any area just kept saying "no"?

What is the proper attitude toward all this anyway? What should the attitude of the individual minister be? What should be the attitude of the local church?

Read Colossians 1:1 and make notes:

"Paul. . . and Timothy our brother" What's in a name? Paul may very well be the most famous of the apostles. Some have even said he was the greatest apostle. I don't know if that is a fair and true statement - but Paul is given credit for having written 14 out of the 27 books in the New Testament.

The Holy Spirit chose to give us more than half of the New Testament books through this apostle, Paul. One would just naturally think, Paul would have reason to stand proud in Christian circles. As many of you know, Paul's name was not always Paul. It was changed after he became a Christian.

Have you ever wondered why God changed his name? I believe God changed his name for two reasons. One was to say something to Paul. And the other was to say something to us today.

The name "Paul" means "small or little". This has some significance, especially when we get down to verses 23 & 25. His original name was "Saul" which means "desired." Saul was a name he could wear with pride. Every time he introduced himself, he was saying "hello, I'm the desired one, I'm glad to meet you." When someone asked him his name, he would reply, "I'm the desired one."

After he met Jesus face-to-face, he never again called himself Saul, the desired one. From that moment on, he introduced himself as just the "little guy."

Why not take a moment and compare that with the way many people introduce themselves today who claim to be a minister of the Gospel! "Alright now, take notice, I'm mister Bigstuff, and God has sent me here to bless you - are you ready?"

When I here people presenting themselves in this manner - I can't help but wonder if they have ever met Jesus - I mean really met Him. I believe I have met Jesus, and I have come into contact with several people who believe they have met Him too - and you know what is one of the common denominators among those who really believe they have met Jesus? Everyone of them realizes they are just a "small part" of what God is doing. Not one of them tries to promote themselves as something Big.

Perhaps there aren't many people today in the church who identify with Paul. Maybe the majority already know they are "little guys" in the kingdom – or perhaps they see themselves as “nothing.” I know this name, Timothy, is the name of an actual person. But I am convinced God is saying something more to us in the name of the person He had written down in this verse.

We see in chapter 4 of this letter Paul had several other companions with him at the time he wrote this letter. Not one of them is mentioned at this time. It is also apparent in chapter 4, Paul loved and respected these other companions, and yet, he didn't mention them in the opening of this letter. It is reasonable to ask God why.

The name "Timothy" means "honoring God". Please remember, Paul came from a very devout Jewish family. Paul was raised in the strict Pharisee lifestyle and was unusually faithful to the standards and requirements of the Pharisees. Paul took great pride in his being a Pharisee of the Pharisees. The name God gave Saul, this Pharisee of Pharisees, was "little or small".

This Timothy in verse one came from a mixed marriage. He couldn't make any claims to family purity. He was raised without a father. He was raised by his mother and grandmother. Maybe it was a broken home – or an illegitimate birth - or maybe his father died when he was a young boy.

Timothy didn't have the opportunity - or family lifestyle - growing up which Paul had experienced. As an adult young man, Timothy could make no claims to the faithfulness of adhering to the strict Pharisee standards. And yet, Timothy, this man from impure breeding, - this man who had not been raised by a father, - this man who no doubt lacked much of the knowledge the religious leaders of that day prized, - had a name which meant, "honoring God."

The person who could truthfully claim to have accomplished all that man revered as a holy and righteous lifestyle – God renamed "little or small". But this person who could make no claim to anything holy or righteous - God did NOT change his name from "honoring God."

The simple message here - is that it isn't the righteous attitude or lifestyle we bring to God that honors Him! It is the surrendering to Him, - the submitting to His will, - and the obedience to whatever He asks of us that honors God!

And when we look at what Paul called Timothy, there is another message for us today. The Greek word for "brother" means "having the same national ancestor - belonging to the same people". Paul, the highest achievement in Jewish lifestyle, called this mixed breed, so un-qualified to be a religious leader among the Jews, "brother".

Paul said openly, "Timothy and I are of the same ancestor - we have the same father - we belong to the same people" - "We have the same Father – God' - "We have the same Mother – the Church' - "We have citizenship in the same city - the Heavenly Jerusalem."

If you couldn't identify with Paul, - with all of his accomplishments of righteous faithfulness - maybe you can identify with Timothy. Perhaps you can't make any claims to genetic purity. Perhaps you can't make any claims to a right and faithful lifestyle. Maybe the best you can say, is that I have taken my messed up life, with all of its mistakes, and given it over to the Lord to serve Him in any way I can from this day forward. If you have done this or if you do, you can expect God to say, "Your name will be one of honoring God."

This passage and a few others which speak of God's acceptance of Timothy - along with the apostle Paul's acceptance of Timothy - speaks volumes against the modern day efforts toward ethnic purity going on in some countries.

It never has been, - nor shall it ever be, - a case of ethnic or genetic purity. It never has been, - and it will never be, - a case of past righteous living. It has always been, and will continue to be, a matter of submission and obedience to the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings.

Have you been holding back from surrendering completely your life to the Lord - just because you know your ancestry is less than perfect? Have you been holding back from surrendering to God - just because you know your past life actions, attitudes, and accomplishments are less than right?

The Greek word for "apostle" means - a delegate or messenger who is sent forth with orders. At it's deepest level, this word speaks of one who has been empowered to act as an authorized spokesman and representative. Remembering the meaning of the name God gave to Paul, - this helps keep this introductory title in balance. "I'm just a little guy whom God has empowered to act as His spokesman and representative among you."

Paul did not claim to be an apostle in an attitude of being better than the others to whom he was ministering. Paul only stated he was an apostle because that is what God commissioned him to be. We are wrong to make anything more out of it than that.

Someone who has orders, has a defined purpose. In several of Paul's letters he identifies his orders. He does this in verses 23-25 - he has been sent forth to be a servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ - and he has been commissioned to present the Word of God in its fullness - even to the point of revealing some things regarding God's Word that has been a mystery to past generations. Paul, just a little guy in the kingdom of God, says something significant about the way, or manner, in which he became an apostle - right here in verse 1.

The person he was before, - Saul, - might have said something about having attained a certain level of spirituality, or having achieved a level or righteous accomplishments - but the person he is now, - Paul, - did not say anything about becoming an apostle by merit, reward, or worthiness.

Paul, said simply, I have become an apostle of Jesus Christ "by the will of God." It wasn't my accomplishments that earned for me the position of apostle. It wasn't my righteous lifestyle by which I earned the right to be an apostle. I am an apostle simply because God willed it to be so. I have been assigned the work or the job of an apostle simply because that is what God wanted me to do – and I have accepted His Will!

The Greek word for "will" in this verse is one which means "what one wishes or has determined shall be done". God's Will is what God wishes or has determined shall be done. My Will is what I wish or determine should "be done.

There are too many today who have wished or have determined that they should be some kind of spiritual leader - so they hang out a sign and set up shop and try to get a group of people to gather around them. Whether it is being a Pastor, Elder, Deacon, or Home Group Leader - we need to make sure it is God's will and not just ours. Whether it is being an Evangelist, Prophet, Missionary, or Christian Counselor - we need to make sure it is God's will and not just ours.

Our Will speaks about what we think should be done or what should happen. Our Will almost always speaks about our wisdom and our fleshly desires. There is something we need to recognize about the wisdom of man in relation to the wisdom of God! What we need to realize is that if we were to take all the wisdom of mankind and turn it into gasoline - it wouldn't be enough gas to drive a fire ant's motorcycle half way around a B-B.

God's Will IS what God wishes to be done by us - and what God has determined should be done by us. So, why are we doin the things we are doing? Why are we trying to serve or minister in the area we are trying to serve? Is it because no one else was willing to do it and it really needed to be done - in our opinion? Is it because we are pretty sure t his is some thing we can do well - and the opportunity came our way? Is it because we have always wanted to just see if we could do this?

Are we serving - where we are serving - and when we are serving - because this is what we want to do? Are we serving where we are serving - and when we are serving - because we believe this is God's will for us - at this time?

Following the example which Paul set is by far the better way to go. Surrender our will, - accept God's will, - and be obedient to His will - and the whole time recognize that we are all just "little guys" in the kingdom of God.

If you haven't already – please surrender your will to God's Will.

If you haven't already – please surrender your “mister or miss big stuff” attitude.

If you haven't already – please surrender to the Lord and become a modern day “Timothy.”

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Have you ever met someone for the first time - and heard them say something like - "Oh, so-in- so has told me about you." And then had this sinking feeling down in your gut - "I wonder what they told them?" The particular person they heard from could have told them something nice - or they could have told them about your failures and shortcomings - they could have told them something that you are really embarrassed about.

As an adult - I have personally experienced the agony and anxiety of just sweating it out - when a certain person was offering to tell others about me - and I knew that they knew things that I just didn't want anyone to hear.

When I was about 12 years old - I had become involved with some other kids and we were doing things we weren't supposed to do. One Sunday night, just before church, the Pastor walked up and said, "I heard something bad about you." I began to shake and quake. All I could think of was how did he find out what I had been doing - we had all sworn complete secrecy to our sins together. He must have noticed that I was about to self-destruct - he said, "all I heard was that you are moving away."

I have also experienced the sinking feeling - when I was told that someone had already told them all about me - and I didn't know what they had said. Had the person been told about my embarrassing failures - or had they been told about my efforts to do good?

It really takes the wind out of your sails when this happens. It takes a person who is seldom without something to say - and makes a nervous mute out of them.

Paul wrote a letter to the Believers at Colosse - and all he knew about them is what another traveling minister had told him.

Read Colossians 1:3-8 and make notes:

In that day, there were many gods being worshipped by various people groups. If you spoke of "god" in your conversation or writing, the other person or people might have a different god in mind.

When I was a boy, I remember many people in our community didn't specify which god - they simply said things like "the good lord", or "the man upstairs", and a variety of other phrases. But because there weren't any other gods being worshiped in our community at that time - or at least they were not worshiped openly - everybody understood which God they were referring to when they made any reference to a higher power - regardless of how vague it was.

Look at the phrase "we thank God" in verse 3. When I had a secular job, I traveled to a variety of laboratories all around the south. One day while at one of the facilities, I asked them who we should talk with to get permission to order a very expensive item they needed. They asked how much it would cost and I gave them an estimate which was pretty high. They said, "on , if it is going to be that high, we'll have to talk to the man upstairs."

That was a phrase I heard a lot as I was growing up. I responded, "I will be glad to pray with you about it, but I won't order it until someone in authority at this Lab gives the okay." After a moment of surprised look on their face they said, "I didn't mean pray about it, the only person who can authorize that much expense has an office on the floor above us." When they said, "the man upstairs," I had a totally different image come to my mind than what they were even thinking.

Paul wanted to make sure the Colossians knew which God he was referring to - so he specified that it is the God who is the Father of Jesus. In fact, he said he was referring to the God who was the Father of our "Lord" Jesus Christ.

Allow me to share a little word study with you. Every reading this probably understands the word "lord" - but let me give you the definition of the Greek word used here - it helps keep things in perspective - especially if we are going to call Jesus our Lord.

The Greek word translated "lord" in this verse means -
"he to whom a person or thing belongs, about which he has power of deciding;
the possessor and disposer of a thing, the owner;
one who has control of the person, the master."

The vast majority of Church people DO NOT allow Jesus to be Lord of their everyday lives. The closest most Church people come to this definition is that they will acknowledge they belong to Jesus - but they have not allowed Him to exercise the power of deciding in their lives. They do all of the deciding - They certainly don't allow Jesus to control them.

Is Jesus your Lord? Is Jesus the one to whom you belong? Is Jesus the one who has the power of deciding things in your life? Is Jesus the one who is in control of what you do, where you go, and when? If not, then He is NOT yet your Lord! Just think about that statement for a few minutes and be honest with yourself. God already knows.

The Greek word translated "faith" in verse 4 means -
"conviction of the truth of anything, belief with the predominate idea of trust or confidence."

Paul said, he had heard about their "conviction of the truth" concerning Jesus Christ. Paul said, he had heard about their belief in Jesus Christ with the predominate idea that they trust him. Paul said, he had heard of their confidence in Jesus Christ.

When the enemy comes to the place where we live or work - and he begins to tell us how completely he is going to destroy us - do we have confidence and trust in Jesus - or do we fall into despair over the threat?

When the enemy tells us how hard he is going to make things fall down around us - and Jesus gives us a promise of Victory and success - do we act on our conviction that Jesus is Truth - or do we drag ourselves around just waiting for the walls to start falling?

When others hear about our walk with the Lord Jesus Christ - what do they hear? Do they hear about our conviction of Jesus' truth – do they hear about our trust and confidence in Jesus – regardless of what the circumstances look like?

The Greek word for "love" in verse 4 means -
“brotherly love, affection, good will, benevolence.”

Paul also said, I have heard about your brotherly love you have shown to all the Believers that have come your way. Paul said, I have heard about the goodwill you have displayed to all the Believers that have come to you. Paul said, I have heard about the benevolence you have shown to all the Believers you have come into contact with.

What would the report about our daily walk with the Lord say? In regards to the amount of or lack of "good will", "brotherly love", and "benevolence"? What would the report about us say?

The Greek word for "hope" in verse means -
“to anticipate, usually with pleasure; expectation of good.”

For the Colossian Believers - This faith in Jesus - and this brotherly love to all the Believers - springs forth from the hope - please note that it does not say "from the hope you have" - it says "from the hope STORED UP FOR YOU in heaven."

It really was not a matter of the level of hope – or the amount of hope - which was found in the fleshly minds – or hearts - of the Colossians. It was a matter of the level and quality of hope which is "laid up" for them in heaven.

The Greek word for "laid up" in verse 5 means - "1a) to be laid away, laid by, lb) reserved for one, awaiting him."

The term we use today is "lay-away". When we put something on "lay-away" - the store holds onto it. We' can't use it, we can't put our hands on it, we can't even let others see it. But it is being reserved for us - it is being kept apart from the other things - just waiting for us to come and take possession of it.

It is that hope which is stored up in “Lay-Away” for us in heaven - from which this kind and level of faith and love spring forth. If we are having a shortage of faith and love - then just maybe we are looking to the hope that is within us - instead of the hope that is in “Lay-Away” for us!

The Greek word for "truth" 10 verse means -
"what is true in any matter under consideration
- that candor of mind which is free from affection, pretense, simulation. Falsehood, deceit."

The “truth” of God is not subject to our affections – emotions – or circumstances! The "truth" of God is true – regardless!

Sometimes people will actually begin to say certain things are not wrong - when they find out one of their children have been caught doing it. They try to change the "truth" to fit the circumstances.

In one church where I served - one man came to me really angry that a police officer who was a member of our church had given his son a ticket for running a stop sign. Even though his son admitted running the stop sign - this man thought he should not have received a ticket because they were members of the same church.

Sometimes - out of our emotions - we are tempted to try and change the truth about what is wrong. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is an absolute truth! God's Word remains Truth – regardless!

It was through the Word of Truth - absolute truth regardless of the circumstances - that the Colossians heard about a hope "laid-away" for them in heaven - from which real faith and real “agape” love begin to spring forth - once they grasped the reality of it.

The Greek Word for "Understood" in verse 6 means -
"to become thoroughly acquainted with. to know thoroughly."

There are a lot of people sitting in pews and chairs in churches all over this great country of ours
- who have heard about grace - but they do not understand it. They are not thoroughly acquainted with God's grace.

Are you thoroughly acquainted with God's grace? Or is it just a subject of some academic biblical concept you have been taught?

The name "Epaphras " means “lovely.”

Paul said to the Colossians, - You learned of this grace of God from the "Lovely One." When you find someone who has been trudging through some mess of life - and someone introduces them to the Grace of God - that person who introduced them to the Grace of God will always be a "lovely person" to them.

I have had more than one "Epaphras" come into my life at different times and I thank God for everyone of them. Can you remember an "Epaphras" person who has come into your life and explained, or demonstrated, or acquainted you thoroughly with God's Grace?

The Greek word for "fellow-servant" in verse 7 means -
"one who serves the same master with another
one who with others acknowledges the same Lord Jesus, and obeys his commands:
Just as angels are the fellow servants of Christians."

What a message for the contemporary church in America! If someone is serving the same master as we are - then they are a "fellow-servant." Even if they are a different color - Even if they are a different nationality - Even if they are of a different language - Even if they are a different denomination.

If this other person - regardless of how different they may be - If they serve the same Master, - AND obey his commands - then they are a "fellow-servant."

All servants do not receive the same command. Even though they serve in different areas - and serve doing different things - and required to dress differently - they serve the same Master – Each one obeying their specific instructions .

If we are serving the Lord Jesus Christ - AND obeying His commands - then we are "fellow-servants" with Angels. How different we are from the Angels! And yet the Angels don't disown or dis-fellowship us because we are not as strong - or as clean - or as smart - or dressed as holy as they are.

Why do we with-hold fellowship from other servants of the Lord Jesus Christ - just because they are different? Why do we do this?

There are some words I am convinced Jesus had placed into the Bible - just for the sake of those of us who are Pastors, Teachers, Missionaries, Apostles, Prophets, Evangelist, and so on. This next word is one of those words. I am sure the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to use this particular Greek word - just to help keep those of us who are in the recognized ministry offices in balance - a kind of reality check for the clergy.

The Greek word for "minister" in verse 7 means -
"one who executes the commands of another, especially of a master; a servant, attendant, minister."

In this country we use the word "Secretary" for people who serve the President of our nation. "Secretary of Defense" - "Secretary of the Treasury" – etc. In many other countries they use the word "Minister" - "Minister of Finance" - "Minister of Foreign Trade" – etc. They don't mean these people are preachers - just that they serve.

Not all for sure, but many of us who are Clergy - have a tendency to see ourselves in more of an executive role than a servant's role. We tend to see ourselves more in a position of command than in the place of foot soldier.

The Apostle Paul did not simply say that Epaphras was a servant - he said that He and Epaphras were simply servants of the same Lord Jesus Christ. If the Apostle Paul could identify himself as "just a servant" - then why do so many Clergy today have a problem with that?

Those of us who are sure we have been called to some ministry office - join me as we Think about this.

I began this lesson by telling my personal experience of great anxiety over what the report about me just might be from someone else. It is different for me today. Not only do I not have even a little anxiety when I hear that someone else has told a person all about me - But I don't experience anxiety when I am told that this other person has said something terrible about me.

What has made the difference? Is it that I no longer have any shame? - Even when I do something wrong? Am I no longer embarrassed by my sins? Is it that I just don't care what other people think about me?

The truth is that I feel great shame when I do wrong. I am very embarrassed every time I sin. And I can't help it, - it is an integral part of my personality – I want to be accepted, - and I want to be liked.

What has made the difference? The difference has come about entirely by the change in the walk! I don't walk the same path I used to walk. I still make mistakes. I still find myself having to repent for sins from time to time. Just like years before, - I know the walk - I know the path I have walked. The path I walk today has failures and weaknesses - not so different from the path walked then.

The path today has something that the old path did not have. The old path, at its best, offered only to hide or cover-up the mistakes. It didn't do a thing for the guilt or shame. This new path offers complete forgiveness and cleansing for the mistakes - and takes them off of my record. (1 John 1: 9; Hebrews 10:15-18)

I am not concerned about any false reports. Today, just like years before, I know the path I have walked – I know the true report.

The invitation is for you to join the Colossians in the walking the path of Jesus - with Jesus - serving Jesus! In this lesson you have been asked to think about several questions during the word study. Is Jesus the one who is in control of what you do, where you go, and when?

When others hear about your walk with the Lord Jesus Christ - what do they hear? Are you looking to the hope that within you - instead of the hope that is in “lay-away” for you?

Are you thoroughly acquainted with God's grace? Or is it just some academic biblical concept? Why do you with-hold fellowship from other servants of the Lord Jesus Christ? If the Apostle Paul could identify himself as "just a servant" - then why do we have a problem with being referred to as simply "a servant"? ? ?

It was not a particularly flattering thing to be from the town or vicinity of Colosse. The name "Colosse" means – "monstrosities." And yet, these less than ideal people, - in the natural - from a less than ideal location - when examined in the light of these questions - were referred to in such a magnificent way in verse 2: "To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse."

When others consider us in the light of such questions as these - will we be seen as "Holy" and "Faithful" - and will they be willing to call us "Brothers" or "Sisters" - "in Christ Jesus"?

If the people who were known as "monstrosities" could be so changed by their walk with the Lord Jesus Christ - then so can each and everyone of us.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Recent statistics say – in the United States of America – approximately 1,000 ministers leave the ministry EVERY MONTH. The latest report I read said it was approximately 1,300 every month who leave the ministry. This does not include those leaving a particular church or ministry and looking for another. This is the number of those leaving the ministry with the intent to stay out permanently.

I have heard it said, "God didn't call them or they wouldn't leave." I know that isn't true for all of them. I have known some personally. Probably the majority of those who leave the ministry each month - were not called by God to be in the ministry. But there is a number who have been genuinely called of God to be in the ministry. And yet they leave - and decide they don't want to have anything to do with ministry ever again - some even decide they don't want to have anything to do with the church after that. So, why do these who are God's people, - called to ministry, - leave the ministry?

Psychologists provide a variety of reasons why this happens. Most of these reasons appear to be variations of the term most of us know as "burn-out". I suggest to you, the real root reason is not so different from what many pregnant women have when they decide to have an abortion.

This is not something that happens only to ministers – it happens to lay persons as well. Pastors leave the church and the ministry - Elders leave the church and the ministry - Missionaries leave the ministry - Deacons, teachers, and church members leave the church - in at least as high of numbers as do the ministers.

People are bailing out of marriages left and right today. Parents are abandoning their children at the drop of a hat. People are walking away from good jobs.

The Church really needs to hear the message in this lesson. Today's Church needs the very same thing the first century church needed.

Read Colossians 1:9 and make notes:

Now that sounds like something good doesn't it? That we would be filled with the knowledge of God's will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding Now look at WHY Paul is praying for this :

Read Colossians 1:10-14 and make notes:

Now read verses 10 & 12 and just skip over verse 11. Doesn't that read much easier?

Even if you only include the first half of verse 11 and just leave out the last half - that too would be good. But the second half of verse 11 IS THERE - and it is an important part of God's Word - "Great Endurance – Patience"!

Satan would like us to skip over it and to believe it is not there - but it is there. And that is what the Lord wants us to focus on in this lesson.

In verse 11, the Greek word translated "patience" - "makrothumia" (mak-roth-oo-meh-o) – means: controlling of the passions: could be the anger which cries out to avenge wrongs - could be the love which pulls us toward some affectionate actions.

This word speaks of the person who is slow to hand out punishment, giving it time to be sorted out - maybe the emotions are not fair toward the other person - maybe there is something we don't know which could change the perceived need for punishment. This word also speaks of the person who is slow to pour forth their emotions of love upon another - giving it time to be determined if this is real love or just lust - maybe they won't feel the same passion when things have settled and their head has cleared - then again they may feel exactly the same way, in which case they can move ahead with great confidence.

The word "patience" says nothing of facing opposition of difficulty. It speaks simply of having control over our passions; - both positive and negative. I am sure most people in the Church today would agree this is a good characteristic for a Christian to have. I'm sure if it came to a vote, most Church people would vote in favor of every Believer having this "patience."

There is another word found in verse 11 which is another story all together. It goes against the grain of much of what is taught in the churches of our great land today. It is the word translated "endurance." The Greek word "hupomone" (hoop-om-on-ay) - which means: to stand firm in a courageous endurance. This word differs from patience in that it has an energetic active significance in the bearing of pain, in the not giving in under the strokes of destiny or chastisement - true hupomone is not motivated by outward public opinion or the hope of reward, but it is motivated by love, honor and commitment.

"Hupomone" does not speak of merely enduring the inevitable - but it speaks of a heroic, brave contending with the forces or circumstances that come against us. This Greek word was used in some secular writings of that day to denote the "manly way" of dealing with setbacks and difficulties as opposed to the weakling or coward's way of dealing with them. In the N.T. this word is used to speak of one who does not swerved from their deliberate purpose - and their loyalty to faith by even the greatest trials and sufferings.

Today, we are bombarded with the message that if you have enough faith, - you will get it "FAST"! If you say the right things to God, you will get it fast. If you say Jesus' name enough times, you will get it fast. If you are saved, don't do really bad things, and make God happy, then nothing will stand between you and the things you want.

We have been taught - and are being taught - those in a right relationship with Jesus don't face obstacles, setbacks, disappointments, or even difficult times. It is with lightening speed, how quickly other believers will begin to search for hidden sin in someone's life - as soon as this person faces some difficult part of the path of life they are traveling.

If you ever do any hiking in a mountain wilderness - you will get some great help in understanding life. Even when you are traveling a path that many have traveled before you - not all parts of the path are easy going.

Some places it is fairly level and smooth - just about anyone can travel this part of the path with relative ease. Some places may be fairly level but there are rocks and roots sticking up which have to be climbed over, or there are holes and ditches to jump over. Some people find this a painful part of the path.

In some places the path goes down hill, and almost anyone would say this is the easiest part, but the truth is some people have a major problem keeping their balance going downhill. If you ever hike with a group of people, chances are there will be one or more who will need help, just going down hill.

There are some places along the path which are very narrow, or maybe they are uphill. There are a lot of people who need help in these areas. Many people turn back as soon as the path becomes difficult to deal with or when there are frightening consequences looming on either side of the path.

That really is a good picture of our walk with Christ Jesus! And yet the message many people are being told today is "real Christian Believers" don't have to struggle, face difficult times, or deal with setbacks. Paul would not be a welcome teacher in many churches today.

I can think of several churches where he would probably be stopped in the middle of his message and led from the premises - if he began to tell the congregation, he was praying everyday that they would have great endurance in their Christian walk. That would go completely against what the pastor and visiting teachers have been telling them.

Was Paul's message only for the Believers of the first century A.D.? "Oh yes brother, those early Believers were soon going to come under such heavy oppression - as they were dispersed from Jerusalem. Paul was trying to prepare them for that. And after that dispersion of the early church, we came into the time where we only need enough faith to receive immediately all that we wish for or hope for from God - if it is good of course."

Let's look at the history of God's people for a few minutes. We don't know how much advance warning Noah had to build the ark. The scriptures tell us it was about 120 years, but it was just barely enough time. All of that time Noah "endured." While he was building a boat, - something no one had ever heard of - to protect his family from a flood, - something else no one had ever heard of - he was preaching to the people a message of repentance - and begging them to get right with God.

The people made fun of Noah's preaching - and they made fun of Noah's claim of a coming flood. The text in Genesis 6 clearly tells us that Noah was a righteous man and that he found favor with God. And in spite of the fact God declared Noah righteous, - and in spite of the fact Noah was in God's good favor, - Noah had to endure to remain faithful to God.

Noah was in a dark, cramped barge with his family and a whole zoo of animals, for about 11 months. Noah knew something about endurance.

David was a young man, - perhaps 15 years old, - when the prophet Samuel came and anointed him the next king over Israel. David was approximately 30 years old when he became king. He didn't spend those 15 years in "king preparatory school". He endured ridicule by his family. He endured willful efforts of king Saul to kill him personally. He endured having a bounty placed upon him. He endured having to live in a foreign country among pagans. He endured having to live in caves and move about in secret.

David was God's man to be king over Israel. David had been publicly anointed and declared out loud by the nation's prophet. David knew endurance for at least 15 years.

Moses was God's man to lead the nation of Israel out of slavery and bondage to the promised land. Moses had been saved as an infant for such a time as this. He had been trained in the finest schools the nation of Egypt had to offer. He had been fed absolutely the finest diet of the land. He had not only been given the opportunity to be in leadership, but he had proven himself a very capable leader. And yet, after he had developed a taste and appreciation for the finest culinary treats and grown accustomed to the finest accommodations - at about 40 years of age - He was literally driven into the desert wasteland with nothing to his name but the clothes on his back and a stick.

Moses endured the heat of the desert and the loneliness of solitude. Moses endured manual labor with no public recognition. This went on for 40 years before God said, "Now Moses." Even then, with God's commission, God's anointing, and God's appointed helper, Moses still faced opposition, setbacks, and difficulties. Moses knew endurance for at least 40 years – in preparation for another 40 years of being faithful.

Some will argue fiercely about the exact time Jesus came to understand who He was and what His purpose was on this earth. Can we at least agree that He knew a great deal of it when He was 12 years old? That was the time He stayed behind "tending to His father's business" at the temple and Joseph and Mary had to leave the others and return to Jerusalem to find him.

Again, there is a difference of opinion about the age of Jesus when He began His earthly ministry, - but everyone seems to agree that He was at least 30 years old. This means Jesus had to wait 18 years to begin doing what He was sent to do. He experienced 18 years of enduring the petty fleshly attitudes and actions of people instead of dealing with the Holy and Divine things of His heavenly father.

Was that waiting and observing easy for Him because He was God? I submit to you it must have been even more difficult to bear.

While serving as a Pastor - I found myself losing sleep sometimes grieving over the fleshly actions of someone I have witnessed to - and I know Jesus loves them much more than I do. Jesus left the Holy place of the Almighty God and endured the fleshly attitudes, actions, jealousies, lust, and greed of unholy, dis-honest people for at least 18 years before being allowed to begin doing what He knew He was supposed to do. Jesus knew endurance!

The Apostle Paul, who every time he prayed for the Colossians, prayed that they would receive "great endurance"- knew something of endurance. Remember, the Apostle Paul was God's man. God hand picked him, God called him, God anointed him, God filled him with His Holy Spirit. God used him to establish churches- and inspired him to write more than half of our N.T.

Paul was in God's favor - and we should listen to Paul's testimony near the end of his ministry. Before we read this, please remember Paul was fairly well off before he started serving the Lord. He had a good position, good income, and respect from people in high places. Everything we are about to read, happened to him after he became a faithful, obedient Believer - This is while he was serving the Lord:

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 and make notes:

Paul knew endurance! Let us not forget Job, Daniel, Joseph, and many others.

Do those who teach differently think we can be closer to the Lord than Paul? Do they think we can be more in God's favor than Paul?

Paul knew other Believers would need endurance to finish the race - and that is why he prayed for the Believers to have "great endurance." So, why has the message changed today among God's people?

I'm going to be real plain here - God's message HAS NOT CHANGED! If you are hearing a different message, it may have filtered through several places, people, or organizations - but it originated in Hell!

God does bless His people! God does supply our needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus! Amen! and Praise God!

There are some ministers today who are serving God with their whole heart - they have given up worldly comforts and honor among men - just to serve the Lord - and they have to endure life without the comforts taken for granted by the majority of people - and they have to endure seeing their family do without the things everybody else in the community says are "must have items". Just try telling one of them - Believers who are right with God - don't have to endure!

There are men and women today who are serving God - the few hours each day or each week they have the physical ability to do so - suffering under physical infirmity in their body most of the time - enduring pain, emotional distress, or staggering weakness. They watch others going and doing just about whatever they want to do just about anytime they choose to do so - and they are just hoping to be able to get up and out one more time to serve the Lord in their limited capacity. They spend their lying down time reading the Word of God or praying for all those who are able to be up and about. They spend special time with the Lord, He listens to them, and they hear from Him. Just try telling one of them that if you are close enough to God, you won't have to endure today!

There are men and women who have made no greater mistakes than you - they have done just as much right as you - and they have sincerely repented of the wrongs they have committed - and they have made a commitment to stand firm with God regardless - and yet they endure lonely days and nights without that person who covenanted with them - to never leave them "until death do us part." Just try telling one of them - that Believers who have faith – don't have to endure today! But if you, you might want to duck real fast.

Let's reflect back on the definition of that word for endure: "hupomone" = to stand firm in a courageous endurance - the bearing of pain - the not giving in under the strokes of destiny or chastisement - not motivated by outward public opinion or the hope of reward, but motivated by love, honor and commitment. Not merely enduring the inevitable- but a heroic, brave contending with the forces or circumstances that come against you.

The endurance spoken of in this text is the "manly way" of dealing with setbacks and difficulties as opposed to the weakling or coward's way of dealing with them. It is talking about one who does not swerve from their deliberate purpose and their loyalty to faith by even the greatest trials and sufferings.

Yes, that is exactly what Paul meant to say - that is exactly what God desires for His people to have - That is exactly what the church today needs.

If our setback is a physical infirmity which causes pain or weakness – we are to have great "hupomone" - be brave and courageous - and serve where we can, when we can, - and don't bother apologizing to anybody.

If our setback is an estranged spouse which drains our emotions, robs us of sleep, and keeps us on edge everyday – we are to have great "hupomone" - do not give in to these strokes being placed upon us - serve when and where we can - and don't give a second's thought to that complaint lodged by the one who has no idea what we are having to deal with.

The Church has already experienced too many Pastors who decided to "abort" the baby when things became uncomfortable or inconvenient! The Church has already experienced too many Elders, Deacons, and Teachers who decided to "abort" the baby when things became a daily struggle. The Church has already experienced too many brothers and sisters who have decided they no longer want to be part of the family because someone offended them and hurt their feelings.

The Church is in desperate need of people who will be mature adults in the kingdom. People who will have great endurance ("hupomone").

The Church desperately needs ministers - in every area - who will not abort the baby just because it becomes uncomfortable and inconvenient. The Church desperately needs brothers and sisters who can count on one another being there even though they are mad - and have a right to be. The Church desperately needs family who gives one another un-conditional love - takes care of the things which have to be done - even when it isn't fun anymore! In short - the Church needs some who will be mature.

Regardless of what setbacks, obstacles, or troubles are thrown at us - make sure we must not allow ourselves to be motivated by outward things such as what others think or what reward we could gain – we must have great "hupomone" (endurance) - and keep our motivation simply the love, honor, and steadfast commitment to our Lord.

Saints, - strive to have great "hupomone" - and do what is right - just because that is what is right. Serve the Lord, just because that is what is right.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

If you ask the average Christian, or Church person, I'm sure they would all agree we belong to God. I am also convinced the average Church person doesn't have any idea of how thoroughly God intends - and desires - to reconcile us to Him.

I am concerned most Church people aren't even aware of how much God, the Heavenly Father, wants a personal relationship with each of us. It appears, the great majority only think in terms of God wanting to "own" us or to be able to make a claim that we are His.

God's plan, and God's desire is so much more than some title of ownership. Those of us who have grown children who live in another state – we still want – desire – a relationship with them.

God's design involves such a greater depth than the simple paying of some debt. That's what makes this particular section of the 1st chapter of Colossians so important to us. The Church in America today needs to hear and understand the simple message found in this portion of the letter to the Colossians.

Read Colossians 1:15-23 and make notes:

In verse 15 we are told, “He is the image of the invisible God,…” The Greek word translated “invisible” means that which can not be seen. It is not that it simply is un-seen or that it is out of sight. Jesus is the image of God - who Himself cannot be seen.

When Ezekiel received his vision from God, he saw in the middle of the rainbow- like brightness - “a likeness as it were of a human form.” Paul had a similar experience on the Damascus road. When Jesus, the Son of God, appeared to him, he recognized “the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

So when Paul wrote these words down to send to the Colossians, he was not making some theological statement. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit - Paul was expressing what he had experienced personally. In Jesus Christ, the invisible, - or the un-see-able - had become visible and see-able.

John, in his great gospel states in the first chapter, "no one has ever seen God;" but later in the 14th chapter he records Jesus' words, "He who has seen me has seen the Father." If it hasn't already occurred to you, this is a great place to bring to your memory the magnificent declaration found in Genesis 1:26-27 - God created man, male and female, "in his own image."

The image of God which had been created in the Garden of Eden - became horribly defaced by sin. That defacing of the image did not change for one minute the fact that humanity had been created in the image of God. It did not change the fact that humanity was intended to reflect something of the glory of God - or to some degree be a copy, of the Glory of God. Sin did manage to deface the image of God in humanity to the point that it was un-recognizable. It no longer looked at all like God!

In verse 15 – the Greek word translated “creation” means “a creature or anything created.” We must not miss the inclusive message in the particular word the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to pen at this point. Jesus Christ is not only the firstborn over all creatures - He is also the firstborn over anything and everything that has been created. The all inclusive extent of this particular word will be all the more clear as we look at the next few verses.

In verse 16 the word translated “created” means “to make habitable, to found a city, colony, state; to completely change or transform.” This is not the word "to form" or "to construct." It is a word which can mean "completely changed" or "transformed" - It also means "to make habitable." This verse says that everything that was transformed and made habitable in heaven was done so by Jesus Christ. What kinds of things are there in Heaven? The Scriptures tell us there will be a River – a Tree of Life – but we do not know what all will be there!

Everything that was transformed and made habitable on earth was done so by Jesus Christ. What kinds of things are there on earth? We can think of – and name – quite a few.

The things that can be seen in heaven which were transformed and made habitable - as well as the things which cannot be seen in heaven which were transformed and made habitable - all of these were completely changed and made habitable by Jesus Christ.

We have so little of an idea of what kinds of things there are in heaven which cannot be seen - but they were transformed and made habitable by Jesus Christ.

Also the things which can be seen on earth as well as those things which cannot be seen on earth

– which were transformed and made habitable - were done so by Jesus Christ. Whatever the things are on earth that we can't see, - these were transformed by Jesus Christ and made habitable.

Look again at Colossians 1:16; "... whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." Paul uses these particular words to refer to angelic and demonic levels of authorities in some of his other letters. So, if he is still using them in this context, what he is saying, is even the various levels of angelic authority and power - were not just established by Jesus Christ - but they were transformed and made habitable by Jesus Christ. God's plan included more than just the creating, or completely changing of people - so that we could be habitable His plan also included the transforming of "things." This includes positions of authority!

In verse 17 the word translated "hold together" means "1) to place together, to bring or band together 2) to set one with another." Paul doesn't just speak of a pre-existent Christ. He speaks forthrightly about a cosmic Christ.

Paul speaks of Christ as the one by which everything came into being. Christ is the one by which everything is able to hold together. Christ is the cohering factor for the entire universe.

What was created by Him was also created for Him. What was created through Him is also maintained by remaining with Him.

It is Jesus Christ that holds families together. It is Jesus Christ that holds Churches together. It is Jesus Christ that holds businesses together.

When churches make other things their primary focus – they will come apart! In order to be held together – we must keep Him Who Holds All Things Together as our primary focus.

If we ever find ourselves at a place where we feel like we are personally coming apart at the seams - it is important for us to know - It is Jesus Christ that holds individuals together!

If our family is coming apart - Jesus Christ is the only thing that can bring it back together. If our family is together at the moment – we need to make sure Jesus Christ remains an integral part of our family make-up - for Jesus Christ is the only thing that will keep our family together.

If our business or vocational work is coming apart - Jesus is the answer to bring it all together and keep it together. On and on the list can go - Jesus Christ is what holds it all things together.

Jesus is what holds everything together - everything without Jesus Christ WILL come apart ! Let's take a moment and evaluate: Where are we? Coming apart – or coming Together?

In verse 18, the word translated “church” is the Greek word “ekklesia” which means “gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place.”

In verse 18, the word translated “supremacy” means “to be first, hold the first place.”

It is the risen Lord that is Head of the Church. To those who have been taught - or tempted - that Christians should remain quiet and at home regarding the faith: It is the risen Lord Jesus Christ who is the head of those people who have been called out of their homes into the public eye.

Jesus isn't the head of some secret society. The "ekklesia" refers to those who have been called out of their comfort zones (their homes) and into the public places. As for as Jesus being the supreme one: There is no legitimate challenge to Christ Jesus holding first place - in everything
– except evil.

In verse 19 the word translated “pleased” means -
“it seems good to one, is one's good pleasure;
take pleasure in.”

God took pleasure in having "all his fullness" to take up residence in Christ Jesus.

In verse 20 the word translated “reconcile” means -
“to reconcile back again, bring back a former state of harmony.”

In verse 20 the word translated “making peace” means -
“to make peace, establish harmony.”

God took pleasure in reconciling all things to Himself through Jesus Christ. God took pleasure in bringing everything back to its former state of harmony with Him, through Jesus Christ.

I find it significant that it says "all things in heaven" and "all things on earth" – but it does not even mention things elsewhere. Whatever and whoever is in Hell is not going to be reconciled to God!

Isn't it interesting that it actually says "things in heaven" were reconciled to God. What would be in heaven that was not right with God - what would there be in heaven which would be in need of being reconciled to God? Things defaced and/or things defiled.

When Satan and the angels who followed him rebelled against God - the Bible doesn't say they took a vote and walked out - it says there was war in Heaven. Everything touched by this war had become defaced and/or defiled. These are the things brought back to their former place of harmony with the Heavenly Father. God had Jesus to reconcile "things"!

Just as everything in the universe was created by Jesus Christ - Just as everything in the universe is maintained by Jesus Christ - everything in the universe which has been defiled or defaced will find reconciliation through Jesus Christ - if it is going to be reconciled.

Jesus Christ is the universal reconciliation. And there is no other! What things in our life have been defaced or defiled by sin or evil? Jesus is the only means of having these "things" brought back to a place of harmony with our Heavenly Father.

Clothes are not a bad thing - in fact they are a very good thing - especially when they keep you dry and warm. But some people have used clothes for the purpose of sin and evil - thus defiling clothes.

If we have used clothing to cause another to sin - or to help ourselves to sin – we need to bring clothing to Jesus and allow Him to reconcile it to the Father in Heaven.

TVs and VCRs are not bad - they are real good when used to bring us news, education, and wholesome entertainment. But some have used the TV and the VCR for sin and evil and as a result have defiled these things. Please - we need to bring this to Jesus, The Reconciler. And there are many other things we have defiled or defaced.

God's plan was not only to reconcile you and me - the person, - to Himself - His plan includes the reconciling of all of our "things" to be in harmony with Him. What thing or things do we have which we have not brought to Jesus for reconciling to God?

In verse 21 the word translated “alienated” means -
“to be shut out from one's fellowship and intimacy.”

In verse 21, the word translated “minds” means -
“the mind as a faculty of understanding, feeling, desiring.”

You and I were once "shut out" from fellowship and intimacy with God. Our "desires and feelings" were for ourselves and/or for others, - but they certainly were not for God.

In verse 22 the word translated “sight” means -
“before the face of, before the presence of – in the sight of.”

Some of us defiled – were out of God's presence - But we have been brought back to our former state of harmony with the Heavenly Father by Christ's blood shed on the cross. It was this personal divine sacrifice upon the cross by Jesus Christ - which makes it possible for us to be before the presence of our Holy Heavenly Father. Some still have not brought the things of their life to Christ!

Verse 23 has caused a number of people a problem. They see it as saying "if you continue in your faith - then you will be saved." That is a deviation from the context and perverts the gospel message of Jesus Christ. The Gospel as presented by Jesus Christ is a message of salvation by grace through faith. The continuing, on our part, is an indicator of the reality of our faith. The continuing does not validate or merit or earn the salvation.

Jesus is the one who said, "if you love me, then you will obey my commands" - "if you love me, you will remain faithful." There are many who confess, for a season, but after a time, or when it gets anything other than smooth or easy - they drop out or drop off. Precious is everyone of the few who hold fast to Jesus Christ Precious is everyone of the few who hold onto their faith and hopes in Christ - regardless of the threats, bad reports, or the weather outside. If we continue in our faith - then we know our salvation was and is real!

Just as we were once "shut-out" from fellowship with God - some of us still have things in our lives which are "shut-out" from fellowship with God. We cannot come into His presence when we are holding onto these defiled things which are shut out.

Some have been teaching, you must trash these things – and that is true in some cases - but it is the minority of times. The reality is that God doesn't want us to destroy the things He has given us - He Just wants us to bring them to Jesus so that He can "transform" them and bring them back to a place of harmony with the Heavenly Father.

Do we have some things that we need to bring to Jesus today? Things that need to be reconciled with God?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Have ever seen someone who was busy in the ministry - full bore - pedal to the metal - and then just all of a sudden - out of the ministry - Gone! Have ever seen someone who just keeps on ministering even though it looks like there are a 1,000 real good reasons to quit - and they seem happy about ministering when you know they have been hurt, - disappointed, - and certainly not rewarded as for as anyone can see.

Neither of these questions is meant to refer only to Pastors or other offices of ministry. Think in terms of every work in the local church – as well as missions and evangelism.

This could be seen as part two of an earlier lesson which came from the 1st chapter of Colossians. But it will stand on its own. Every Believer needs to the message in this lesson.

Read Colossians 1:24-29 and make notes:

In verse 24, we notice that Paul was not like some ministers and teachers of our generation. Paul was not one of those who taught, "if you just have enough faith and remain obedient to God, your life will be all bliss and blessing." Paul told those under his pastoral care - "I know what it is to suffer because I have decided to live for Christ."

When someone under his spiritual care spoke of enduring hardships or painful circumstances - Paul knew first hand what they were talking about. Paul wrote in several of his letters to the Believers and told them "we will suffer" if we live for Christ Jesus - just like Christ suffered - so shall His followers suffer.

However, Paul had anything but a "woe is me" attitude about having to push through some hard places in his walk with Christ. It wasn't a view of personal suffering. Paul saw his suffering as being on behalf of the church.

The word translated “rejoice” means -
“to rejoice, be glad; to be well, thrive.”

I "am well" in what was suffered for you! I "thrive" on what I have suffered for you!
I am actually thriving on the suffering I have experienced because I am trying to minister.

Please don't worry about me, - the misfortunes and hard times I have suffered through are not defeating me - they are not making me want to give up - "I am thriving because of these afflictions!"

Some are troubled by one of the statements Paul made in this verse: "I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions." If you see this as saying Christ somehow failed to suffer everything He was supposed to suffer - and Paul has decided to finish Christ's work - then you should have a problem with it.

When we study Paul's letters to the first century churches it becomes very clear - Paul had an understanding that there was a certain amount of suffering in store for all those who would follow Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus Christ suffered - those who are in fellowship with Christ will also share in the suffering. There is an allotment of suffering in store for each Believer. This suffering for the commitment to a life in Christ is the "Christ's sufferings" Paul is referring to.

The word translated “fill up” means -
“to fill up in turn.”

What Paul is saying here not only am I doing well in spite of the afflictions - but I am – as a result - filling up the allotment of sufferings. Whatever may be lacking to fulfill my allotment of suffering is being accomplished.

Paul wasn't seeing his experiences as a continuous failing time after time - Paul was seeing his experiences as a continuing to come closer to the finish line. He was getting more ready – after each experience – to declare that final Hallelujah!

And Paul gives the reason he is enduring the suffering and hard times: He is saying that I “fill up” in my “sarx” - for the sake of my “soma” - the “ekkllesia.”

The word translated “his body” means -

“is used of a number of people closely united into one society, or family.

The word translated “the church” means -

“a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public.”

Paul is willing to endure some hard places, - some difficult times, - some rejection, - and some physical pain - for the sake of the Church. What is our attitude when we have just come through a tough place - a hard time - or a disappointment? ?

In verse 25, the word translated “fullness” means -

“to make full, to fill up;

to make complete in every part, to carry through to the end, to accomplish.”

Paul understood clearly he had been commissioned to proclaim the Word of God – “in it's fullness.” Paul was Full Gospel! (The significance will become apparent in a couple of verses.)

Paul was determined to carry out his assignment to the point of declaring God's Word through to the end. That kind of determination simply doesn't leave any place for discussing the possibility of quitting or hiding away some place when it stops being fun or easy. “I've got an assignment and I'm going to do everything I can to complete it regardless whether anyone appreciates the ministry, - appreciates me, - or even if they work against me - I'm going to do my best to complete what God has called me to do!”

I am no longer able to estimate how many times I have heard people declare they were never going to work or minister in the church again. It is incredible, - the number of people who have been gifted by God - and called of God - to minister to His people - and yet they either hide out at home or hide out in some church where they don't have to minister. The church today, really needs more Paul like attitudes!

In verse 26, the word translated “mystery” means -
“a hidden thing, not obvious to the understanding.”

The mystery spoken of in this verse has really become a source of too much muddy water - due to all the strange people trying to make something out of God's word - and they are running with the wisdom of man - or in some cases the wisdom of demons.

It was never a mystery that God intended to redeem His people and that He was going to send a "Redeemer." It was never a mystery that God greatly desires intimate fellowship with His people. All the prophets of old, from Adam right through to the time of Christ Jesus' earthly ministry, knew a Savior was coming. A major part of the great mystery for all of them - was "WHEN" he would come.

Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples - for the original 12, the mystery was solved. Jesus revealed Himself to Saul on the road to Damascus – for Saul or Paul - the mystery was solved. Jesus is still revealing Himself to Believers today, and for those who will surrender and submit to Him, the mystery is solved.

The saving purpose of God was a major theme of the O.T. prophets. And they understood - ultimately the Gentiles would somehow be included along with the Jews. Another part of the mystery was “HOW” this would be accomplished.

The Jews understood covenant living - They understood living according to the "law." They didn't see the Gentiles coming close in either area – covenant or law. It is not likely - very many, if any at all, - of the Jews ever imagined a plan which included "Grace". And yet, the most exciting part of God's redemptive plan is in fact "Grace!"

The answer to the mystery as to how Jews and Gentiles alike could be reconciled to God - when the Gentiles made no effort to obey the law - is that by Grace - Jesus abides within us in our midst as a community of Believers - and within us - as an individual Believer.

We become reconciled to the Heavenly Father - not by achieving some level of legal accomplishment - but simply by the Grace of God being poured out so mercifully and lovingly to all who will Believe.

There were those in Paul's day who taught some people attained a higher access to divine knowledge, wisdom, and power than did others. They taught of a "higher wisdom" or a "special grade of knowledge" available only to the privileged few. This same perverted doctrine has been presented in every generation since.

Paul is very emphatic in this verse that He is teaching "everyone" with "all wisdom." This is part of being Full Gospel. He doesn't want to even imply that he has been privileged to knowledge and 'wisdom that is not available to "everyone".

He also wants to make sure that no one is able to say he teaches some people the "lower level knowledge and wisdom" - and then teaches others the "higher level wisdom and knowledge." All of the wisdom and knowledge in Christ Jesus is available to every Believer - regardless of age, social status, educational background, or genetic parentage.

Because there were also those who taught not everyone has access to be with the Heavenly Father - Paul wanted to make an important associated declaration. His purpose for teaching everyone - was specifically so that "everyone" could be presented to - or brought into the presence of God.

They are still around today - those who would try and teach that some people were created to be lost - and they can never be saved. Paul did not believe this! God desires that "everyone should be saved and that none perish"!

Paul desired everyone become complete in Christ - and be presented to the Heavenly Father. Paul desired to present everyone as fully grown in Christ.

We may not be completely transformed into the full likeness of Jesus Christ until we are with Him for ever and ever. But be assured that this prospect of glory, - or this hope of glory - is truly available to all people – everywhere - If only they will accept Jesus Christ confess Him as Lord with their mouth and believe in their heart that God has raised Him from the dead.

The wonderful consummation Paul was so devoutly wishing to see - was his motivation to keep on keeping on.

In verse 29, the word translated “labor” means -
“to grow weary, tired, exhausted;
to labour with wearisome effort.”

The word translated “struggling” means -
“to contend with adversaries 3) to contend, struggle, with difficulties and dangers.”

The word translated “energy” means -
“working, in the N.T. used only of superhuman power, whether of God or of the Devil.”

“To this end, I work to the pint of exhaustion – struggling on in the face of – and in the midst of
- these difficulties – working with His superhuman power – that works in me.”

For Paul, his apostolic ministry did not end with the conversion of the hearers. When they became believers, that was just the beginning of Paul's ministry - and it wouldn't end until the day of Christ's return - in Glory. Paul seemed to indicate he felt the quality of his ministry would be tested by the maturity level of those to whom he was ministering.

I can attest to the great heart break when a pastor discovers the fake and insincerity of a professing Christian in their care. I can also attest of the great joy when a pastor discovers the genuineness and the authenticity of a professing Christian in their care. I can understand why Paul worked so hard to try to get everyone to become mature and complete in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

And, right in the middle of this statement of why he works so hard - is one of the profound statements of the apostle Paul as to the secret of his ministerial perseverance. Paul never denied that there was "super-human" power coming through him from him. He gladly acknowledges that the superhuman level of strength required to stay in ministry is not his own strength.

Paul openly declares the strength with which he is ministering is God's strength - it is God's energy. He wasn't embarrassed to admit that the power of God worked in him and through him in extraordinary ways - but it was important to Paul that we understand - it was God's power and God's strength - and God's energy.

I will let you in on a secret - when you see someone today - who is ministering with seemingly endless energy for the ministry - when you see someone today - who is ministering with a glad heart even though you know they have been attacked, disappointed, and hurt - they are ministering in the energy of Christ Jesus - they are ministering in the strength of the Lord - they have found out that our own personal strength and energy simply isn't up to the task - and they don't even try to minister in their own strength anymore.

The other side of the coin is this: When you find someone who has "quit" the ministry - you have found someone who has tried to minister in their own strength and energy - and it wasn't enough - it never is!

Everyone of us has a place in the ministry to this community! As long as you want to try to minister in your own strength and energy - don't even talk about your own wisdom - I would rather you not minister. But when you are ready - to join the attitude that Paul had - and will minister in the strength and energy of the Lord - I will only say "What are you waiting on ?"

We don't need to hear about the specific circumstances as to why someone quit ministering. Everyone is going to go through some difficult places - some hard times - some disappointments - some real hurts. Most of us who quit - did so because we found ourselves completely spent - with nothing left to give - and little if any desire to give if we had it.

I'm not picking on anyone - I can talk about this from personal experience. But this message is to every Believer.

I want everyone to play in the game. I don't want anyone to sit the game out on the sidelines. I want everyone to become mature in the Lord. I want everyone to become complete in their relationship with God. I don't want anyone to be left behind.

We need more players in this great contest of life and death. We need more assistant coaches - We need more supply personnel - and many other areas as well.

Those who are lost in this community really need us to be real, genuine, and faithful to tell them Jesus really cares. Those who have burned themselves out trying to minister in their own strength and energy - really need us to be loving, gentle, and instructional as to where they can find a strength to do the work - and an energy source from which there will never be a shortage or an outage.

One of the specific instructions in the commission to this minister - is to get those who have dropped out - back on the team!

Are you one who needs to be plugged in again? Are you one who needs to be busy and faithful in the process of plugging others back in?

The “Bad News” - none of us is qualified or worthy to be used of God.

The “Good News” - It is God's pleasure to pour out His Grace upon us – so that He can use us!

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

With so many church growth programs to choose from - how do we determine which one is right for us? Sure enough, not only can we pray - but we should pray and seek God's direction for us as a local church. But, is there a Biblical plan laid out for church growth?

More than one church group believes there is - and even though some are quite different from the others - each one believes their way is the Biblical way. What should we do?

Read Colossians 2:1 and make notes:

“Struggling” is a term used in the sense of intense competition requiring the greatest of effort. Olympic scale competition in games - or battlefield competition between two opposing armies. Paul was not simply praying a good prayer for the Colossians: He was saying - "I would really like for you to understand just how much I am battling and fighting for you."

Most Bible scholars believe Paul wrote this letter while he was under arrest and spent his days chained to a Roman soldier. Probably in Ephesus. If so, Paul is talking about spiritual warfare, perhaps intense prayer intercession. And not just for the Believers in Colosse, but for all the Believers in the Lycus valley, - the cities Colosse and Laodicea; as well as those Believers in the surrounding area.

This is an important clue to understanding Paul's attitude toward his responsibility concerning Christian Believers who were under his spiritual care. Paul's attitude and doctrine of Pastoral calling seems to be a little different from the majority of those who are in the Pastoral ministry today. But this isn't just a message to those of us who feel we are called to some place of Pastoral ministry - it is a message of what the local church should be all about.

Read Colossians 2:2 and make notes:

The word translated “united” means -
“to join together; to unite or knit together.”

Paul would not "fit in" very well with many major churches of our day. His message wouldn't be all that welcome in the first place - and his goals would really make some of them mad.

I grew up in a particular denomination who openly professes to holding the saving of the lost as the primary and most important thing they do. I have served in almost every position within the local church of that denomination.

I feel that if we take a serious look at the budget of their average local church - and if we seriously evaluate the programs of the average church in that denomination - the evidence would probably convince you that increasing the number in attendance or on the membership list was the higher priority, - even over winning the lost to Christ.

It is not my intent to attack that denomination or any others. The point is that when we take a close look at the programs being instituted in most modern churches - and particularly when we analyze the budgets - the message is all too clear - the most important goal is to increase the membership of that local church!

Paul's primary ministry focus was not increasing the membership in the local church! Paul's primary ministry purpose was not to have an exciting program which would catch the community's attention! Paul clearly and simply states his ministry purpose in this letter to the Colossians in Chapter 2 - verse 2. "I want you to become encouraged in heart - and knitted together in love" – Wow!

Paul was certainly interested in and participated in evangelistic activities - He was truly a great missionary. But Paul seems to understand something the majority of us today don't even have a clue about. Whatever it takes to attract someone to our local church - is what it will take, in an increasing measure, to keep them.

This is true about employees for a business. This is true about volunteers for your civic organization. And it is very true in the local church.

If attracted by program - you will have to continually find more exciting and more interesting programs. After a while - you have pretty much exhausted all the types of programs - you can change the names - but just about everyone recognizes the plan - and many of the people move on looking for something different.

If attracted by music - you will have to continually find more exciting and more interesting ways to present the music. There comes a time when you have pretty much covered the spectrum of music styles - people recognize the circle is starting again - and many of them move on.

If attracted by miracles and manifestations of the Spirit - you will have to continually find more exciting and more interesting ways to present miracles and manifestations of the Spirit. Assuming we could be the most Godly minded and Christ centered body of Believers - would there not come a time when all the miracles had been performed - would there not come a time when we have experienced all the different ways the Holy Spirit manifest Himself known to mankind?

Some really fine ministers have gone astray when they have exhausted the miracles and manifestations as we know them - and have made a “good intentioned” effort to create a new way to manifest the Holy Spirit. People leave because they have seen all this before - or because they believe the minister has left faithfulness to God's Word and moved into carnal practices. There is a limit to each of these things – practices – and programs!

If attracted by love - you will have to continually increase your love for them in order to keep them.

You want some good news? While I will not guarantee you that you will love another person more next year - because that depends upon choices you make - I can guarantee you that YOU CAN love them more next year - and the year after that - and the year after that - and on it goes.

It is possible to love someone more and more. So, if that is what attracted them - then you have a realistic possibility to keep them. This cannot be said about anything else which is used to attract people to a local church.

Paul wasn't a part of trying to create an exciting music attraction - He wasn't a part of trying to create an exciting children's attraction - He wasn't a part of trying to create an exciting social attraction - He was committed to trying to get the people to come to a place of being "knitted together" in love while they were being encouraged in their hearts.

Paul knew love could continue to grow and satisfy that human desire for "more!" But it is more than that! Look at the reason Paul gave for wanting the Believers to be encouraged in heart and united in love: "So that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ."

People who Do Not walk in love - DO NOT Know Christ!

We are referring to the Biblical sense of "knowing" someone. As Adam "knew" Eve - as Joseph Did Not "know" Mary until after Jesus was born - in the same way today if we want to "know" Jesus Christ - if we want to experience an intimacy with Christ Jesus - then we will have to walk in love toward those other Believers around us.

I am very aware of two bumps in that path - one is that everyone who claims to be a Believer - ISN'T! The other is that some who are Believers - are truly hard to be around. But if you walk in love with other Believers - then you will "know" Christ - you will experience an intimacy with Jesus.

That's what Paul wanted for the Believers in his care - That's what Jesus wants for everyone who is a part of any local fellowship – He wants each of us to experience the intimacy of Jesus Christ as a real part of our daily life - and not to only have some academic awareness of Jesus.

Read Colossians 2:3 and make notes:

Have you ever stopped to think about the access you have to other people's homes and personal things? We have different levels of access based upon our relationship. We have different degrees of knowledge about personal things based upon our relationship.

If you go to your parents home - you probably don't have much that you don't have access to. If you go to a good friends home - you may have access to almost any part of the home - but there is likely to be some place or thing you don't have or wouldn't assume access to. If you go to the home of someone you know only professionally or have a light social relationship with - you probably don't have access past the living room, kitchen, and bathroom.

The personal things about someone's life; their past, their fears, their hangups, their weaknesses, etc. - We are given access to these based upon our relationship with them - the closer our relationship - the more personal the relationship - the more personal detail they allow us to have.

As we move into that intimate relationship with Jesus, we find we are given access to an un- imaginable storehouse of wisdom and knowledge. In much the same way as Paul wanted this access for his flock – Jesus greatly desires for everyone in the local congregation today - to make their way to a place of having daily intimacy with Jesus Christ - so that we have access to this un-limited storehouse of wisdom and knowledge.

In summary – Jesus actually desires for us to become healed, filled, mature, and ministering Saints.

Read Colossians 2:4-5 and make notes:

We have people today who talk so smooth – I mean “smo-o-o-o-o-oth!” And there are those who have something charismatic about their personality - we get excited about whatever these people are involved in.

All too Often, the very excitement and enthusiasm we so much desire to have, is the lure Satan uses in the hands of these smooth talkers - or these "mister excitement" talkers - to steer us away from the place of intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Excitement and enthusiasm are not bad. In fact God intends for us to have some in our lives. But there is a proper place for excitement. Paul will address the issue of "order" again in the letter to the Colossians- but in this verse 5 he tells them how delighted he is to see "how orderly" they are.

This particular word or term is in frequent use in military organizations. It refers to each person being in their assigned place. It speaks of items being in their assigned place. It speaks of things being done precisely at the time and in the sequence laid out by a specified plan.

Would the Apostle Paul be able to say that about the local churches today?

More important - would Jesus Christ tell us that we have a complete disregard for order - or would He compliment us on our order - during the services?

Please, before you get your nose completely out of joint - There is a big difference in things being done decently and in order - and things being done so rigidly and structured that the Holy Spirit is not allowed to speak or act unless getting it into the program 3 weeks in advance.

We can have a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit - and be willing to make any alteration He directs - and maintain order in our services - Home Group services as well as Sunday morning services.

Read Colossians 2:6-7 and make notes:

In verse 6, the word translated “continue to live” means -
“to make due use of opportunities; to regulate one's life, to conduct one's self”

Since you have accepted Jesus as your Savior - regulate your daily life - conduct yourself in such a way - and make due use of the opportunities given to you- to live In Jesus. Make sure to be "rooted" or fastened down in Him and to Him.

A part of the "regulating" your life is for the purpose of "building up" or building your life upon the foundation of His Salvation of you and His having taken up residence within you - or at least His desire to live there as soon as you will allow Him to do so. Make use of the opportunities to strengthen your faith - as you have been taught and are being taught.

The word translated “overflowing” in verse 7 means -
“to exceed a fixed number of measure”

It is like saying "we are going really fast - but since the speedometer only goes to 80, I don't know how fast we are going." It is like watching a ball game where they are trying to measure the speed of the baseball being thrown by the pitcher. The radar they were using only went to 99 mph. When the instrument displayed 99 mph - they could only say - "It went at least 99 mph - but it might have been faster". Conduct yourself in such a way as to "overflow" or "exceed the ability of measuring" your thankfulness.

How thankful are you in your daily life? Jesus desires for us to grow to the point of being able to say honestly - "I'm thankful all that I know how to be and then some more - however much that turns out to be." So, how do we get there?

There are some terrific things being taught today. There are some fantastic programs being made available to churches today. There are some exciting outreach methods being used today.

The truth is that availing ourselves of most of these will end up with a season of growth, excitement, and perhaps a few other side benefits - but in the end - most of the people will be gone - and the leaders will be burned out and spent - and someone will be suggesting - "Let's start allover from scratch."

The better way is the one Paul was ministering - teach and lead the people to be "encouraged in heart and united in love" - with this - we find healing for our wounds, - a place of safety from our fears - a sense of value and worth - renewed energy for ministering - and an ever increasing strength, wisdom, and knowledge. Are you ready to begin?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In the United States of America we have a federal agency who is commissioned to watch, test, and make sure the foods which are sold in this nation are safe for consumption to keep the people of our land from being poisoned either intentionally or un-intentionally. For the most part, we go to the store and buy food take it home, eat it and feed it to our families – and the vast majority of us probably give very little, if any, thought to the possibility that it might not be safe for our family.

Most people in this nation have to a certain degree - a blind trust that this agency is doing it's job - so we don't spend any of our energy or attention checking on the safety of what we eat. Even with this agency doing it's job - there have been a few times when - bad food has made it through the system to the public people have become very sick - some have even died from contaminated food.

When someone gets sick or is harmed in any way from the food we buy it is automatically assumed the company who sold the food is responsible - or maybe this federal agency is responsible to insure the safety of what we eat. I won't spend any time arguing for or against the level of responsibility of this federal agency - or the company who sells the food regarding the safety of the food we consume. There will probably always be a difference of opinion as to “who” is responsible.

But in a very similar way - we consume spiritual food. Spiritual food can strengthen us - make us healthier - and make us grow - or it can weaken us - make us spiritually sick - and destroy our spiritual life.

How many of us ever stop to consider the safety of the spiritual food we are consuming - or of the spiritual food we are allowing your family to take in? The message in this lesson is only a reminder to some us – but to others – it is a “wake-up” call. This message is not only for those who are reading this lesson – but this message is also for you to share with others with whom you will come into contact.

Read Colossians 2:8-12 and make notes:

In verse 8, the word translated “captive” means -
“to carry off booty; to carry one off as a captive (and slave).”

This word is referring to something more than just being tied up - or being placed into some type of room where you are locked up. It is referring to being carried off - as if you were some kind of prize. Something the captor will display - like a trophy - or like the animal or fish a sportsman might have mounted to show off what they were able to catch.

"See to it" - take an active stance so that it does not happen. We must remain alert toward that possibility - it does happen – and Satan is working toward that very purpose. It is also saying, in a sense, that it is our responsibility to make sure-we are not taken captive.

We are even told what to be on watch for - the lure which will be used to try and snare us and to entrap us - and make it possible for us to be led away as a "captive" - is hollow and deceptive philosophy. Philosophy is not the problem - it is the hollow and deceptive philosophy that is the destructive object we are to be on guard against.

One of the keys to recognizing "hollow and deceptive" philosophy is to determine what is the basis of the philosophy. Hollow & Deceptive Philosophy has 3 primary identifiers: (v8)

- 1- depends upon human traditions
- 2- depends upon basic principles of this world
- 3- does not depend upon Christ

If it is built upon human traditions - or if it is build upon the principles of this world - then it is most likely "hollow" and will be used to deceive us. If it is built upon Christ Jesus - then it is solid - truth revealing philosophy - and will lead us to life and victory.

A contemporary example: God is the original teacher of the "prosperity" message. Some men and women of God got hold of God's "prosperity" message - and they found it was good. It wasn't long before the great majority of them were led astray by some "fine sounding", "exciting possibility thinking" principles. The problem? They began to mix God's philosophy regarding prosperity - with the philosophy of this world. The result was the prosperity message being presented - was one which became "hollow" and VERY "deceptive" - it brought defeat, destruction, and death.

Those who had been observing could only come to one logical conclusion - the prosperity message "is a fraud." So, it wasn't long before few, if any, were willing to listen to any message concerning prosperity- even God's message.

If only God's people had followed the instructions in this passage of Colossians chapter 2. If only God's people had "seen to it" that no one led them captive into bondage and defeat!

In verse 9, the Greek word used for "lives" is the present tense. It currently exist and is of a continuous action. So it IS NOT saying the fullness of the Godhead "did live" in Christ. It IS NOT saying the fullness of the Godhead "will one day live" in Christ.

The fullness of God - the fullness of the Trinity - the fullness of the Heavenly Father, - the Savior Son, - and the present day empowering Holy Spirit - IS LIVING in bodily form. This "bodily" form is not the "sarx" or the fleshly body. This is the same word we saw a couple of lesson earlier - "soma" - which is a collection of people into one group or organization.

What is the body of Christ? The church! The fullness of the Godhead continues to live today in the bodily form of the Church - of whom Christ Jesus is The Head.

We have been given "a fullness."

In verse 10 the word translated “fullness” means -
”to make full; to cause to abound.”

The word translated “power” means -
“privilege; power of choice; liberty of doing as one pleases.”

The word translated “authority” means -
“the person or thing that commences; the first person or thing in a series.”

Christ Jesus is Head even over all the "privileges" - Jesus is Head even over all the "powers of choice" - Jesus is Head even over all the "liberties of doing as you please." Remember, earlier in Colossians we were told Jesus has the "supremacy" over everyone and everything in the universe.

Believers in Christ are "made full" - and get to share in this "fullness" of Christ. Contrary to what some have been teaching - this DOES NOT say the fullness of Christ has somehow been "transfused" into us so that we now have our own fullness. What it IS saying is since we have Christ - we have access to the fullness which is His. What the Head has, the rest of the body has access to.

As long as we have Christ - we have the realistic potential to have our every need met. But, should we ever separate from Christ - then we are no longer full. The Body which is separated from the Head – does not have access to what the Head has.

Since Christ has all the fullness of God - since we have Christ - then there is absolutely no need to turn to worldly philosophies to find a fulfilling life. The "all-sufficiency" of Christ is such that He is even Head over every "power" and "authority" - regardless of who are what that power or authority may be.

It is at least interesting to take note - while Christ is declared the "Head" of all the cosmic "powers" and "authorities" - the "powers" and "authorities" of the universe ARE NOT referred to as Christ's Body. The distinction of being Christ's body - is reserved for the collection of the Believers in Jesus as Savior.

An important contrast is being drawn in verse 11. As Believers in Christ - we have "put aside" or "laid down" - the sinful nature by means of having it circumcised from us. The term circumcised literally refers to a "cutting all the way around."

The Jewish Believers of Paul's day were familiar with a circumcision which took place at the hands of man. They depended upon the skill and competency of a fleshly human being to perform - what was to them - a very important action to their righteousness. They knew sometimes the one who claimed to be qualified turned out to be false and not qualified at all.

The point in this text is the "circumcision" which has separated us from our sinful nature was not accomplished at the hands of man - it was performed by the faithful and most qualified - the savior of all mankind - Jesus Christ. The physical circumcision performed by man removed only a small portion of the body. The spiritual circumcision performed by Christ Jesus removed the whole corrupt, carnal nature - and put it away from us much like taking off a coat or other garment and taking it to some other location.

The people of that day did understand that if we are to again put on that carnal nature - then we have to put forth some effort - we have to go to where it was taken and we purposefully "put it on" again. The logical question is "why would you want to put it back on?"

The physical Mosaic circumcision was but a symbol to give God's people a word picture of what He desired for us. The true circumcision, of what was only symbolized by the Mosaic circumcision, comes to reality when we find union with Christ Jesus in the salvation He alone provides.

The rite of baptism portrays both the "burial with" - and the "being raised" with Christ. This text started out speaking about circumcision - and is building toward the being free from human regulations. It seems odd to some readers as to why, - all of a sudden, - it speaks of baptism.

Paul seems to never pass up an opportunity to remind us one more time - our righteousness in Christ was accomplished by our "faith" in Him - and not by accomplishing, performing, or refraining. It is a typical use of parallelism in Hebrew thought to speak of baptism at this point.

It was a common practice in the Hebrew culture to use a parallel thought to explain or to help illuminate an important principle they were teaching. Just like Baptism is an outward symbol of something God desires to take place in the inner man - the Mosaic circumcision was an outward symbol of something God desired to take place in the inner man. The physical - or outward - was only a symbol of the real - which is an inner spiritual condition.

Baptism is a very important rite in which we should desire greatly to participate. But Paul took the time to stress Baptism was not the effecting experience - it was only an act of obedience. The real instrument IS our faith.

While a person who does not participate in Baptism - is falling short in the area of obedience - and faith without baptism - is short of being complete - Faith without Baptism still has significant value. But Baptism without Faith is empty, - vain, - and completely meaningless.

Please remember - Paul stressed a point concerning Baptism for the express purpose of opening our understanding to what had come to be a "traditional" rite of circumcision. Some were being led away from the grace and mercy of the "Good News" of Jesus Christ - and they were often being led away by people stressing "circumcision."

Just because this "teacher" made a big issue out of a very important rite - such as circumcision - doesn't mean what they are teaching is wholesome - healthy - or life giving. And it is still true today.

Frankly, it appears most often - that the teachers who make the greatest issue of some rite or act toward holy living - are usually the false teachers who are attempting to lead God's people off as some type of spiritual booty.

The main point of this portion of the text in the letter to the Colossians - was to be a "wake-up" call - for Believers to "be on guard" - to in fact "make sure" - that we are not led away captive - like some booty of war - by the philosophies built upon the principles of this world or those built on the traditions of man.

Do you take any caution in regard to the teaching you listen to? Do you exercise any safety precautions in taking some new teaching and running with it? Are you careful about what you read? Are you careful about who you listen to? Do you make a serious effort to test all teaching according to the Word of God?

God could have already wiped out all the false teachers. Then we wouldn't have to take any care about who we listen to or who we follow. God could have already taken all the poisonous plants off the face of the earth. But God intends for you and me to take some responsibility for what we eat - and what we allow our family to eat.

There are some things out there which will cause you a lot of pain and discomfort - some things out there which will cause permanent harm - some things out there that will kill you! So it is - regarding the spiritual teachings being offered today. Spiritual teachings – that are sweet in the mouth – but are a fire in the belly!

“Spiritual” teachings are making an impact on the people. Look at the increase in belief of “false” spiritual teachings:

Those who Believe in:

UFOs	24% 1976	48% 2013
Spiritualism	12% 1976	52% 1998
Astrology	17% 1976	26% 2009
Re-Incarnation	9% 1976	24% 2013
Fortune Telling	4% 1976	30% 2008

Consider the teachings you have been attempting to follow. Are they built upon traditions of man - or upon basic principles of this world? If so, Please pray to be cleansed of these - and have the strength to turn them loose?

If you have not really made a conscious effort to evaluate the teachings you and your family have been listening to - or taking into your lifestyle - will you tell the Lord - "I am sorry" - and commit to take a serious and active role in testing everything you and your family feed upon - spiritually?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In the past few lessons, we have seen that God has a clear definition of sin. But among men, we find a great variety of opinions as to what is sin! What a person calls sin seems to depend upon where they are in life - their background, heritage, experiences, training, etc.

There are very few people these days who agree with God and God's Word regarding exactly what is sin. Most of us would rather see ourselves at the most only guilty of: philosophical misunderstanding; social irresponsibility; human error inappropriate behavior; character defect.

But we DO NOT see ourselves as guilty of sin!

The typical person's view of death is just as different from the Biblical view of death, As man's view of sin. The most common ideas people have regarding death:
cease to exist pass into oblivion
a semi-conscious or sleepy-eyed existence reincarnation into another life form
moving into some other world where we work our way into heaven

Some Insights Concerning Death From Contemporary Philosophers:

Never take life seriously. Nobody gets out alive anyway.

Good health is merely the slowest possible rate at which one can die.

Never knock on Death's door; ring the doorbell and run (he hates that).

It's not the pace of life that concerns me, it's the sudden stop at the end.

Man's idea of death is basically either the denial of a hereafter - or the giving of another chance to work oneself into being acceptable to God. This causes us to have a very man-centered view of the concept of "conquering death."

If we are one of those who believes death simply means to cease to exist - then we only need to get beyond the fear and concern of "ceasing to exist" and then we have conquered death. If we are one of those who believes we can earn acceptability with God, then all I need to do to conquer death is to live as good a life as I can - then I have conquered death.

Those who deny any existence in the hereafter - appear to be trying to cause the hereafter to cease to exist - simply by the power of their denial. They should practice on something more possible - before they try this one.

Maybe they could get a marksman to stand a good distance away with a high powered rifle - but still be in the rifle's range of fire. Then ask the person with the rifle to aim at them and pull the trigger and then while the bullet is racing toward them - they would have a second or so - they should deny that the bullet will harm them. If they get to the place where they can stop the bullet from banning them consistently time after time - then they should move up to trying make the hereafter cease to exist simply by the power of their denial.

Those who hope and believe for a chance to work our way to heaven after we leave this world are only a little different from all the people - who hope to work our way to being acceptable to God while we are on this earth. The only real difference is between those who take care of responsibilities now and those who are procrastinators and hope they will have a chance to fulfill their responsibilities at some later time - but not now.

Maybe the next time you hear someone saying they hope they live a good enough life that God will let them into heaven - you should say - "the only difference between you and those people who believe in reincarnation - is they are procrastinating and you are trying to take care of it now."

Some Churches have certain rituals which are very important to them. Other churches don't ever or perhaps seldom perform those same rituals. Some churches have detailed rules to follow others seem to have no rules at all - and some churches fall somewhere in between having at least some rules and varying degrees of expectation or demand that they be followed. Some churches live under a heavy bondage - others only a slight amount of bondage, - and some have no bondage at all.

What's right for the local church when it comes to rituals? What's right for the local church when it comes to having rules and expecting the congregation to follow those rules or obey them? And How much do these impact or affect our standing with the Heavenly Father?

Are rules and rituals to be the focus of man's attention and life? Do we really believe we will become acceptable to God by observing all the rules and rituals? If either of these were true, then Christ would not have had to come and die in our place.

Believers have received three victories which Paul points out in these verses:

Read Colossians 2:13 and make notes:

Victory #1: Victory over Spiritual Death.

We were dead -Christ made us alive. Verse 12 had just told us of God's raising Christ from the dead. Now we are being assured of sharing the resurrection experience with Christ - for Christ it was a bodily resurrection. For the Believer - it is right now a spiritual resurrection. The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ - who is the "first fruits" of those who are asleep in death is God's pledge that our spiritual resurrection will one day be a bodily resurrection just like Jesus'.

This verse speaks of us being "dead in sin" and the "un-circumcision" of our sinful nature - this gives us a picture of our position and condition before we are saved. We were "uncircumcised" from the sinful nature. That means the un-saved person is fully and completely attached to their sinful nature.

If you are fully and completely attached to something - can you see how difficult it is going to be to rid yourself of it and its influences? It would be like trying to rid yourself of your skin!

These verses also reveal to us the "being made alive with Christ" - involves being forgiven of our sins. The word translated "forgave" in this verse means simply and clearly - "to grant as a favor."

Read Colossians 2:14 and make notes:

Victory #2: Victory over Impossible Law.

We could not pay our penalty - Christ wiped away our debt of penalty. There are some who claim the Law was done away with when Jesus died on the cross! They claim the Law is no longer in effect! Jesus did not cancel the law - He fulfilled it!

Read Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 16:17 and make notes:

In Colossians 2:14, the word translated "canceled" means "to anoint or wash in every part; to wipe off, wipe away; wipe out, blot out."

The word translated “written code” means “what one has written by his own hand”

** what was written by God's hand **

Jesus paid (wiped out) the debt of the Law which was written by God's hand! He didn't pay the debt of the Law written by man's hand!

The word translated “stood opposed” means “set over against; an adversary”

This speaks of something like a legal document which gives the state the right to punish you if you do not do certain things. If you do not pay a certain amount of money within a certain amount of time - this document gives the legal right for you to be fined - or have your property taken away - or have you placed in jail.

It's speaking of the kind of document you would sign and agree to it's terms - it is not speaking of the situation where someone has enslaved you and is forcing you against your will. I signed a note of debt against the property where I live. I agreed to not only pay the money - but I agreed to pay fines and penalties if I don't pay the money. I even agreed to have the property taken away from me and sold to someone else if I don't pay the money in the agreed time. This document stands opposed to me. This document prevents me from having complete freedom. If I become unable to pay this debt - this document would not be my friend in a court of law.

There is an incredible number of Believers who stand defeated and discouraged by the guilt they accept for their past failures. They walk out their lives whipped and bowed down, in an attitude of un-worthiness and a knowing that they are completely unacceptable. They have an understanding of what the Law says, and they know they have sorely missed the mark and fallen short of any margin for error the Law might have allowed. They know that there is an outstanding spiritual warrant for them.

What Good News we have for them! Someone has paid the debt for those who surrender to Jesus. The warrant has been withdrawn. There is no longer any outstanding debt! Hallelujah !

Read Colossians 2:15 and make notes:

Victory #3: Victory over evil forces or evil spirits.

We were no match for the power of evil angels – but Christ dis-armed them for us.

The word translated “spectacle” means -
“to make an example of”

The word translated “triumphing” means -
“to triumph, to celebrate a triumph”

There are too many Christians today who live and speak as though we live in some type of haunted universe. Believing we are at the mercy and whim of evil and wicked spirits or demons. You are right to acknowledge demons exists and they are here on earth with us. But, as a Believer who is washed in the Lamb's blood - we ARE NOT subject to them. They CAN NOT make us do anything unless we surrender to them. The real truth is they must obey the obedient Christian.

The word translated "disarmed" is the same one used of "stripping" the enemies of war. In battles of that day - the victor did not only take their sword, knife, shield, chain, and other weapons taken from them - frequently their boots, cloak, helmet, and other articles of clothing were taken also. You really need to get this picture in your mind concerning the powers and authorities of the demonic realm.

When you see a great warrior standing before you - dressed in full battle armor - several impressive weapons in his hands - it is only natural for the human being to become intimidated or even fearful. But should someone who is stronger and more powerful come along - and not only take their weapons and their uniform away from them- but if they took their clothes as well and left them standing before you in nothing but their underwear - how fearsome do you think they would appear?

"Therefore" - with these 3 victories in mind!

Victory #1: Victory over Spiritual Death.

Victory #2: Victory over Impossible Law.

Victory #3: Victory over evil forces or evil spirits.

Read Colossians 2:16 and make notes:

The word translated “judge” means -
“to separate, to put down, to pick out,
to pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong; to be judged”

We don't become acceptable to God by observing all the rules. We don't become acceptable to God by performing all the right rituals. We don't please God by eating only certain foods and restraining from eating others. We don't please God by the things we drink or don't drink. We don't find ourselves in a right relationship with God because we are sure to observe all the right religious festivals and celebrations. Don't let anyone "approve" you or "dis-approve" you based upon any of these things.

Read Colossians 2:17 and make notes:

The word translated “shadow” means -

“an image cast by an object and representing the form of that object”

The word translated “reality” is the Greek word “soma” which means -

“is used of a number of men closely united into one society, or family as it were;”

Any reasonably intelligent person will recognize the need for some rules & guidelines when people are going to live together, work together, or minister together. If the rule or the ritual becomes the end in itself - then it has in fact become an anti-christ. If the rule or the ritual helps point or direct one to coming closer to Christ Jesus in their personal relationship - or helps them become more Christ-like in the dealing with others- then it is an acceptable rule or ritual. I would even call it a Godly rule or ritual.

There is a real stressing of this point - All these things - the rituals, the celebrations, the sabbath day - they were only the image of the reality. They were only an image of the Body!

For someone to cling to the image and allow the reality and the substance to escape would be a tragic error in judgment. A contrast is being laid out between the image or shadow- and the reality and the substance - of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Read Colossians 2: 18 and make notes:

"Disqualify you for the prize" – is translated from a word that means -
“to declare him unworthy of the prize;”

"Goes into great detail" – is translated from a word that means -
“to frequent; to invade, make hostile incursion into

**** forcefully ****

Absolutely NO ONE - not anything in Heaven - not anything on earth - nor anything in hell - can take our salvation from us - Except God. There is no one anywhere who can be responsible for us becoming disqualified to share in the inheritance of God, the Heavenly Father.

We became qualified - or we will become qualified- by our own personal believing and accepting of Jesus as your Savior. It is not the actions, beliefs, or faith of someone else who brings us salvation. So it is not anyone else who can take it from us. DO NOT listen to those who try to tell you why you can no longer have Salvation.

Don't accept anyone's judgment that you are not eligible for the inheritance based upon your eating, drinking, or rituals. Don't accept anyone's judgment that you are, eligible for the inheritance based upon your eating, drinking, or rituals. It couldn't be made any more clear than it is in this verse. We need to be very careful of people who are making a big deal of the visions they have seen. When they go into great detail about the spiritual things they have seen - we need to be very careful of them. This is a main characteristic of the false teachers.

Read Colossians 2:19 and make notes:

The word translated “body” is the word “soma” - same as in verse 17.

The word translated “supported” means -
“to supply, furnish”

The word translated “held together” means -
“to unite or knit together; to cause a person to unite with one in a conclusion”

The false teacher lacks any real or vital contact with Jesus Christ. Those who are disconnected from the body - "community" of Christ - are very dangerous. But those who are disconnected from the head are both dangerous and hopeless.

Have you ever seen a chicken with it's head cut off? There is a lot of activity - but it gets no where!

There are some "exciting" teachers and preachers on the move in our nation today. It is scary to find out some of them do not have a local congregation anywhere - to whom they are accountable - to whom they go to for refreshing - prayer covering -encouragement - etc.

While serving as a pastor, I came to the place of being very careful to get to meet with and ask some specific questions of those who want to come to our church and "minister." If they are not part of a local church somewhere - they are not likely to come.

Sometimes good people follow an "exciting" minister in great activity - for a season - then the minister fully dies - spiritually not being connected to the head - and they have been led exactly - "no where"!

The physical body is held together by the ligaments and the sinews - and it has its strength to move about and do things by the muscles - and yet we wouldn't worship and honor the ligaments, sinews, or muscles at the expense of losing our physical head. It simply wouldn't matter that you had the biggest and strongest muscles - if the head was severed from the body. It wouldn't matter at all if all your tendons or ligaments were the very strongest and attached to the bones in the most perfect way- if the head was separated from the body.

It is not different in the spiritual body of Christ. We have those today who are so impressed with the spiritual gifts and the power of the Holy Spirit - that they are chasing after the power and the manifestations at the expense of having no personal intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, the Head. Surely we can agree that there will be greater power and manifestations of the Holy Spirit when we remain connected to the Head!

We have those today who are so enthralled with the rituals and the rules - which they see as holding the people together - that they strive to make sure every detail of every ritual is performed - and completely overlook the moments of intimate personal time with Lord Jesus, the Head. What real good is it - if you have the most orderly organization - and everyone goes to hell for an eternity? What real good is it - if you have the greatest power and spiritual manifestations - and no one ever learns what it is to have a personal relationship with the Head, Jesus Christ.

The most important thing - maintain a good connection with the Head - communicate frequently and intimately with the Head - Know what the Head is saying, thinking, and seeing - then respond accordingly. Only after the relationship and connection to the Head is sound, solid, and secure - should we spend time, effort, or resources striving to attain shape or definition - you know - what we call muscle tone.

Almost all false teachers stress performance in some form or another - and omit the personal relationship with Christ. Please don't overlook the closing words of verse 19: The body which remains firmly and intimately attached to the Head- will grow "as God causes it to grow."

Once again we see in God's Word - a different plan for Church growth than programs and events.

Read Colossians 2:20-22 and make notes:

The word translated "use" means -
"abuse, misuse"

A common teaching among the false teachers is the physical body is evil. They then conclude that the way to holiness is to deny the physical body all of its desires, refuse all its appetites, and to reduce its needs to the absolute minimum.

False teachers do often promote and exalt the virtues of virginity and some other wholesome areas. But the false teachers also try to do away with marriage, promote monastic living (or solitary living), and the self-torture of the human body.

Don't follow some teacher because they promote what sounds like a wholesome lifestyle. If they don't promote a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as the primary goal - don't listen to them and certainly don't follow them.

The statement that these legalistic practices are all destined to perish with use - or misuse - reminds me of the despair found in Ecclesiastes. It seems good while you are striving toward it - but in the end it turns out to be just empty vanity.

Read Colossians 2:23 and make notes:

"harsh treatment of the body" - soma- the collection of people into one society.
Sensual indulgence - refers to the desires and cravings of the flesh (sarx).

I have met too many people who have lived and participated in some group who demanded strict adhering to the rules and rituals - hoping to find deliverance from the sinful cravings - only to find they punished themselves and others - and still committed the fleshly sins anyway. If we really want to find deliverance from the sinful indulgences - we simply need to spend more time with Jesus Christ - I'm talking about personal time - the kind of time where you get to know what they really like and don't like - the kind of time where you get to know them so well you can just tell what they are about to do next - the kind of time where you get to know them so well you can tell how they are feeling without them saying a word.

Get to know Jesus personally - spend time with Him everyday - you will find a whole new life - and it won't be one of harshness and deprivation. It will be a life of love, joy, peace, and a whole list of fruits of the spirit.

I know there are some who have placed more emphasis on rituals, celebrations, and observances than on the personal relationship with Christ. There are also some who have placed more emphasis upon the spiritual gifts or the manifestations of the spirit than on the personal relationship with Christ. I am convinced that God has spoken to many of us regarding these things.

The question is :

Are you ready to trade in the old standards which are nothing but an image of the real thing and will all perish anyway in time - are you ready to trade that for the real standard? A personal relationship with Jesus!

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Is it enough to be saved? Is it enough to know our name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life? Is there anything God expects us to do after we are saved? Does it matter what kind of lifestyle we live after we are saved? Does it matter what kinds of things we say after we are saved? After we are saved, are we all that God wants us to be until Jesus takes us to Heaven? Are there things God expects us to work on in our lives after we are saved?

When we consider the passage we are going to read in this lesson - was actually written to Believers - it is heartbreaking - it hurts to think such things need to be said to Believers! But, we do need hear this today. And the Believers in Paul's day needed to hear it as well.

Read Colossians 3:1 and make notes:

The word translated “set” means -
“to seek in order to find; to crave”

This verb in the Greek is a present imperative tense - which suggest we are to "keep on setting our hearts" on the things above. We are to “keep on seeking” - “keep on craving.”

We have already been told in chapter 2 - we have died with Christ to our old sinful nature - and we have been raised with Him in a resurrection to the new Godly nature. We were spiritually dead already. We were then buried with Christ. We were then given a new "spiritual life" which is Christ Himself - and raised up from the dead - We were raised up from the dead to life for a purpose. That purpose is to "live the Life!"

If our death with Christ severed the ties that bound us to the old sinful nature - then the being raised with Christ has given us some new ties to the Godly righteous nature. We are now bound to a new heavenly nature. When the old nature comes by where we now live and tries to impose its dominion and rule over us - why do we submit to it as though we are still bound to it? We Are Raised With Christ.

Consider a man – or a woman – whose spouse has died. Later they meet another person and get married again. How well do you think the relationship with this “new spouse” will be – if this person continues to do things the way the previous spouse wanted them to be done – especially if it is opposite of the way the new spouse desires for them to be done? When the previous spouse died – the ties that bound these two people were severed.

What are the practical implications to being raised with Christ?

- .1. We have no private life of our own. The life we have is the life of Christ.
- .2. Our life is maintained by Christ being at the right hand of the Heavenly Father.
- .3. This life in Christ is shared with all other Believers.
- .4. We don't have to wait until the last day to receive a new life - we have it right here and right now.

SINCE this is the case -

Step #1: "set your hearts on things above."

We really do understand this principle – if we will think about it! We use the phrase “their heart is somewhere else!” A person maybe here – doing what is required of them – but their heart is somewhere other than here. Jesus said, “where your heart is – that's where your treasure is.” We find ourselves thinking, “this doesn't give me fulfillment! That would!

"To set our heart" speaks of setting our desires on things above. "To set our heart" speaks of setting our love and affection on the things above. So, step #1 is to set our desires - and keep on setting our desires on heavenly things. Set our affections - and keep on setting our affections on heavenly things.

Read Colossians 3:2 and make notes:

The word translated “minds” means -
“to direct one's mind to a thing, to strive for” Since this is the case -

Step #2: "set your minds on things above."

Set our thoughts and keep on setting our thoughts on heavenly things. Don't think earth - think heaven. Don't think dirt - think Divine!

It is important to make a declaration at this point. Not all earthly things are evil or sinful. Just because something is earthly does not make it sinful. But even harmless things become very bad and dangerous - when they take a place in our hearts, minds, or lives - which is supposed to be occupied by God things.

We must not allow our ambitions to be earth bound. We must not allow our ambitions to be on the transitory and temporary things of this earth. We must not allow our ambitions to be for the inferior thing of an inferior life. We must not look at life from the mere standpoint of what is on and about the earth.

We must look at life from the exalted and glorious standpoint of the exalted Christ - seated at the right hand of the Heavenly Father. Judge everything strictly from the standpoint of this new creation.

Read Colossians 3:3 and make notes:

Perhaps this concept is so strange to our fleshly nature that it has to be repeated. Perhaps we find it so difficult to turn loose of the fleshly desires – so, The Teacher, the Holy Spirit, repeats it. Because we have died with Christ - Our old nature is hidden in the grave where the old nature was buried.

Do you have any mental picture of what kind of condition dead things are in after they have been buried for awhile? If we think that old nature of ours was bad before - if we go and dig it up and try to put it own again - it is going to be a tremendous disgusting disappointment.

Before we leave this verse - please take note - our life is not only "with Christ" - but it is "with Christ IN GOD!" Just as our old nature is hidden with Christ in the grave of buried dead things - now that we are "in God" with our new nature - our old nature is doubly hidden.

Read Colossians 3:4 and make notes:

We might not look like much right now - not to others in this world - and maybe not even to ourselves. But when Christ comes again - we will share in His glorious life in a glorified body. Boy are we going to shine!

Read 1 John 3:2 and make notes:

I fear the great majority of current day Believers, especially those who have experienced a personal infilling of the Holy Spirit - sorely misunderstand the current day ministry and purpose of the Holy Spirit presence in our daily lives! It seems there are too many today who see the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives for the purpose of impressing others.

Too many today see the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life for the purpose of making them in some way spiritually powerful. Too many today see the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life is some type of personal reward from God.

I'm going to let you all in on something that too few Christians know or understand. The presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in our life is for the sole purpose of helping us to clean up, strengthen up, re-clothe ourselves - so that we will become more like Christ and help others around us to become more like Christ - in the right here and the right now. It has never been God's intention for His sanctified, bought with a price, washed in the blood, children to continue to live in a cesspool – to only be suddenly and profoundly changed at the last moment.

It has been - and is still today - God's intention that we make every effort to take off the clothes of the sinful nature and to dress again in the robes of righteousness - and to continue to do so - little by little - until the last day when He will make the final cleansing in our lives. He will make the final clothing in righteousness for us - and we will still be suddenly and profoundly changed - But He does expect us to make some effort to get as close to that place as we can.

For anyone who wants to argue that point - just look at the next few verses. "THEREFORE" - or since this is the case:

Read Colossians 3:5 and make notes:

The word translated “put to death” means -
“to put to death; to deprive of power, to destroy the strength of”

We are to "put to death" - or "deprive of its power" - or "destroy the strength of" - our old earthly nature!

There have been many throughout the generations of the Church's history who have tried to interpret this literally to be speaking of the fleshly members and parts of our physical body. This text IS NOT saying we are supposed to destroy our arms, legs, eyes, etc.

We are to put to death “cravings of our heart” - and the “thoughts and feelings of our mind” - which are continually upon earthly things. We are to "Deprive the power" of our heart's cravings after worldly stuff. We are to "Destroy the strength" of our minds plans toward obtaining earthly things.

God desires for Believers to - get rid of - put off from ourselves - consider as dead - the manifestations of the old sinful nature - which are:

“Sexual immorality” translated from a word that means -
“illicit sexual intercourse: including adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals, etc.”

The Greek word used in this text is a term which refers to any sexual activity that falls outside of the boundaries which God has set as clean and wholesome. We should not allow any immoral sexual activity to be manifested in our life or lifestyle since we are now a Christian.

The word translated "impurity" means -
"uncleanness"

We are to get rid of anything and everything which causes us to be "unclean" or "impure."

The word translated "greed" means -
"greedy desire to have more; covetousness"

This is NOT just money. We should not allow ourselves to be greedy about any thing worldly. Is there anything - of which we simply can not have enough?"

"Idolatry" is the worship of anything or anyone who is not God. "Idolatry" is placing something or someone in a place of greater importance than God. "Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed" - all lead to "idolatry."

When we say that we would rather engage in this particular sexual activity than do what God has said to do - then this sexual activity has become idolatrous. When we say we would rather keep this thing which makes us unclean more than be in God's presence - then this impurity has become idolatrous. When we decide we would rather continue with our evil desires or our greed - than to have the heart and attitude of God - then our evil desires and our greed have become idolatrous.

Anyone of these areas of sin is bad enough all on its own. But when it becomes not only the destructive sin that it is - but also becomes a matter of idolatry in addition - as Bubba might say - "That's a lot of ugly!"

Read Colossians 3:6 and make notes:

For as long as God has been speaking to man - He has been saying that our sinful actions - our disobedience - our idolatry - will bring painful consequences. It is because we do these things that God's wrath is coming upon the earth. It is these very actions of mankind which has polluted the earth - and the things of earth. It was true in Noah's day – and it is still true today!

Read Colossians 3:7-8 and make notes:

The sins mentioned in verse 5 are primarily sins of actions or attitude. The sins mentioned in verse 8 are primarily sins of word or speech.

Yes, we know you used to walk in these very things – they were just a natural part of your life. Do you, Christian – do you still have anger, rage, and malice as a part of your lifestyle? Do you, Christian – still have slander or filthy language as a part of your lifestyle?

“BUT NOW” - we must put them away from us. We must get rid of them. We must not allow them to have any part – or place – in our life.

The word translated “slander” simply means -
“speech injurious to another's name.”

How often do we hear a person who confesses to being a Christian – use words that injures the name of another person?

Read Colossians 3:9 and make notes:

The Greek verb for "do not lie" is also a present imperative tense - which in the negative usage says - "Stop Lying!" - and continue not to lie! Do you think "lying" was singled out from the other speaking sins because it is the most common among believers? Was it singled out because it is the most difficult for us to overcome?

Whatever the reason, the fact remains that the Holy Spirit had "lying" set apart all on its own from the other sins - so we need to give it some special attention. We must give continual consideration to what we say - is it the truth?

We lie to one another when we intentionally tell them something we know is not true. We lie to one another when we say things in such a way that it allows them to believe something is different from what it really is. We lie to one another when we don't tell the whole truth and that allows the other person to think it is different.

Since we have taken off the old self - if we have taken off the old self - then don't even do this – don't lie to one another. It truly seems sad that it is necessary to tell God's Children not to lie to one another - but we all know that – IT IS necessary.

Read Colossians 3:10 and make notes:

The word translated “put on' means -
“to sink into, put on, clothe one's self”

The word translated “renewed” means -
“to cause to grow up, to make new; to be changed into a new kind of life as opposed to the former corrupt state”

One major result of putting on the new man - is the availability of new knowledge. It is so very sad - so few take advantage of this new knowledge. Jesus Christ - do you really know Him? We are to sink into the person of Christ Jesus.

If a man is walking around with the whole seat torn out of his pants - people are going to see his rear end. If this man picks up a vest - or maybe an arm band – or a hat - which identifies him as a member of a new organization- people are still going to see his rear end. This is basically what a lot of people do when they claim they are saved.

Instead of trying to wear some headband, or armband, or badge - if we would just "sink into" the new person - then nothing will be visible to others except the new person in Christ Jesus.

The "new self" is described in these verses as "being renewed" – and something of a continual happening. The "new self" does not decay or grow old - instead it can continually be renewed - revitalized.

To help or to assist our "new self" to be able to "renew" more easily - we need to do three specific things to keep the obstacles to a minimum. Three step instruction given to us in verses 5-9:

- .1. Put to death anything that belongs to our earthly nature.
- .2. Rid ourselves of the manifestations of the earthly nature.
- .3. Do not lie to one another.

To engage in anyone or combination of these things of the sinful nature - or the manifestations of the sinful nature - or the lying to one another - makes it difficult for the new person to be renewed.

All too often, we Believers, - are our own greatest obstacle to becoming more Christ-like - and our own greatest obstacle to having our new person to be "renewed" - just because we don't want to give up our attachment to some fleshly attitude, desire, or plan - or lie!

This message is so timely for us a nation - but it is especially timely for us as a local church in our community. Each of us needs to take some serious inventory. Are we willing to pray and ask our Heavenly Father to help us fulfill the 3 step instructions listed above?

List some of the things we need help with:

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

Previously in this study, we were told with some rather strong language to remove - take off - put to death - certain characteristics of the old nature. We were told to take these things off and TO CONTINUE to take them off - every time they try to get back onto us. Today, we are going to see some things the Lord instructs us to PUT ON in the place of the old garments.

How should today's well dressed Christian appear? After we are saved – we are expected to take off – or to put off – some things from our life. It doesn't stop there – e are then expected by God to take four more steps!

Read Colossians 3:11 and make notes:

There is no distinction of class with God. It doesn't matter whether we are Greek or Jew - with God there is no privilege based upon our national origin. It doesn't matter about our personal legal standing - whether we are of the circumcised or of the uncircumcised . It doesn't matter whether we are a cultured individual or one with no culture at all - barbarian or Scythian. It doesn't matter where we may be in the social class of our day - slave or free man.

None of these distinctions makes any difference at all in the real significance of who we are as the new creature we have been made in Christ Jesus. There are still many differences in the Christian community today - but not one of them is a real barrier to fellowship around Christ. This text alone should be enough to tear down any segregated churches - whether they are segregated by nationality, economics, or anything else.

When we, as Christians, allow any of our differences to become a barrier to our fellowship - then we are truly acting out of Character! For Christ Jesus is "all" and He is "in all."

Read Colossians 3:12 and make notes:

Step #1: Clothe yourselves – we are to take some action.

"Clothe yourselves" is an aorist imperative verb - and this means it is talking of taking action in a sense of urgency. This is not only important - it is important that it be attended to immediately

- don't hesitate or delay. Just as in the earlier section, we were told to "take off", "rid ourselves", or "put to death" - the manifestations of the old nature we are now told to "put on" garments befitting of the new creature we have become.

Paul points out 3 good reasons why we should so respond:

- .1. We are chosen of God
- .2. We are holy
- .3. We are dearly loved

Each of these phrases speaks of the same fact but from different aspects. We, as Christians, are in a highly favored position and enjoy the privilege of being Israel's heir to the promises of God. When we clothe ourselves with "compassion" - we offset those who are clothed in "pity" and are experiencing suffering. When we clothe ourselves with "kindness" - we offset those who are clothed in "severity" – or harshness.

When we clothe ourselves with "humility" - we offset those who are clothed with "pride." When we clothe ourselves with "gentleness" - we offset those who are clothed with "self-assertiveness." When we clothe ourselves with "patience" - we offset those who are clothed with "hastiness."

Being clothed in these Christian virtues greatly reduces the friction of everyday life. For each one of these is a manifestation of Love (compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience). These virtues show the special mark of a person who has a consideration for the rights and feelings of those around them. A Believer so clothed - is much more willing and able to make concessions where others are concerned.

Read Colossians 3:13 and make notes:

Even if we have a just cause - forgive one another. "Bear with" and "forgive" really expands on the virtue of patience from the previous verse. Just how willing are we to bear with those who have faults or unpleasant ways or who just have the ability to irritate us? Just how willing are we to forgive the grievances they have brought about?

Forgive does mean to let go of the desire for retribution or for restitution where an injustice has occurred (something in the past). But "bear with" speaks of putting up with something we dislike in the other person (something currently – and ongoing).

Read Colossians 3:14 and make notes:

Love is what holds things together. In a previous lesson of this study, we saw where it said Jesus is what holds all things together. Is this a contradiction? John Chp1 tells us Jesus is God. 1 John 4:8 tells us God is love. There is no contradiction! Jesus - who is God - who is Love - holds all things together.

There are those who readily see each of these virtues as a high manifestation of love itself. But love is so much bigger than any one or combination of these traits. It is right and fitting that love be mentioned as a stand alone characteristic or trait or virtue. Love should be addressed as a separate article of clothing.

Read Colossians 3:15 and make notes:

Step #2: LET the peace of God rule your heart.

We are to "allow" the peace of God to rule in our heart. We are to "give permission" for the peace of God to rule in our heart.

The Peace of God means more than simply not having war between the members of Gods family. The Peace of God includes the calm of mind – even when adversity appears on every hand. The Peace of God includes the calm of heart when we are threatened by sin and yet there is no reason for a remorseful conscience. The Peace of God includes the calm of mind and heart when death is approaching and we cannot be made to fear it. The Peace of God includes all of these and so much more. The Peace of God is a peace the world cannot give – and it is available only through Christ Jesus.

And Be thankful. This IS NOT added as some after thought. An attitude of gratitude and the thankful and grateful heart are a natural result of the peace Christ bestows upon us. Being thankful for the peace helps us have an incentive to put forth some effort to maintain and to preserve this peace.

The Greek verb used in this text speaks of "becoming" thankful. It is something we develop or learn to do. It is a matter of developing the habit of being thankful. Get started right now, putting forth some effort of your own, for the purpose of becoming a thankful person. This attitude and heart promotes even more peace within the Christian community - which in turn creates reason for more thankfulness. When more thankfulness begins to be a reality - then there is more peace and harmony promoted within the community - which in turn creates reason for more thankfulness - and on and on it goes.

Read Colossians 3:16 and make notes:

Step #3: LET the Word of God dwell in you.

We are to "allow" the Word of God to dwell in us. We are to "give permission" for the Word of God to dwell in us. Then "Teach" one another. Make use of every kind of wisdom to teach and admonish one another. And then "Sing" with grace and gratefulness in our heart.

I don't believe it is in order to make too much distinction between the "psalms", "hymns", and "spiritual songs" in this text. "Psalms" might well refer to the singing of Scripture to one another. "Hymns" might refer to the singing of the traditional songs to one another. "Spiritual Songs" might refer to the singing of the contemporary songs which inspire or encourage one another. The proper emphasis in this text is upon the "heart of gratitude." It is very important that we sing the songs we sing - in a heart of gratitude.

Whether we sing Scripture, or the traditional hymns, or the spontaneous chorus and songs of today's experiences. It is important we sing whatever we sing with a grateful heart. This concept will be expanded on in the next several verses.

Read Colossians 3:17 and make notes:

Step #4: Whatever it is that you do - do it as though you are doing it for God.

In spite of what some tend to teach - the N.T. does not contain a detailed rigid code of rules for Christians. The N.T. provides instead the basic principles of Christian living which should include being dressed in the virtues listed above and everything being done "in love" and everything being done as if it were being done for the Lord Jesus Christ directly.

We are to say whatever it is that we are going to say - as if we are saying it to Jesus or on behalf of Jesus. We are to do whatever it is that we are going to do - as if we are doing it to Jesus or on behalf of Jesus.

If we are truly doing something for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ - regardless of how small it might otherwise be, - it now becomes something great. If we are truly doing something for our Lord Jesus, - it doesn't matter that it might otherwise be monotonous, - it is now a beautiful and refreshing task. In everything, give thanks to the Father.

When it is something we are being given the opportunity to say – we should say it with a grateful heart. When it is something we are being given the opportunity to do – we should do so with a heart of thankfulness.

Read Colossians 3:18-22

Regardless of our station in life- do our thing - fulfill our place - in an attitude of "reverencing God." The majority of teachers who use this passage – verse 18-22 - probably use it when teaching on family or personal relationships. This passage is certainly a good one to include. But it is not used in that sense in this letter. These instructions are plopped down right in the middle of a teaching on doing what you do as if you were doing it for the Lord.

Also, the emphasis throughout this short passage is on "duties" - and is not on rights or privileges. The first illustration is more about the finding ourselves in a place of submission - than that of being a wife. If we find ourselves in the place of being expected to submit to someone else - then submit and carry out these duties as if we are submitting to the Lord and are fulfilling these duties to Him and for Him.

The second illustration is more about finding ourselves in a place of having others look to to us - and expect us - to provide for them - than it is about being a husband. If we should find ourselves in a place of having others expect us to provide sustenance or protection for them - then provide this sustenance or protection as if we are providing it for the Lord and/or to the Lord.

The third illustration is more about finding ourselves in a place where we are expected to obey the instructions of others. If we find ourselves in a situation where others are taking a position of parental authority over us - and this applies equally well to spiritual parents as it does to physical parents - then obey their instructions as if the instructions were being given to us by the Lord Himself.

The fourth illustration is more about finding ourselves in a place where others are looking to us for instruction. If we find ourselves having others asking us for instruction and guidance - then provide this instruction and this guidance as if we were giving it for the Lord or to the Lord. Imagine how Joseph must have felt at times when he was raising the young boy Jesus - having to instruct Him and to perhaps correct Him in some way.

The fifth illustration is more about finding ourselves in a place where someone else basically owns us. In our country today, we don't have literal slaves and slave masters - but we do have debts and penalties. If we find ourselves in a place where we are required by law to do what someone else tells us - whether it is pleasant or not - whether it seems right or not - then be obedient to this master as if the orders and commands were being given by the Lord Himself.

What should come through loud and clear at this point - is the teacher is stressing complete obedience "in everything." Glance back at the last part of verse 22:

We are not to be this way only when we are being watched! We should be faithfully, thankfully, obedient even when no one is around to see – out of a sincere heart and an attitude of reverence for the Lord. A cord began in verse 17 – and tuns right through these verse to verse 23!

Read Colossians 3:23 and make notes:

Whatever we do - do it as though we are doing it for God and not for men. This is an extension and an expansion of verse 17. We not only should do what we do in the "name of the Lord" - but we should be doing it "for the Lord."

If God's people could just grasp this one concept - that we are not serving man - but we are in fact serving God Himself - this would totally transform every task we perform - regardless of how small and how meaningless to other people - it would be transformed into a service of dignity and divine significance for us - the obedient servant.

Read Matthew 25:40, 25:45 and make notes:

Can you imagine how it will be for us when we have the attitude - "isn't this cute - they think I'm doing this for them - " "but I'm doing this for the Lord Jesus Christ." "And it's okay if they want to think I'm serving them."

That's what keeps Preachers preaching even when there is no money in it.
That's what keeps Pastors pastoring even when there is no thanks in it.
That's what keeps the bathrooms cleaned even when there is no recognition in it.
That's what keeps the Praisers praising -
That's what keeps the trash cans emptied -
that's what keeps the floors clean -
That's what keeps the intercessors praying -
That's what keeps the helpers helping -
and the list could go on and on - and this is what keeps us doing what we do with joy in our heart instead of discouragement and resentment. Because we know whom we serve and why we serve!

Know that our reward comes from God - because it is God that we are really serving. It is God who ultimately pays me - It is God who ultimately rewards me - It's nice that He lets it flow THROUGH some person - so that they get to receive a blessing - But "I KNOW" the blessing - the reward - the provision - comes from God. God is the one for whom I work! God is the one for whom I serve!

It is God to whom I look for my sustenance and provision. It is God to whom I look for my recognition. What about you ? To whom are you looking to meet your need ? To whom are you looking for promotion? To whom are you looking for a pat on the back and to hear "well done"?

Read Colossians 3:25 and make notes:

This is one of those double-edged swords. As we go about our serving - while we can rest assured those who do wrong will certainly be paid for their wrongs - be sure to remember there is no favoritism – we will be repaid for what we do as well!

God is no respecter of persons - if we do wrong - we will be paid for our wrong. This is a great place to bring our attention back to the opening verse of today's text. There is no difference with God - Christ is all and is in all.

Step #1:

Take an active role - put forth an intentional effort to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and love.

Step #2:

LET - or allow - the peace of Christ to RULE in our heart.

Step #3:

LET - or allow - the word of Christ to dwell in us richly.

Step #4:

Do whatever we do as if we are serving the Lord - because we ARE !

Maybe we are one of those Believers who has done the best we could do - to take off and to rid ourselves of the manifestations of the old sinful nature. But we have not put forth a serious effort to clothe ourselves with the manifestations of the new nature in Christ. If so, let's ask some mature brothers and sisters to with us and for us – and seek God's direction as to how we can best go about clothing ourselves with these new clothes.

Maybe we are one of those who has been faithful to put off the old sinful nature - but we have not allowed the peace of Christ to RULE our heart - or maybe we have not allowed the Word of God to dwell in us richly. If so, let's ask some mature brothers and sisters to pray with us and for us – and give God permission and to LET the peace of Christ to rule our heart and the Word of God to dwell in us RICHLY.

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

How often do you wish you knew what to say to someone? Do you try to keep from getting into a place or a situation where you might be asked what to do by someone? Do you avoid certain groups or situations because you don't think you would know how to answer the questions they might ask about spiritual matters?

A local church does not come into existence by accident. A local church is as a result of answered prayer - in fact many prayers which have been prayed by a great variety of people - some of them for a long time. And a local church has a specific plan which God has put together.

In much the same way – as the Colossians needed to hear this message - we need to hear - and to put into practice - this message. Not only do local churches, but as individuals – God has a plan for us also.

Read Colossians 4:1-6 and make notes:

For some, it seems verse 1 is out of place - as the beginning of chapter 4. They would rather see it as a part of the previous section on the wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves. But when you get a glimpse of the message contained in this last chapter of Colossians - I believe you will agree, this verse is in the right place.

This letter to the Colossian Believers is about to give the closing instructions. These instructions are for the entire church - and they are for the Church at large today.

As Believers in Christ Jesus - we have dominion over this earth. The first man, Adam, was given dominion over the earth. In a sense we have once again become Masters upon this earth.

In the Roman world of Paul's day, slaves had no rights. The teacher does not instruct us to do what is kind and patronizing. We are told to do a great deal more than that. "Masters, - provide what is right and fair." When we do what is "right and fair" - we will be providing wants which would never have existed had there been equity in the relationships all along. And we are given a most compelling reason to provide what is right and fair - because "we have a Master in Heaven."

As Christians, - WE ARE MASTERS - and yet, every Christian is accountable to THE MASTER - as to how we treat others and deal with others - even if they should be a slave to us or for us.

We find the first instruction in verse 2. We are to - "devote yourselves to prayer." Perhaps you will remember how this letter began. In chapter 1 verse 3, Paul stated he prayed for the Colossian Believers at "all times." In Mark chapter 14, Jesus told His disciples to "keep awake and pray." In Luke chapter 18, Jesus told His disciples that we "ought always to pray".

As individuals, we CAN NOT perform the ministry God has called us to do if we don't maintain a personal devotional lifestyle. You show me a Dad who is losing his grip on life and feels like he is going under for the last time - and I'll show you a Dad who doesn't have a personal devotion time. You show me a Mom who is coming apart at the seams - and I'll show you a Mom who does not have a personal devotional time. You show me a business person who is becoming an emotional wreck- and yes, I'll show you a business person who doesn't have a personal devotional time.

It is the same for churches! If an individual is to remain capable and active in whatever God has called them to do - they must maintain their personal devotion time with the Heavenly Father. If a church is to remain capable and active in ministering to the community - then its leadership must maintain a personal devotion time with God - and the whole church must be encouraged to have a devotional time together.

While we are devoting ourselves to prayer – we are to make sure we are "watchful and thankful." I must say this plainly and clearly! If we allow Satan to push us back into some kind of cave – where we think we are hidden – and no one else will be able to hurt us – then we are NOT in a position to be “watchful.” We are only in a position to be hiding.

Those who remain watchful - first of all - must be out among others so they can "watch". Then, having seen what is going on, - those who are watchful - are able to know what to pray for - they have seen it. The additional result of this watchfulness - is that we see we are not the only one who is having trouble and is in need.

We frequently will find someone who is suffering in a way that we are sure we don't want to endure. It is not unusual to decide we are at least better off than that person. This causes us to be thankful. We are thankful we don't have it as bad as they do. We are thankful that God has helped us as much as He has. We are thankful that God has protected us the way He has. Are maybe we are only thankful that we are not the only one who is suffering.

The Greek words that are translated "devote yourselves" - speaks of having an “earnest adherence to a person or to a thing,” Ruth had an earnest adherence to Naomi. We are supposed to be persistent and consistent in our prayer life. We are to stick with it!

The words translated "being watchful" - speaks of having a constant and continual alertness. If we are going to be faithful to the instructions given in this one little verse - then we can't go about our prayer life in a careless manner.

We can not be mechanical or dull in the way we approach prayer. We must be truly alive and active in the way we go about praying. If we do, then it will only be a natural result that we are thankful.

Let's be honest – Do we actually pray for opportunities to share your testimony or your witness? How often do we ask God to open doors for us to get to minister in the ministry to which we have been called? Or do we find ourselves "whining" about our circumstances? "Oh, please pray that I can get out of the place or condition that I am in so that I can minister." "Please pray that things change for me so that I can minister and serve the Lord."

Isn't this what most Christians do? We cry and complain about the unhappy or unpleasant place or condition or circumstances we are in - and basically do nothing in the way of ministering - complaining and trying to sound pitiful - hinting that we might serve the Lord when things get better for us.

Paul wasn't just in jail - Paul was in chains. Paul was in chains in a country where prisoners were treated like so much worthless meat. And here is Paul, in chains because of ministering the Gospel message of Jesus - and he is asking others to pray that doors be opened and opportunities be given to minister the gospel - even the gospel which has resulted in his being imprisoned.

In verse 4, he prays "Oh, pray that I proclaim the gospel message of Jesus loud and clear." Has it occurred to you - that the Apostle Paul was much like many of us? He was such a doer and such a person on the go that he didn't sit still very long at a time. There was so much to do. There were so many who have not heard the gospel. There were so many places to go.

Maybe he wouldn't have taken the time to write half of what is now our New Testament - if he had not been put in prison and chained to the floor.

How many Bibles are in print today? How many different languages is the Bible in today? How many people are reading these precious words of instruction, encouragement, and edification today?

Paul did not just sit there on the floor with the chains around his feet and hands - crying and whining that he will minister as soon as he is set free. He did exactly what more of us need to be doing today! He made use of every opportunity. If I can't go there in person - then I will write them a letter. If I can't be there in person to lay hands on them - then I will intercede for them in prayer from here.

We need fewer Believers resting on their "Blessed Assurance" - and more Believers doing what they can where they are!

In verse 5, isn't it interesting that he says, "Be wise in the way you deal with outsiders." When it comes to Believers - who are the outsiders? (the un-believers!) As Christians - remember we have dominion - we are Masters - we are expected to be cautious and use wisdom when we are dealing with pagans.

Why? So that we can make the most of every opportunity!

Let's be honest – What kinds of things do we Believers typically say to un-believers? "You're going to burn in hell if you don't stop _____. Just fill in the blank. While it may very well be true; does saying it to them – make them willing to hear the Good News?

Usually, we are so busy trying to make the pagans feel guilty about the way they live - that we don't have time to tell them about Jesus – His love for them – His Grace – His forgiveness. And if we do get the time to tell them about Jesus - they aren't willing to listen to anything we have to say.

Believers - use wisdom so that we don't cause needless antagonism. Believers - use wisdom so that we don't needlessly alienate the un-believer who is our neighbor or co-worker. We can't make anything with those whom we antagonize, alienate and infuriate - except war.

We are to live our life - conduct our affairs - in such a way as to attract, impress, and yes even convict the un-believer so that we can be given the opportunity to share with them the glorious message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We, collectively as Believers, have done an excellent job of convincing more than one generation of unbelievers - that they at least don't want to be like the Christians.

It is time - we as Believers - begin to give the non-believers a favorable impression of the Christian community the way Christ intended it to be. When we take a look at the Greek in this text - we see the phrase "make the most of every opportunity" - was actually a marketing term. It means to "buyout completely - or to purchase all existing parts." So as Christians, we are expected to "buy up" every part of every opportunity and not let that opportunity be owned by someone else.

Who is going to own that opportunity that I will have today? Is Satan going to own this opportunity - just like he has owned so many in the past? Or, is it going to be me - who is going to buy that moment of opportunity so that I can do with it what should be done with it? Remember, whoever owns a thing - gets to choose what is done with it. How do we come to own a moment of opportunity? We buy it! How do you buy it? We purchase a moment of opportunity by giving this other person time and attention - and genuine love and caring about what happens to them.

Christian - use wisdom when you deal with un-believers - so that you can come to own the opportunity - so that you can do with it what you please - instead of allowing Satan to have it and do what he does.

The Greek word for time is "chronos." The Greek word translated "opportunity" in this passage is the word "Kairos." It means "a specific time which is God's time." Believers - buy up every moment and give it to God's time.

Christian - use wisdom when you deal with un-believers - investing little by little - until the "kairos" comes - until the opportunity comes - and you own that moment - so that you can share the gospel of Jesus with them - either in words - or by just demonstrating it in what you do.

Jesus knew all too well what kinds of words come out of Believers mouths and He addressed the way we speak several times. James knew well what kinds of words Believers spoke and addressed it in his letter. Paul also knew how important it is for Christians to be careful as to how we speak to one another as well as to~un-believers.

Let your conversation "be full of grace." Grace is when we receive what we don't deserve. Sure, you know very well what this person deserves to hear - but you speak the words of forgiveness, healing, and restoration – anyway!

Please, - don't just allow some words of grace to fall into the conversation now and then - make sure your conversation is FULL of Grace! Let your conversation "be seasoned with salt." Two things about salt that might help us:

(A) Salt enhances the flavor. So it would be correct to say our conversation should be such as to make it more interesting to hear. Will it take a funny story to get this person to listen? Will it take a certain amount of (clean) foolishness to get this person to listen? Will it take an example from history to get this person to listen? Will it take an analogy, or the comparing it to something else, to get this person to listen – cars – sports – trains – children - etc?

What will make our conversation "tasty" or interesting to this person? Find out what it is - then season your conversation with that salt.

(B) Salt has a valuable characteristic of preserving things and keeping them from spoiling or going bad. So, this could mean that our conversation is to be kept wholesome and healthy. You surely wouldn't want to serve someone some meat which has gone bad. Don't serve them any conversation which has gone bad either. Don't even serve them conversation which is in the process of going bad.

But salt also has another valuable characteristic.

(C) Salt makes a person thirsty! Christian - season your conversation especially your conversation with un-believers - in such a way as to make them thirsty for the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. On the short term, salt has a cumulative affect. Over the long term, salt will be washed from our system. If you have constant contact with un-believers - then continually put just enough salt in your conversation as to make it interesting and pretty soon they will find themselves actually thirsty - and thirsty people ask for something to drink.

Christian - become so familiar with the Word of God – and continually practice seasoning your conversation - "so that you will know how to answer everyone."

Do we devote ourselves to prayer, - all the time being watchful and thankful? Or, do we whine and complain about how things are for us? Do we use wisdom in the way we deal with pagans and make the most of every opportunity we are given? Or, do we carelessly deal with the un- believers around us not really caring whether they find forgiveness and salvation in Jesus Christ?

Let's consider our conversation - Is our conversation full of grace and seasoned with salt? Or, is our conversation just whatever seems to flow? Do we need to make some course corrections? Do we need to make some changes in our daily life?

Are we ready to confess our failure to maintain a daily devotional time? Are we ready to confess our failure to pay attention to what is going on around us? Are we ready to confess we haven't been giving much attention to the way deal with un-believers around us?

Are we ready to confess we haven't been careful about what we say or how we say it? Perhaps, we need to have some of the brothers and sisters who have been where we are - to pray with us to have the strength and determination to begin to live the life we have been saved to live?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group:

In this lesson, we are going to close out our study of the letter to the Colossians. I am aware many people quickly skip over these last verses of the 4th chapter. Since we have been studying Colossians - in search of direction and instruction for our own local church - we cannot skip over this text.

This is especially true in today's society - When we consider how many local churches have separated themselves from other local churches - When we consider the competition which goes on between local churches - these last verses become very important.

What kind of persons should be allowed to be part of the ministry team in a local church? What kind of people should be allowed to be part of the ministry team of OUR Local Church?

Read Colossians 4:7-18 and make notes:

Contrary to a common picture given of the Apostle Paul - he was not some kind of "lone ranger" who traveled about - ministering and establishing churches all by himself. In this letter to the Colossians - Paul mentions 9 people who are serving and ministering with him. Paul did not minister alone - He does certainly appear to be the head of the team, but Paul ministered with a team of ministers.

The reality is that all of the people who are serving and ministering with Paul may not be listed here. It is completely reasonable to think there may have been others - these are simply the only ones mentioned.

Let's take a brief look at their names and the meaning of their names: One was mentioned in the opening of this letter:

Timothy = "honoring God"

The other eight are mentioned in these closing lines:

Tychicus = "fateful"

Onesimus = "profitable or useful"

Aristarchus = "the best ruler"

Mark = "a defense"

Justus = "just" (fair)

Epaphras = "lovely"

Luke = "light-giving"

Demas = "governor of the people"

Again, I ask you to think about this for a moment - what kind of people would you like to have serving and / or leading your church? Paul had a team made up of "the one who is honoring God", "the fateful one", "the profitable or useful one", "the best ruler", "one who is a defense", "the just one", "the lovely one", "the light giving one", and "the governor of the people."

The primary message we should take home from this text - is that it IS NOT God's plan that any of us should minister alone.

Point # 1: Minister as a Team!

If we are going to be a successful local church - then it is going to take many people - each one serving in the area God has gifted them and called them. As a local church, we need to establish a team of ministers - and establish a safe and secure place from which this team of ministers can serve. And it is not just that God has told us to do so (which would be enough) - it is also because this is the pattern which has been set before us.

Jesus didn't minister alone. And I must add, if anyone would be able to minister all alone - it would have been Jesus. But Jesus made sure He assembled a team - before He began the ministry. Paul followed the pattern of the Lord Jesus. Why do so many today try to be "lone rangers" of the ministry? We must not try to minister alone!

I am convinced that this is the best overall pattern for ministry. When Jesus sent His disciples out to minister - He sent them in pairs - little teams. Not only should the overall local church be a team but the individual personal ministry should be performed by small teams - two people as a minimum.

Many ministers who have “burned out” in the ministry would testify to the importance of serving with a team. There is an old saying, “if you ain't the Lead Dog, then the scenery never changes.” Many of us have learned there is something worse! It is when you think you are the Lead Dog – you are pulling as hard as you can – you find your muscles are aching – your tongue is hanging out – you are about to pass out – you look back and discover “you are the ONLY dog.”

Many ministers who have fallen and become unable to minister for a season or permanently would testify to the importance of serving with a team. If we are going to remain capable of ministering to the community for the long haul - then we must develop a team mentality - and we must continually be about the business of replenishing the team.

As the Lord expands our boundaries and capacity - we must have additional ministers to come and join the team. We must be continually training someone to take our place and serve where we are currently serving so that no hole will develop when the Lord moves us to another area of ministry.

We can see something of a description of 4 stages or levels of commitment:

In verse 7 - Paul first calls Tychicus a "dear brother" -

Stage 1 - Endearing stage (brother or sister)

Then next he calls him a "faithful minister" - Stage 2 - Faithful stage

And then Paul calls Tychicus a "fellow servant" -

Stage 3 - Obedient stage – no more questioning – just obedience

Fellow-servant – is translated from a word that means “one who serves the same master with another.” It is to call Tychicus a "fellow slave" with me - a slave to Jesus Christ - a slave to the ministry of Jesus Christ. This is the same way Paul referred to Epaphras in chapter one of this letter.

In verse 10 – while Tychicus was referred to as a "fellow servant" or "fellow slave" - stage 3 - here - Aristarchus is referred to as a "fellow prisoner." There is no choice. This is Stage 4 – Called stage.

This could mean that Aristarchus was also chained as a physical prisoner but it could refer to Aristarchus being called to the ministry to such a degree as Paul and cannot do anything else. This is not the first time Paul made a point of letting the reader know that he does not elevate himself to some high position above the other ministers and servants.

Anytime a teacher repeats something - it is important and we should take note of it. Since the Holy Spirit felt inclined to have Paul point this out more than once in the letter then it is in order to say it again. We must not develop positions of high and low estate within the body of Christ - we must develop a team of ministers who are serving side by side.

I, Paul, am a servant of Jesus Christ. Tychicus is a servant of Jesus Christ. On a team - there is a team leader - maybe even group leaders - or squad leaders - but there is not class distinction.

Now, on to the second point. Back to Tychicus for a moment: Verse 8 reveals an “express purpose.”

Two fold purpose:

1 - that you may know our circumstances 2 - that he may encourage your hearts

It is right - and it is proper - to keep in touch with those other believers who are separated from us by geography. Other churches - and ministries. It is right and proper - that we know their circumstances - so that we may rejoice with them in times of blessings - and we may know how to pray for them in times of struggle.

It is right and proper that we encourage one another as we serve in the place God has placed us. This applies equally well to individuals within the local church. This can help explain the value in having Home Groups – as they clearly help with this purpose.

Point # 2: Keep in touch with other ministries and ministers to encourage them.

In verse 12 & 13:

Laodicea = "justice of the people"

Hierapolis = "holy city"

These two cities faced each other from opposite sides of the Lychnus valley. Colossae was a little further up stream from there.

Epaphras wasn't only interceding with great zeal for the Colossian Believers – his home church

- he was also praying and interceding for the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis. And make note of the purpose for which Epaphras was praying for these cities:

- A. that they may stand firm in the will of God
- B. and that they may be mature and complete.

It is right and proper - and it is very healthy for us to pray not only for our own local church - but we also pray and intercede for the spiritual welfare for other local churches we know.

Point # 3: Pray and Intercede for other ministries.

In verse 15, different translations of the New Testament offer slightly different words. The name "Nympha" is one of those names which can be masculine or feminine. It is believed to be a contraction of the name Nymphodorus. The gender of the name was usually determined by the pronoun used with it. If the sentence read "his house" - then it was understood to be masculine. If the sentence read "her house" - then it was understood to be feminine.

The problem we face in this text is the pronoun used is the Greek word "autos" (owtos) - which is technically "their." The pronoun used with "house" is a pronoun which can be either masculine or feminine - so some of the English translations read "Nympha and the church at her house" while some read "Nymphas and the church at his house." And it is just as accurate for it to read - "Nympha and the church at THEIR house."

In this particular text, it simply comes down to your own personal choice. There isn't sufficient evidence to push one way or the other - Nor does it change the message of the text one way or the other. It is only important that we lay to rest any seeds Satan might try to use to cause division within the body. Remember! "Church" - ekklesia {ek-klay-see'-ah} - a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place." So, what does all this mean to us?

First, if anyone should ask you - you can point to this text and use it to explain the basic pattern of how this local church is endeavoring to be established. Not on the basis of a hierarchy - but on the basis of a team.

Secondly, if you have the mentality that you are just going to "come to church" - and allow the "ministers" to do the work of the ministry - you have a faulty image of the local church as established by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, we are expected to make contact with other local churches - not only in this county - but other localities as well - and to be aware of their circumstances - to encourage them and exhort them.

Fourthly, we are expected to pray and intercede for the other local churches - that they may stand firm in the will of God and that they may be mature and complete.

Let's look one more time at the people on Paul's team who were mentioned in this letter - this time - not by what their names mean but what they were like:

Timothy - student - disciple - apprentice - mentoree of Paul

Tychicus - Believer who served others well - Ephesians 6:21-22

Onesimus - Believer who was making an effort to correct his past actions toward Philemon

Aristarchus - Believer who was sold out - a companion in times of trial - Acts 19:29, 20:4

Mark - Believer who had been redeemed - previously had deserted the ministry and those who were counting on him - Acts 12:25, 13:13

Justus - Believer who turned from religion to Jesus Christ - Acts 28: 17-29

Epaphras - Believer who fervently prayed and worked hard in the ministry for the benefit of others

Luke - physician - but one who is dear to everyone and loved by them

Demas - Believer who slipped back – deserted ministry for things of the world Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:10

Archippus - Believer given a special task and needed some encouragement - Philemon 2 is the only other reference

Everyone on the team with Paul was not from the school of the ministers! The team consisted of just common everyday people - people from different walks and stations of life - just people who were doing what they could with what God had given them. The team with Paul was just real people doing what God showed them to do on a daily basis. People just like you and me.

Are you a real person? Have you given up the pretending? Are you ready to become part of the team ?

Write your thoughts and questions regarding this study to share with the group: