

# PHILIPPIANS and COLOSSIANS

Paul's letters from prison in Rome

**A Bible Teaching Commentary  
for personal or group study  
by Fred Morris**



**Book Part 1  
Chapters 1 to**



## **PHILIPPIANS AND COLOSSIANS**

### **Paul's letters from prison in Rome**

- **Paul's ministry 'in chains' through his prayers and letters**
- **Seeking the life of Christ and rejecting the life of Satan**
- **Maintaining unity in the church and rejoicing in the Lord always**
- **Instructions for holy living and guidelines for families and churches**

**THIS BOOK** describes two letters written by Paul while he was a "prisoner for Christ" in Rome. He knew and loved the believers in the cities of Philippi and Colosse (Greece and Turkey). Paul expresses his joy in suffering persecution on their behalf. He strengthens their faith in God's Bible truth and the Good News of Jesus Christ. He describes clearly the nature of Christ which they must copy. He also gives instructions for holy living and church unity. He wants them to rejoice always even in times of suffering and share the love of God to all. His letters were copied and distributed throughout Europe which later blessed millions of people around the world through missionaries preaching the Gospel.

**MANNA PUBLICATIONS** publish small Bible teaching commentaries written by Fred Morris to use on your own or to study in a group. For many years Fred and his wife Lorna travelled round the world teaching and preaching. His books are easy to read, understand and translate into other languages. They give basic New and Old Testament teaching of God's truth with practical applications of our salvation through Christ alone plus additional notes for Bible students, teachers and pastors.

**THESE BOOKS** will help you to come closer to Almighty God. He is worshipped by millions of Jews and Christians worldwide. These books will also help you to receive salvation and eternal life through God's Son, Jesus the Christ who is Israel's Messiah. They will help you to talk about your faith in God and to pray to Him. They will help to guide you from going the wrong way in life. They will help you to live a life that is pleasing to God through the love and power of His Holy Spirit. This was promised to all who believe Jesus is the Son of God, who suffered death for our sins before returning back to Heaven.

**WE PRAY** that you may have a new peace and purpose in life as you trust in God, read the Bible and use these commentaries. Think about what Jesus taught and suffered 2000 years ago for our eternal salvation and what He is calling you to say and do today to prepare the way for His return. Amen.

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## To the Reader or Leader

These commentaries help to explain the Bible in a way that is easy to read and understand. They are also easy to translate. Fred Morris was a missionary in Africa and Asia. You can use his books to study the Bible on your own or with others in a group. Each person should have his or her own book and a Bible if possible.



**Bible reading:** Where you see this, it means you or your group leader should always read the Bible passage first before reading this book.



**Talk about this:** Where you see this, there are questions to prayerfully answer yourself or to discuss in a group study. They also help the reader to remember the Bible verses.



**Think about this:** Where you see this, the questions require more time for personal meditation.



**Pray about this:** Where you see this, ask God to help you understand and apply what you have read.



**Ruled teaching boxes:** Where you see these, the information gives extra teaching about life at the time the Bible passage was written and helps to apply the teaching for today.

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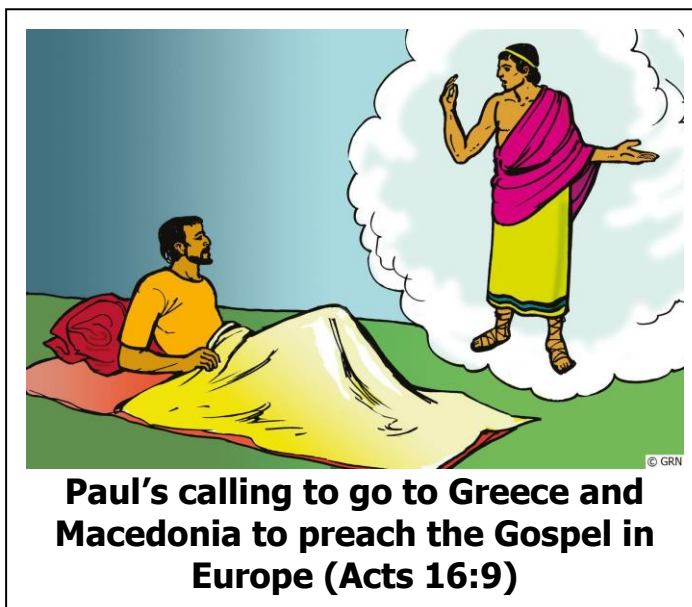
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## PHILIPPIANS Chapters 1 to 4

### INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul wrote letters to the Jewish and Gentile believers in Philippi and Colosse. They were cities in what is now Greece and Turkey. Paul wrote to them while he was living as a prisoner in a house in Rome. Roman soldiers guarded him (Acts 28:14-31). He was later tried in Rome for preaching "Jesus and the resurrection" (Acts 17:18). Paul went to Philippi on his second missionary journey. He wrote to the followers of Christ there to thank them for a gift they had sent to him. They sent him money at a time when no-one else did. Paul was their missionary.

Philippi was the first city in Greece he visited after his meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9). He had a vision of a man calling him to preach in Macedonia, north of Greece. (Acts 16:6-10). He went there twice (Acts 16:11-40 and 20:1,6).



#### **Who is the Messiah-Christ?**

No other part of the Bible explains the Jewish Messiah, Jesus the Christ, so wonderfully as in Paul's letters to the Christians in Philippi and Colosse.

In setting forth Christ as God and Son of God, Paul answered many of life's questions: Who am I? Why am I here? Why am I suffering? What is my relationship to others? What does God want of me?



#### **Bible reading: Philippians 1:1-11**

### **SERVANTS OF JESUS CHRIST**

Paul begins his letter with a greeting. Timothy was with him. Timothy's father was Greek. His mother was a Messianic Jew (Acts 16:1-3). Young Timothy became a believer when Paul preached in Lystra. He travelled with Paul for 15 years. They went together to Rome, to Jerusalem and maybe even to Spain. Now Timothy was Paul's best friend and companion in Rome. He was like a son to Paul. Paul called Timothy "my true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2).

Paul said he and Timothy were "servants of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:1) not church leaders. He did not call himself 'bishop' or even 'pastor.' Paul was a humble servant of Christ Jesus. In several letters Paul puts the name 'Christ' first before

Jesus. Jesus was first the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed Son of God. Then He was Jesus, Son of Man, who lived humbly among us and died to save everyone from their sins.

Paul wrote to “all of God’s people who belong to Christ Jesus” (1:1). This was for all members of the fellowship in Philippi including leaders. He often called them ‘saints.’ They had believed in Jesus Christ and some were slaves. They were the community of Christians at Philippi. There was nothing special in these people that made them saints or holy. Only God can make people holy. He does this as they let His Spirit work in their lives. The people chose leaders (elders and deacons) to shepherd the believers. These men were appointed to serve and to care for the life and work of each fellowship (Acts 6:1-6).



### **The Christians at Philippi**

Paul said these things about them:

- they are “in Christ”
- they are holy brothers and sisters
- they are faithful (believing) brothers
- they are part of the Christian Church
- they are servants and saints
- they have love in the Spirit for others
- they are spreading the Good News to the entire world.

## **PAUL JOYFULLY PRAYS FOR THEM IN LOVE**

Paul thanked God for and prayed for the believers who joined him in ‘spreading the Good News’ of Jesus (Philippians 1:3-4). He told them his heart was full of joy and confidence as he prayed (1:5-6). His confidence was not in himself and not in his prayers. His confidence was in the power of God.

When he wrote to ‘the saints’ in Rome, he said “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). God’s Spirit filled Paul with joy, even when he was awaiting death at the hands of the Romans for honouring God before the Emperor. He wanted the very best for the new believers.

He wanted them to allow God to carry on His work in their hearts (Philippians 1:6)

God had already begun this work in the believers. He saved them through the preaching of the Gospel. They believed and they were born again by God’s Spirit (John 3:8). Now the Holy Spirit lived in them and worked in them to make them like Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit works in us through fellowship and ministry with other believers:

- A spiritual work.
- A work at which He never gets tired.
- A work that will go on to the end of our lives “until the day Christ Jesus returns” (1:6)

Paul would continue God’s work in their hearts until “the day Christ Jesus returns” (1:6). Paul obviously hoped the Second Coming of Jesus would be soon and he wanted them to be ready.

“It is right for me to feel this way about all of you. I love you with all my heart.” They had shared God’s grace with Paul in “standing up for the truth of the Good News” (1:7).

Then Paul said, “I pray that your love will grow more and more in [Scripture-based] knowledge and understanding. Then you will be able to know what is best. You will be pure and without blame until the day Christ returns” (1:9-10). There were now many Christian churches in Asia Minor and Paul prayed for them all. The Christians in these churches were partners with him. He loved them. He prayed that:

- Their love would grow stronger and even overflow.
- They would understand more and more of God’s will based on Scripture.
- “Then you will be able to know what is best.”
- They would be pure and without blame, filled with the fruit of righteousness through Christ.
- These things at work in their lives would be to God’s glory until the day Christ returns (1:11).

He rejoiced that Christ was being preached even though he was in prison and others had tried to take his place. “What has happened to me has really helped to spread the Good News. One thing has become clear. I am being held by chains because of my stand for Christ. All of the palace guards and everyone else know it.” (1:12-13.)

Their faithful witness before men proved that the Gospel had changed them (1:14). And they defended it boldly to the death. Right living is the fruit or result of God working in our lives through Jesus Christ.



### **TALK ABOUT:**

1. Why was Paul always full of joy (1:3-4)?
2. What will happen on the day of Christ’s return (1:6)?
3. What did he ask the Christians to do and to be (1:9-11)?
4. How do Christians become fruitful in God’s sight (1:11)?



### **Bible reading: Philippians 1:12-26**

### **GOD’S PLAN FOR THE GOOD NEWS**

Paul said. “What has happened to me has helped to advance the Good News” (1:12). Paul was not free. He could not leave the house where he was living. A Roman soldier stood guard nearby. Paul said he was “in chains for Christ” (1:13).



Though he was not free, he could preach the gospel to all who came to see him. It was clear to all the churches that God was using Paul's 'chains' for a greater purpose. Because of this, Paul was convinced that "most of the believers in the Lord have become bolder" (1:14).

God's great purpose is always to bring honour to His name and to "advance the Gospel" and to bring good out of suffering. God wants all men to know about Jesus Christ. Jesus commanded His disciples to preach the gospel to all people (Matthew 28:19). This brings people to Heaven and glory to the Father's name. Paul had preached the Gospel in Philippi and now was doing the same in Rome (1:14).

Paul said, "Some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of love to help me in my work" (1:15). Some preached against Paul and the Good News because they were jealous of him. Paul confirms he preaches the Good News "out of love" (1:16). He did not mind being in chains under house arrest as long as the Gospel was being preached. He had only one goal in life: to honour the Lord Jesus Christ and preach Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23). Paul rejoiced (1:18) in this. In Rome, he was made strong by their prayers "and through the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (1:19; Galatians 4:6).

Christ's Spirit is the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of God (Genesis 1:2). God Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One Person (Matthew 28:19).

## **NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL**

Paul said, "I hope that I will in no way be ashamed in any way" (1:20). He needed courage to face his trial before the Emperor Caesar. He would be ashamed if he feared his guards and stopped speaking about Jesus. He personally believed that the message of Christ "will be lifted up whether I live or die."

We exalt or lift up the name of Jesus when we tell others about Him. Paul would be sad if he heard the Christians were not following Christ. We witness that He is the only way we can be holy and worship the Living God.

Paul would be glad when Christ called him home to Heaven. It would be to his benefit, but their sorrow. He wanted to leave his old, tired body and be with Christ in Heaven "which is better by far" (Philippians 1:21-23). "For me, life finds all of its meaning in Christ but death also has its benefits" (1:19-21.) To live is Christ and to die is gain.

Then he thought of the believers in Philippi. "It is more important for you if I stayed alive" (1:24). He could pray for them and encourage them. He lived for them to "grow and be joyful in what you have been taught" (1:25). And their hope of seeing Paul alive kept these believers going on in their faith (1:26; 2:24).

We know that Paul sent more messages to the believers in Philippi but we do not know if he actually met them again.

## BRING HONOUR TO THE GOSPEL

Paul wrote, "Whatever happens, live in a way that brings honour to the Good News of Christ. Stand firm with one purpose ... work together as one person... to spread the teachings of the Good News (1:27). Paul told them to stand like a soldier who does not leave his post when the enemy attacks. Satan is our enemy. He wants to make us afraid. He wants us to stop speaking for Jesus.

Paul knew that the Good News of Jesus Christ is not only preached and taught, but lived out in our lives. We stand for the truth and we stand against the devil's lies. May all believers in your fellowships stand firm together for the truth of God's word!

Persecutors raged against the Christians and their message, but they could not stop the preaching of the Gospel. This was a sign to their enemies that God was giving the believers courage. Their persecutors knew that God was with these Christians and that He might destroy those who opposed them (1:28). But this made them angry and more determined to destroy their witness.

Paul told the believers, "It has been given to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for Him" (1:29). Paul believed that if we share in Christ's suffering, we will also share in His glory (Romans 8:17).

Faith in Christ is just the beginning. Christians go on to serve the Lord and to suffer as He did. So let them rejoice in their sufferings (Matthew 5:10-11)!

The Christians at Philippi were facing the same struggles as Paul (Philippians 1:30). no-one who preaches the truth has an easy life. Satan always comes against that person. But Paul was filled with joy and hope.



### **Talk about this:**

1. Why did Paul say his chains were God's plan for him (1:12)?
2. Does God have a plan for each of us? How can we know what is God's plan?
3. What would make Paul ashamed (1:20)?
4. Why did Paul prefer to live rather than die in prison? (1:25)



**Think about this:** Do you feel shame when you are not bold for Jesus? In what ways can we be bold? How can we work together with other believers in unity to spread the Good News of salvation through Christ alone?



### **Who is the devil we call Satan?**

Satan was once an angel in Heaven. He was proud and wanted to be equal with God. Pride made him rebel against God. God threw Satan out of Heaven. Many angels followed Satan (Revelation 12:9). They were thrown out of Heaven with him. We do not know when all this happened. Fallen angels still follow Satan. They are called evil spirits or demons and Satan keeps them busy doing evil. The apostle Peter said, "The devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8 ESV).



## **Bible reading: Philippians 2**

### **THE MIND OF CHRIST**

In chapter 2, Paul explains that Christ gave up everything and came to earth to save sinners. In chapter 3 Paul explains how he was called to give up all this world offers to serve his new Master, Jesus Christ. Christ gave up Heaven's glory to win Paul. Paul gave up earth's glory to gain Christ!

Paul encouraged these Christians in their struggles and their prayers comforted him. He wrote: "If you are cheerful because you belong to Christ; if His love comforts you; if the Holy Spirit is your companion; if Christ has been gentle and loving towards you; then make my joy complete by agreeing with each other (2:1-2).

Unity among Christians is the work of God's Spirit making us humble. When we are all proud we must seek God for unity in our group. Paul wanted them to live holy lives, so that the fruits of the Spirit will be seen in them (Galatians 5:23-24).

United, we can stand against Satan. Divided we fall. Jesus taught His disciples this (Mark 3:24-26) And He prayed that they would be one (John 17:23). Jesus and Paul said each must consider others more highly than yourself (Philippians 2:4), and seek to do God's will in true humility as in Christ (2:5). This means we should seek to have the mind of Christ, which is pleasing to Father God.

These verses tell us more about the mind of Jesus Christ than any other part of the Bible. By 'mind' Paul meant attitude, example or way of thinking and living.

Jesus Christ is God. He was always with His Father in Heaven (John 1:1-2). He came from the Father to be born as a humble man (John 1:14). Jesus had to give up His glory, majesty and power and be born a helpless baby. He was willing to do this because He loved us and was prepared to suffer and die for us. Jesus Christ, who was without sin, took our sin on Himself and died in our place (John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus had no thought for Himself; "but made Himself nothing" (Philippians 2:7). He gave up His position in Heaven and allowed Himself to be made in human form as a servant to obey His Father "even though it led to His death" (2:6-8). Following the example and mind of Christ therefore requires obedience. He suffered the hardships of this world, was rejected by His own people and died as a criminal (Galatians 3:13).

God had promised One who would come and redeem sinful man (Genesis 3:16). God kept His promise and sent His Son, Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16). Jesus came to die in our place and for us to receive the gift of eternal life (John 3:16).

The Son's sacrifice pleased the Father. "Therefore God lifted Him up to the highest place. Giving Him a name that is above every other name (2:9). At the name of Jesus every knee will bow, to worship Him. Every mouth will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And God the Father will receive the glory" (2:10-11).



## The nature of Christ (2:6-8)

Paul teaches us important things about Christ our Saviour:

- The greatest man on Earth who lived and died as a **servant** for our salvation.
- A human being without sin and with the qualities of God who became a human **sacrifice** in the most cruel punishment invented by mankind.
- A **saviour** whose death and resurrection were planned by God to offer eternal life for all who confess Jesus as Lord.

God gave mankind the greatest gift in all the world: He gave Himself. Paul wrote elsewhere, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15 KJV). Jesus is now back in Heaven, seated at His Father's right side and discussing our prayer requests.

## SHINE LIKE STARS

When we understand these great truths, we want to continue to obey God. Paul called this "working out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). He praised the Philippians for their obedience to God. A holy fear is born in every true Christian. It is not a fear of being punished, but a respect for who God is. When we believe, God's Spirit begins to change us. We "work out our salvation" by letting God work His ways in us and being careful to obey Him. Therefore, we must continually confess to God [talk about] our weaknesses but praise and thank Him for His grace in saving us.

Remember that it is not our working that saves us, but the desire and will to do the work of God. Paul says it is God who is working in you with His own good purpose (2:13; Romans 8:28). God works in us by His Spirit. Do not live the Christian life according to verse 12 alone but live according to verse 13. Why? Your new life in Jesus is not yours but God's life in you to use as He chooses, if we let Him! That's scary! So instead of following our agenda we must follow God's agenda. Trust Him even when we cannot see the way ahead!

Therefore, "do everything without finding fault or arguing. Then you will be pure and without blame. You will be children of God without fault in a sinful and evil world" (2:14-15).

Paul's words had a wider meaning for the Philippian church. There was disunity at times in the church because of arguments. The group was in danger of breaking up. They should fear and tremble at the thought of this. They should all work together to achieve unity. They could certainly achieve this unity because God was at work in them, "according to His good purpose."

At Colosse some argued with the false teachers. At Ephesus the believers argued over doctrine. Paul said these arguments spoiled their testimony. It is better to be "pure and without blame as children of God, without fault in a sinful and evil world. Among the people of the world they will shine like stars in the

heavens" (2:15). You shine among the people of the world... as you hold out to them the word of life" (2:16).

Paul had sacrificed much for the salvation of others. But "even so, I am glad and joyful with all of you. So you, too, should be joyful with me" (2:17-18).

## **PAUL WANTS TO SEND TIMOTHY**

Paul wanted to send Timothy to get news of the Philippian church (2:19,23). He said, "I have no-one else like him. He truly cares about you" (2:20). He said, "Everyone else looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (2:21).

Timothy served with Paul "as a son with his father" (2:22). He was like Christ who always thought of God's work first.

Paul thought he might soon be free to visit them also. "I myself will come soon if the Lord allows it" (2:24). Paul was happy to risk further persecution. The huge cost of sacrificing His Son, Jesus, did not stop God from caring for mankind. As we experience problems today, we must not shut ourselves off from helping to meet the needs of others. God so loves the world, so we must love those for whom His Son died, whatever the cost.

## **EPAPHRODITUS MY FELLOW WORKER**

Epaphroditus had come from Philippi to bring money to Paul (4:18). He carried this love-gift from the Christians at Philippi, and then stayed with Paul to help him. Paul called him "my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier" (2:25). The two men stood as one against Satan.

Epaphroditus had been sick and near death. Paul said, "He almost died for the work of Christ" (2:30). But God spared him. And God spared Paul the sorrow of seeing his fellow worker die. He served Paul a long way from his home. He was a man who was gifted in personal ministry. He encouraged Paul for a while as needed then experienced the call back to his home church to serve those who loved him.

The Christians in Philippi had prayed for their sick brother. When they saw him alive and well, Paul said they would rejoice and be glad at the mercy of God (2:28). Paul told them to, "honour men like him" (2:29). He had risked his life and health to help Paul, so they should respect him.



### **Talk about this:**

1. What does Paul tell us about the need to be like Jesus (2:5-8)?
2. What does Paul tell us about God's plans in our life (2:13)? What is the first thing that Paul tells us to do (2:14)? Why (2:15)?
3. Who did Paul want to send to Philippi and why (2:19; 25)?
4. What did Timothy care about most (2:20)?



**Think about this:** What is the purpose of God yesterday, today and for ever? Read Genesis 3:16; Galatians 3:16; John 3:16. How can we "shine like stars" (2:12-16)?



**Pray about this:** Pray how to “do everything without finding fault or arguing”. Pray for the churches to welcome and encourage and care for visiting workers from other churches or missions.



## **Bible reading: Philippians Chapter 3**

### **DO NOT TRUST HUMAN NATURE**

Paul then wrote, “Finally, my brothers and sisters, be joyful because you belong to the Lord!” (3:1). This was his main thought. He rejoiced and he wanted all Christians to rejoice also. Our situation may be hard. We may not feel like rejoicing, but we are told to rejoice in the Lord!

Paul used harsh words to speak of the false teachers who had come into the churches. He told the believers, “Watch out for those dogs...” Some of the false teachers belonged to the ‘circumcision group’ (3:2). They said that all believers must be circumcised. The Jews circumcised their baby boys. Circumcision was a sign of purity which God gave to Abraham (Genesis 17:9-14). This sign was part of the Old Covenant. It was a sign that a family had faith in God and obeyed His Covenant.

Joseph and Mary took baby Jesus to be circumcised (Luke 2:21). They lived under the Old Testament Law, and they kept the law. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, the Old Covenant passed away (Hebrews 8:13) because Jesus fulfilled all the requirements of the Old Covenant (Luke 22:20). Christians no longer needed the outward sign of circumcision. God gave them the seal of His Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13) as a sign of inner purity. By faith every believer is now made righteous in God’s sight through the blood of Jesus. Paul calls this circumcision from within [of the heart] through obedience (Romans 2:26-29). This is why Paul warned the Philippians, “Watch out for those dogs... When they circumcise, it is nothing more than a useless cutting of the body. We have been truly circumcised (Philippians 3:2-3).

Paul joined himself to the Christians at Philippi. He said: We worship by the Spirit (not by works we do with our hands). We glory in Christ Jesus. We put no confidence in the flesh (3:3).

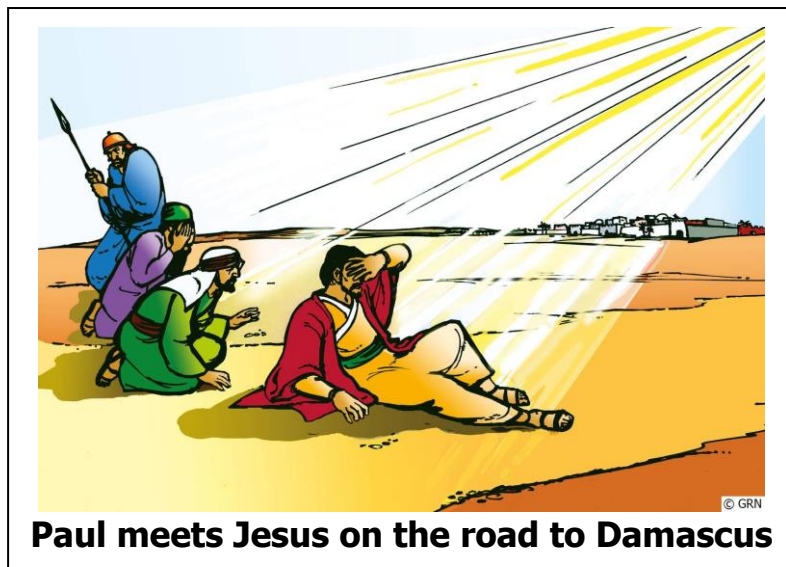
The ‘flesh’ included our old nature before the Spirit of God filled us. This old nature was renewed as they let God’s Spirit speak to them and change them.

Before Paul was saved, he kept the Law. His parents took him to be circumcised on the eighth day, after birth, according to God’s Law (Luke 2:21). He was a Hebrew whose family line could be traced back to the tribe of Benjamin. Paul was also a Pharisee. This group of men studied the Old Testament Law and kept it with great care. Paul had great zeal for his Jewish religion, so he persecuted the early Christians until Jesus Himself stopped him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-2). His “legalistic rightness” was without a fault (Philippians 3:6). no-one could point to Paul and say he was not a good Pharisee.

Before he believed Christ was the Messiah, Paul had confidence in his own faith in God and what was right. Jesus Christ came into Paul's heart and changed the way he lived. He was still a Jew, but he saw that faith in Christ was what God wanted. God no longer wanted believers to keep the ceremonial law with its many sacrifices and offerings. Jesus was Paul's once-for-all sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 9:12-14). Now

he trusted in the righteousness of Christ. He wrote elsewhere, "The righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ" (Romans 3:22).

Paul boasted only about what Christ Jesus had done (Philippians 3:3). He said, "I consider everything [in life] is nothing compared to knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I consider it all to be rubbish" (3:7-8). He knew that the destruction of his powerful former life as a Pharisee with all its "legalistic righteousness" (3:5-6) was nothing compared to the righteousness gained through faith in Jesus Christ, his Messiah (3:8-9). "For me, being right with God does not come from the Law. It comes because I believe in Christ. It comes from God. It is received by faith" (3:9).



**Paul meets Jesus on the road to Damascus**



### **Circumcision**

The physical act of circumcision, done under the Old Testament Law, did not take away a man's sin. Only perfect holiness through faith in Christ could do that. So Paul taught that faith in Christ now took the place of circumcision. God 'cut off' sin from a man's heart by giving him a new life in Christ from within (Colossians 2:13). We call this inner or spiritual circumcision.

## **PAUL'S ONE AIM IN LIFE**

Paul's one aim or goal in life was "to know Christ Jesus better." Our faith in Him enables us to know Him more and share in His sufferings in this world with His resurrection power now and after death (v.10-11). Remember, Christ's power is received by faith (3:9).

He no longer doubted that his body would be resurrected. This is the hope of every believer. When Christ returns, all believers, past and present, will meet in Heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Paul wanted to live as a man already risen with Christ. By faith he already shared in Christ's risen life, and His victory over death. He wanted to be free from all fear of death!

All believers can know a power like the power that raised Jesus Christ from death. Many share the sufferings of Christ. They become more like Jesus! They also crucify the old sinful nature within.

## **PRESSING ON TOWARDS THE GOAL**

Paul did not think he was perfect. Or that he had reached his goal. Or that God had finished working in his life. God had "taken hold" of Paul, and now he pressed on to "take hold of what Christ Jesus took hold of me for" (Philippians 3:12). Paul therefore encourages his readers to do the same and move forward. "The heavenly prize is Christ Jesus Himself" (3:14). This is why he says, "be joyful because you belong to the Lord" (3:1).

Paul thought of the Christian life as a race. Like a runner, Paul refused to look back. God had blessed his preaching, but that was not enough. He would not live in the glory of the past. He would strain forward and use all the strength he had left to win the eternal prize (3:13-14). Forget the failings of the past (3:13) and think only of the good things that God has done in your life. "God will make it clear to you. [Therefore] let us live up to what we have already reached [gained]" (3:15-16).

Christ asks us to leave behind the world and all the things that tempt us. Paul had left all "earthly things" (3:19). Others have their minds set on houses and lands and jobs and money. Paul did not look at these, but at the eternal prize waiting for him at the end of the race. He reached out for all that God had for him, all that was waiting for him in Heaven. All Christians are called to "run with patience" the race before them (Hebrews 12:1) The "eternal prize" is Christ Jesus Himself!

This is why Paul urged them to "live up to what they have already reached" (Philippians 3:16). Let us live up to the light and truth we already have. Let us do all that we know to please God. The believers had grown in their Christian lives and Paul urged them to press on to the end.

He said, "Join with others in following my example..." (3:17). Paul set an example for them to follow. His life was like a pattern for the Philippian Christians to follow.

Others lived lives that did not honour God (3:19). Paul often wept for them. He said, "They are enemies of the cross of Christ. The only thing they have coming to them is eternal death (3:18-19). The Christians must be careful not to act like those who did not know the Lord.

Death does not mean that sinners will cease to exist. It means they will be cut off from God forever, unless they repent and live to His glory (John 3:36). This is worse than death itself!



Paul said, "We are citizens of Heaven" (Philippians 3:20). Philippi was a Roman colony and Rome gave its people the full rights of Roman citizens. They were proud to be citizens of Rome because they enjoyed many privileges others did not have.

As citizens of Heaven, Christ's Spirit rules in the hearts of His people, and they offer their bodies to Him. Let us live to show this. We must not let our God given appetites of hunger and sex tempt us and control our lives. Christ has "the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control." This will finally happen when Christ comes again (3:21; 1 Cor 15:35-49).



### **Talk about this:**

1. What did Paul want most of all (3:10)?
2. Did Paul think he had already received all that Christ had for him (3:12-13)?
3. What prize was Paul running to win (3:14; Rev 2:10)?



**Think about this:** What has God "taken hold of" in your life and why? In what ways can we add to what we have already learned and be a blessing to God and to everyone He has given us to care for?



**Pray about this:** Ask God to forgive your doubts and fears and help you to hold on to the faith and salvation given us through the death and resurrection of Christ our Saviour. Ask Him to enable you to forget the sins of the past and live up to what you have gained in and through Christ. Pray for obedience to move forward in your calling with what lies ahead to serve the church joyfully and the world we live in. Ask for protection from foreign leaders and religions.



## **Bible reading: Philippians Chapter 4**

### **BE OF ONE MIND**

Paul told them how to live to please God. He has given them an example to follow. If they followed his example, they would stand firm in the strength of the Lord (4:1). Then they would be examples to others. Paul called their godly lives "my joy and crown." He loved them very much.

However, two women in the church could not agree. This caused trouble in the church and Paul asked the leaders to help these two women settle their argument. "I want them to agree with each other because they belong to the Lord" (4:2). The Holy Spirit brings unity in a group. This happens when each person holds to the truth and lives a holy life. He wanted all of them to know God's peace (2:2).

Personal matters must be settled by each believer. Leaders must speak against any wrong teaching or sin in the lives of the believers. Paul was careful to note that "their names are all written in the Book of Life" (4:3; Revelation 3:5). This means these two women were born again by the Spirit of God.

## **REJOICE IN THE LORD AND DO NOT WORRY**

Paul told them again to be joyful and "rejoice in the Lord always" (4:4). This is a command to be obeyed. At times we may be sad and mourn. We may get upset and disagree with others at times. But God's word commands us to forgive and be joyful in the Lord for all that He has done for us.

"Let everyone see how gentle you are." And he want them to live believing that the Lord is coming soon" (4:5). If God is at work in us, we can be gentle toward all persons. When we love other believers, we are gentle even in correcting them. This is most important for church leaders.

Paul also wrote, "Do not worry about anything. Tell God about everything. Ask and pray and give thanks to Him" (4:6). Satan wants us to worry. God wants us to enjoy His peace in our hearts (4:7). Instead of worrying, we are told to pray about everything "giving thanks to God" (4:6). If we do this, we have God's promise: "the peace of God...will guard your hearts and your minds because you belong to Christ Jesus" (4:7). Those without Jesus have no true peace in their hearts. God's peace is so amazing, it "can never be completely understood."

Paul then gave them a sure cure for worry (4:8). He gave them a list of good things to think about:

- whatever is true: God's word is the truth,
- whatever is noble and worthy of honour (respect),
- whatever is right (righteous) and just,
- whatever is pure and holy and comes from faith in God,
- whatever is lovely or full of beauty,
- whatever is admirable and is a good testimony worthy of praise,
- whatever is good and suitable to meditate on.

If you fill your thoughts with these things, there will be no room for worry, doubt or evil thoughts. Again Paul said, "Do what you have learned or heard from me, or seen in me. And the God of peace will be with you" (4:9). This means we will have the peace of God and the God of peace in our lives!

## **HOW TO BE CONTENT**

Paul felt very humble and happy when he learned of the concern that the Christians at Philippi had for him. They cared for him when no other church did. They had wanted to send their gift sooner but could not - they had no opportunity to show their love for him (4:10,15). God had given him all he needed (3:13-14). And God's Spirit made him able to do 'all things in Christ' (4:13). So he could write, "Whatever happens, I have learned to be content" (4:11). He had been in great need. Now he felt blessed to have plenty. Whether much or little, he always thanked God. The Philippian church had sent many gifts to Paul in the past (4:16).

Epaphroditus brought the latest gift from Philippi to Paul. He was not looking for their gift, but looking for the faith and acts of love that would become a blessing to themselves and to others (4:17). They did not give out of their plenty, but out of their poverty. Read Paul's testimony of the churches in Macedonia,

including Philippi, in 2 Corinthians 8:2. So Paul said their offering was like a sacrifice “pleasing to God” (4:18)

Paul had given up everything to serve God. He believed the Christians at Philippi were doing the same. Because of this he said, “And my God will meet all your needs with His glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (4:19). Give glory to our God and Father for ever and ever. Amen! (4:20)

Many of Paul’s readers take this promise as their own. We cannot do this unless we are prepared to live as Paul lived. God is gracious and ready to supply our needs, but He also expects us to sacrifice ourselves and all we have to Him (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:8). Our gifts to those doing God’s work are also “fragrant offerings” before God. What we do for God and His servants, we do for Christ (Matthew 10:40; Matthew 25:40).

At the end of his letter, Paul sent greetings to them from the Christians in Rome. The gospel had changed many hearts, including some in the service of the Roman Emperor Caesar. This included Romans in other provinces and soldiers who guarded him.



### **Talk about this:**

1. What put at risk the harmony in the church at Philippi (4:2-3)? What things did Paul remind them about?
2. What part of the Holy Spirit’s fruit did Paul speak of (4:5)? What else did he remind them about?
3. What did Paul say about how to overcome worry (4:6-8)? What personal advice did he give (4:9)?
4. What made Paul content (4:10-11)?
5. What is God’s promise to those who give their all to Him, as experienced by Paul (4:19)?



**Think about this:** Paul often tells his readers, “Christ is coming soon” (4:5). What do we need to do to prepare ourselves and others personally regarding this Bible truth? What do we need to do to prepare non-believers? What do we need to do to prepare whole church fellowships?

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Throughout his letter to the Philippian church, Paul tells of his love and thanks for them. This is because they are a caring church which is mostly faithful to follow his teaching without much disagreement. He also encourages them to press forward in their ministry without fear, believing they are able to do all things through Christ. This epistle is well known for Paul’s joy in suffering much in order to establish a faithful church, especially one that is so caring. It is also famous for describing the mind and nature of Jesus the Christ who submitted to the will of His heavenly Father to provide the only certain way to receive eternal life in Heaven.

# COLOSSIANS Chapters 1 to 4

## INTRODUCTION

Colosse (or Colossae) was a city in the Roman province of Asia, the area we know today as Turkey-in-Europe. It was part of the Roman Empire at that time. When Paul lived nearby in Ephesus, people from Colosse came to Ephesus and heard him preach the Good News of Jesus Christ (Acts 19:10). Epaphras was one of those who heard and believed this Gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31). He took the Good News back to Colosse and God raised up a group of believers there. Epaphras was their first church leader.

However, false teachers had come among the group and Epaphras went to Rome to tell Paul about this problem. Paul now lived in Rome as a house prisoner awaiting trial by the Emperor. Epaphras told Paul how the Good News was spreading in the province of Asia and how the false teachers had come into the churches and caused trouble. Others were confused by new teachings and new ways of worship.

The theme of Paul's letter to the Colossians is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But we see other important themes:

- Thanks and prayers for spiritual growth and concern for other fellowships nearby.
- Paul's concern for the unity of the believers in Christ and their growth in ministry there.
- Christ's work in them by His Spirit and Paul's part in this ministry.
- Their duty to turn completely from the old life to the new life in Jesus.
- Rules for Christian households and other instructions for the church members.

On his missionary travels, Paul helped many small groups of believers. They had no special places to meet, so they met in each others' homes in the many cities of the Roman provinces (Acts 2:46). Now Epaphras was concerned for these scattered believers. He knew Paul was, too. How long would they stand up against the false teachers who turned many away from faith in Jesus Christ? This was why Epaphras visited Paul while he was a house prisoner in Rome.

Jesus once said of the Pharisees: "They do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on other people's shoulders. But they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" (Matthew 23:3-4). The "heavy loads" were their rules and traditions which were not part of the Old Testament Scriptures. False teachers did the same in the New Testament churches.

This is why Epaphras asked Paul to write a letter to the church to oppose the false teaching and give the truth and purpose of God in Christ Jesus, Israel's Messiah. Paul gives his foundational teaching of the Good News of Jesus Christ in chapters 1 and 2. He then gives his personal advice to Colossian believers. His letter was copied several times and remains a blessing for us today.



## **Bible reading: Colossians 1:1-8**

### **GREETINGS AND PRAYERS**

Paul called himself "an apostle of Christ Jesus". The word 'apostle' means 'someone sent with a message'. Paul did not choose to be an apostle. He said God chose him. He was an apostle "by the will of God" (Colossians 1:1; Acts 9:15-16).

Before he became a Christian, Paul hated Christians and went about persecuting them. As he went to Damascus to arrest Christians there, God stopped him. A great light shone on the road around him and blinded his eyes. There, on the road, Paul heard the voice of Jesus speaking to him (Acts 9:4-5). Paul could never forget that God called him and gave him a new life. Now he loved God and went about preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Some of Paul's friends were with him in Rome: Tychicus, Luke, Timothy. They helped him with food. Young Timothy was a close friend and a disciple of Paul (Acts 16:1-3). He helped Paul write and deliver his letters to the Christian churches he and others founded.

### **TO THE FAITHFUL BELIEVERS**

Paul wrote to the "holy and faithful in Christ" at Colosse. He sent his greetings to them with grace and peace from God our Father (Colossians 1:2).

Paul gave thanks for the believers who stood strong in their faith. He thanked God for their love of the brethren and for their prayers for other believers (1:3-4). They were famous for their faith and love in Christ. To be "in Christ" means to be part of Him, our spirits joined with the Son of God. This is very amazing news! The Christian Church was then and still is now Christ's body on earth (1 Corinthians 12:14). It is made up of all born-again men and women (John 3:1-8).

Men and women of faith are to be found in every people and language group where the Good News has been preached (Revelation 7:9). They are God's sons and daughters (Galatians 4:6). He has called them as His own by giving them His Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). They have the Holy Spirit living in them. God gave these believers His own eternal life. He did not make them into a building or a denomination, but into a fellowship of believers. All true believers are part of Christ's 'body on earth'.

Paul described the Gospel or Good News of Jesus in four parts:

- **Faith** in Jesus Christ.
- **Love** for all the believers.
- **Hope** of eternal life in Heaven.
- **Grace** of God that enabled them to receive faith, love and hope (Colossians 1:4-6).

Paul said the Christian's faith and love comes from our hope that awaits us in Heaven (1:5). This was through the grace of God first given in the sacrificial Law given to Moses and then fulfilled in Christ's personal sacrifice for all who believe

He is the Son of God. The fellowships of new believers 'grew in strength and boldness. They grew in numbers and worshipped the Lord' (Acts 9:11).

Paul confirmed, "All over the world the GOOD NEWS is bearing fruit and growing. It has been doing this among you since the day you heard it. That is when you understood God's grace in all its truth" (Colossians 1:6).

## FREE AND FAITHFUL IN CHRIST

Paul did not take the Good News to Colosse but others did. Jesus said, "I will build My Church and the gates (power) of Hell will not be strong enough" (Matthew 16:18). Christ used Paul and other preachers or apostles like Paul and Peter to build His Church.

When men and women heard the Gospel they received Christ as their personal Saviour from sin and they were changed. This change in their lives was the 'fruit' or result of God's Spirit living and working in them (Philippians 1:11).

Epaphras was "a faithful minister of Christ" (Colossians 1:7). He received the Gospel himself, then God used him to preach it to others including the Colossians. Christ gave us His authority to preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20) as well as God's teaching through Moses and the Old Testament prophets.

Paul said, "Epaphras faithfully works for Christ and for us among you" (Colossians 1:7). He wrote in his letter that Epaphras "told us about your love that comes from the Holy Spirit" (1:8). Every minister of the Gospel must be faithful to his Lord. He must serve his people well. Paul and Epaphras were faithful servants of Jesus Christ. They both taught with the same love and good works through understanding and witnessing the grace of God.



### **Talk about this:**

1. What four words did Paul use to talk about the Gospel of Christ (1:4-5)?
2. How did Paul describe the main 'fruit' or result of the Gospel in the church at Colosse (1:8)?



**Think about this:** How would you describe the main result of the Spirit at work in your church fellowship?



### **Bible reading: Colossians 1:9-14**

## PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE BELIEVERS

Paul prayed regularly for the believers at Colosse. He prayed that they would stand firm in their faith and be "filled with the knowledge of what God wants" for their lives (1:9). Obeying God by doing what He wants is an important step to knowing God personally. This is why he said, "We have not stopped praying for you".

The Colossian Christians knew God, but not well enough. Paul wanted them to know God more with their minds filled with God's word and their hearts ready to obey Him. He also wanted them to know by faith what God wanted them to do

with their lives. Their faith must also be in the fact that Jesus is the Son of God with the power and authority of God Himself. The false teachers tried to make Jesus less than God. Therefore, believers must not accept their false teaching. Christians must keep to the truth of God's word and show this by what we do and say, with faith in the amazing power of the Holy Spirit.

## **KNOWING GOD AND HIS PURPOSE FOR US**

Each point in Paul's prayer is good. As we establish each thought firmly in our minds, it will grow and get bigger and bigger until it fills our minds and our hearts with praise to God. Alleluia! He wants us to know and understand and become strong in what we believe and do the things God wants us to do:

- "We pray for God to fill you with the knowledge of what He wants" (1:9).
- "We pray that He will give you spiritual wisdom and understanding" (1:9).
- "We pray that you will lead a life that is worthy of the Lord" (1:10).
- "We pray that you will please Him in every way" (1:10).
- "We want you to bear fruit in every good thing you do" (1:10).
- "We want you to grow to know God better" (1:10).
- "We want you to be very strong, in keeping with His glorious power" (1:11).
- "We want you to be patient. Never give up. Be joyful!" (1:11)

Paul believed that we can know God, because He has revealed Himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Our salvation through Christ brings us closer to God Himself, which was His eternal purpose or plan through much love and suffering for us. But to know God's purpose or plan is the most important thing in life. It will enable us to live a life that reflects God to others and receives His approval. The true value of our life is all about Christ living in us. He is the One who works in us to make our lives bear good 'fruit'.

Paul says that our Father has made us spiritually fit. This helps us run the race of life and win the prize. We are made fit "to share with God's people". Our natural bodies and minds do not have this strength. We want to stop running and hide from suffering. By our own nature we are weak-willed and love an easy life! But "God has saved us from the kingdom of darkness and He has brought us into the Kingdom of the Son He loves. Because of what the Son has done, we have been set free. Because of Him, all our sins have been forgiven" (1:13-14). This is His purpose.

Paul said elsewhere that Christians are to be patient and accept their trials as coming from God and give thanks for them. God will use the trials to make us spiritually fit and strong and to make us more like Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18). Again, this is His purpose for us.



**Bible reading: Colossians 1:15-23**

## **JESUS SHOWS US WHAT GOD IS LIKE**

Paul wrote, "Christ is the exact likeness of the invisible God. He created everything in Heaven and on Earth" (Colossians 1:15). No man can see God because He is

Spirit. Jesus Christ came to show us what God is like. On Earth, Jesus had all the same qualities as God. He was exactly the same as God (Hebrews 1:3) but in the form of a human being. He was born to the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. Read Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38.

Jesus said to Philip, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus Christ is the one true God who came down from Heaven. He came as a human person. He came to offer His life as a sacrifice and suffer the punishment we all deserve for our sins (Romans 5:6-10). He took on Himself the trials, beatings and crucifixion, yet He had no sin.

Almighty God (Father, Son and Spirit) suffered much for the love of mankind. Father God then raised Jesus from the grave, overcoming death and Hell. Jesus later told John, "Do not be afraid! I am the Living One; I was dead, but I am alive for evermore! And I hold the keys to death and Hell" (Revelation 1:17-18).

In Heaven with His Father, God Almighty, Jesus "created all things in Heaven and on Earth, He created everything that can be seen and everything that cannot be seen ... Before anything was created, He was there holding everything together" (Colossians 1:16-17).

## **CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH**

Christ is now the Head of the Church, which is His body on Earth (1:18). "God was pleased to have all His nature living in Christ" (1:19) Jesus was fully God but fully man (Hebrews 1:3). And He is all things to His Church! He came to earth to reveal the nature and power of God to us, knowing that He had to experience human pain to fulfil His plan of salvation.

A Sunday School teacher once asked her class to "touch the Church." Some touched a bench in the church. Some touched the window. Others put their hands on a Bible. The teacher told them, "No, those things are not the Church. The Church is people; people who love Jesus and choose to live for Him only." Jesus is head of the Church.

"God was pleased to restore [reconcile] all things back to Himself because of what Christ has done. He made peace through Christ's blood and His death on the cross" (Colossians 1:20). He offered His life for this peace because there was no peace between God and His creation. Sin was like a wall that shut people away from His Creator (Isaiah 59:2). Jesus opened a way back to the Father (Hebrews 10:20). He has all power and authority including authority over Satan. He rescues those who believe in Him and brings them out of the kingdom of darkness where Satan rules (Colossians 1:13). "Because of what the Son has done, we have been set free. Because of Him [through His blood], our sins have been forgiven" (1:14).

However, Satan rules over all evil spirits and all persons who reject Jesus or His Father in Heaven. By His death on the cross, Jesus has authority to lead followers of Satan out of sin to freedom (Mark 3:27). But Jesus can only free those people who put their faith and trust in Him. All others are at risk under



Satan's rule of darkness where unseen powers rule. Satan controls these evil powers and authorities and uses them against men and women.

Paul reminds his readers what Christ has done for them. "At one time you were separated from God... because of your evil ways. When Christ died, God brought you back to Himself. Christ's death has made you holy in God's sight. So now you are free from blame." He warns, "You must continue in steady and firm your faith" (Colossians 1:21-23).

Think about what we were and what we are now. Think about what Jesus has done for us and what He wants us to do. In this way, Paul encouraged his readers, both Jews and non-Jews, to remain strong in their faith and live lives that bear fruit. This is achieved by believing, living and preaching the truth of God and witnessing the Good News of Jesus Christ all over the world.



### **Talk about this:**

1. In his prayer, what did Paul ask God for the Christians at Colosse (1:9-11)?
2. Who reigns over the Kingdom of Light (1:13)?
3. What did Jesus come from Heaven to do (1:14)?
4. How does Paul describe the role of Jesus Christ past, present and future (1:15-23)?



**Think about this:** What is the Christian's hope (1:5-6)? Do you know God's will for your life (1:9)?



## **Bible reading: Colossians 1:24-29**

### **PAUL'S WORK FOR THE CHURCH**

Paul had suffered much to take the Gospel to the Roman province of Asia (now Turkey-in-Europe). He told of his sufferings for the Gospel in other letters (2 Corinthians 11:23-28). Yet he rejoiced because he was suffering for Christ's sake and "for the sake of His body, which is the Church" (Colossians 1:24).

Paul knew his hardships were a part of the Church's sufferings. Christ's Church is still suffering. In many lands, Christians are persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ.

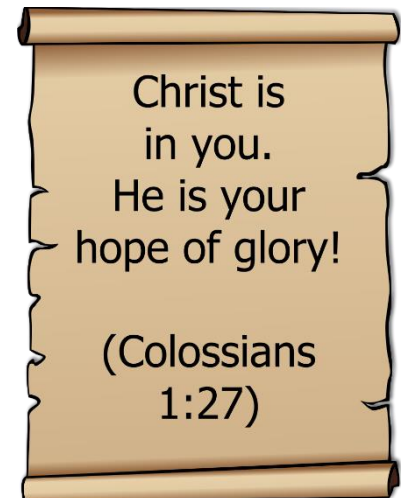
Paul thought of himself as a servant of the Church (1:25). God called and appointed him to do this work. God told Ananias at Damascus, "I have chosen this man to work for Me... I will show him how much he (Paul) must suffer for My name" (Acts 9:15-16).

### **THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST REVEALED TO US**

'The mystery of Christ' was not secret knowledge for the few. It was God revealing His truth, once hidden, but now openly proclaimed. God had shown men over the centuries His plan to bless Gentiles as well as Jews. The way He would do this, by the preaching of the Gospel or Good News of the mystery of Israel's Messiah, Jesus the Christ, was now made clear.

God sent Paul to tell the Gentiles “the mystery that has been hidden for many ages but is now made known to God’s people (the Jews)” (1:26). Paul also showed that Christ lived in the Gentile and Jewish believers and filled them with His Spirit and hope of glory (1:27). Paul preached the Gospel which he called ‘the mystery of Jesus Christ’.

All down the ages, God showed us, little by little, His plan to save people of all nations despite the destructive work of Satan. To men and prophets of old, God’s final purpose was a ‘hidden truth’. Now that mystery was openly revealed and shared to Jews and Gentiles. The Holy Spirit uses the spoken and written word of God to teach each new believer the truth of Christ dwelling in our hearts by His Spirit (1:26). This mystery is “the hope of glory” fulfilled in Christ (1:27). This was the message Paul aimed to teach. “We preach this message with all the wisdom we have. We warn and teach everyone... We then bring them to God as people who belong to Christ” (1:28).



Jesus told His disciples, “When He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth... He will bring glory to Me by taking what is Mine and making it known to you” (John 16:13-14). When the Holy Spirit came to these believers, He revealed truth that had been hidden for generations. Paul then shared this truth with the passion, compassion and power of Christ. So must we. The Good News of Jesus Christ is the truth of God established in all who believe, repent and accept Christ as their Saviour.

Paul wanted to present every believer perfect before God (1:28). They would not be perfect in this life, but every true believer would have their sins forgiven and forgotten. Therefore, on the day they stand before God in Heaven, they will be accepted as “perfect in Christ”.

## **CHRIST LIVES IN US TO BRING US CLOSER TO GOD**

Paul also said the mystery of the Gospel is that “Christ is in you. He is your hope of glory” (1:27). We do not fully understand the meaning of the word ‘glory’. Glory tells of the majesty, holiness and kingly splendour of God. All God is and all He does is full of glory. It is not possible to separate God from His glory. So when God is with us, His glorious presence is with us. We cannot see God, but we are aware of His Spirit within us as promised by Christ our Saviour. Some people chosen by God who come close to God’s Presence see brilliant light. Through Christ, we will see and experience God’s glory in Heaven all the time.

Paul said, “We proclaim [preach] Christ” (1:28). He preached a great truth of eternal value. He said that our every blessing is found in Christ. He wanted them “to be perfect as people who belong to Christ” (1:28). This will be fulfilled when true believers stand before the throne in Heaven. Paul said, “This is what I am

working for". He worked hard with all of Christ's strength powerfully at work in him. (1:29)



### **Talk about this:**

1. Why was Paul happy to suffer for the Good News of Christ (1:24-26)?
2. What does 'Christ in you' provide now and in the future (1:27)?
3. What does Paul word hard to do (1:28-29)?



**Think about this:** Do you work hard for God? Are you working with Christ's strength within you?



### **Christ in you**

Before Jesus went back to Heaven, He told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem. "Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high", He told them (Luke 24:48-49).

What would happen to 'clothe' their spirits with new power? They would receive the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Jesus would come to them and fill them with His own life, power and glory. He came to live in them. The Bible speaks of Christ living in the believer through His Spirit. Christians have the person of Christ dwelling within them, by His Spirit.

The Holy Spirit shows us the things that are of Christ (John 16:14). He works upon our characters to produce the 'fruit of the Spirit' in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23). And He prepares us for living constantly in the presence of God now and in Heaven through "Christ in you, who is your hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).



## **Bible reading: Colossians Chapter 2**

### **TRUTHS PAUL WANTED THEM TO KNOW**

Believers at Colosse and in neighbouring Laodicea were part of Christ's body and Paul wanted to encourage them all to grow up in their faith. He told the Colossian church, "I am concerned for those who are in Laodicea" (2:1). His purpose was to encourage them in their faith and unite them in love, within the church fellowship AND between churches. Only God's love in our hearts can make us "joined together as one. Then their understanding of God's truth will be rich and complete. They will know the mystery of God. That mystery is Christ" (2:2).

Paul did not establish the meeting of believers in Laodicea. But Paul knew the growing importance of Laodicea as a business centre in the Roman Empire. History tells us that as the town grew the church grew in importance. We too should encourage other believers, near and far. Encouraging other churches includes praying for believers in other countries whom we are unlikely to meet on Earth.

Paul's reason for encouraging other believers was because he did not want anyone to be "mislead by words that sound attractive" (2:4). Many would teach false doctrine. The Christians must beware and not be taken captive by these deceitful teachings by Satan's agents.

Paul said, "I am happy that your faith in Christ is so strong" (2:5). "Keep on living in Him!" (2:6) "Have your roots in Him and build yourselves up in Him!" (2:7). "Make sure no-one captures you with false ideas that have no meaning. Their ideas depend on human teachings and not on the teachings of Christ" (2:8).

## **THE FULLNESS OF GOD IN US**

Paul wanted believers to be "filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19). All God's nature lived in Jesus Christ (Colossians 2:9). When Christ lived on Earth, He was fully man and fully God. Now Christians must show this same fullness of Christ to others. Any man or woman who has faith in Jesus can have God's fullness of life in them through the Holy Spirit (John 10:10).

"Because you belong to Christ, you have everything you need" (Colossians 2:10). Christian, you have been given this fullness of Christ. Show it to the world! Paul saw God's grace and power filling Christians more and more through Jesus Christ as we live our lives for Him. Growing never stops!

Paul also said Jesus Christ is "ruler over every power and authority" (2:10; Ephesians 1:20-22). Many people make the mistake of thinking Jesus was just another religious leader like Mohammed or Buddha. Paul said Christ is above all. There is no other power or authority like His. All things are under His feet! If believers keep their eyes on Jesus and search God's word, they will know this truth and Christ's authority will set them free (John 8:32; Hebrews 12:2). As we study the Bible, God's Spirit makes us complete in Christ.

Paul said that in Christ we are circumcised by "putting away our sinful nature". Not with a circumcision done by human hands but with the circumcision done by Christ in our hearts (Colossians 2:11). "You were buried with Him in baptism and then raised to life with Him by believing in God's power that raised Jesus from death" (2:12).

Paul was a Jew and he knew that circumcision was the outward sign that he had obeyed God's Law. Circumcision is also a picture of what God does in our hearts (Romans 2:28-29). And baptism witnesses that same work of God. When a person accepts Christ's death as his own death to sin, there must be a "rejection of the old sinful nature" with all its bad ways (Ephesians 4:22-32). Christian baptism is a picture of our old self with its bad ways being buried (under the water) and our new self is raised up (out of the water) from the death of the old life to a glorious resurrection with Christ (Ephesians 2:6).

## **GOD HAS MADE YOU ALIVE TO CHRIST**

Paul wrote to these Christians, "You were dead in your sins. Your sinful nature was not circumcised" (Colossians 2:13). Before they believed the Good News of Jesus Christ, they did not have God's life in them. Some believed in a creator God

but did not know the love and salvation of His Saviour. But when God forgave all their sins through Christ and planted a new nature in them, He made them alive with Christ. "God gave you a new life with Christ by forgiving us all your sins" (2:13). They were alive in their spirits because they were joined to Christ. Jesus said, "I am the life" (John 11:25).

God's new life is forever. Every life joined to Jesus will live forever with Him in Heaven. This is God's gift to every believing sinner (John 10:10). Jesus said, "Whoever hears My word and believes... has eternal life and will not be condemned. That person has crossed from death to life" (John 5:18).

Jesus paid our penalty in full, so God was able to cancel the sentence of death that stood against us because of our sin (Romans 6:23; 8:1).

## **JESUS BROKE SATAN'S POWER**

Paul said that when Christ suffered our punishment on the cross He fulfilled the Law of Moses with Him at the same time (Colossians 2:15). The requirements of the Law are not cancelled. But Christ forgives our sins when we fail to obey the Law. The Law no longer condemns us when we repent and receive God's pardon through Christ. Jesus won the battle over sin on the cross and the condemnation of disobeying the Law. Every time a person is set free from sin's grasp, Satan loses his power over that person if we continue to believe. Jesus overcame eternal death when He rose from the grave (Romans 6:9; 2 Timothy 1:10). He also defeated satanic powers and authorities (Colossians 2:15).

However, the Christian Church is now Satan's target. Satan cannot attack Christ for He is in Heaven, so he attacks Christ's body on Earth. One way he does this is by sending false teachers into our churches. Watch out! Paul said, "Your mind may be led away by wrong ideas or traditions (customs)." This included some holy days, special feasts and New Moons days as well as what you eat and drink (2:16).

Wrong teaching about God led some in Colosse to believe Satan's lies. They were deceived and no longer believed the truth. Jesus said, "Watch out for false prophets" (Matthew 7:15). Paul called them 'dogs' (Philippians 3:2).

## **MEN'S RULES ARE OF NO VALUE**

In Colosse the Jewish believers followed many of their old traditions. They celebrated religious festivals and special Sabbaths. Paul said, "they are only a shadow of the things that were to come" (2:17-18). The High Priest, the Tabernacle, the commandments and the sacrifices all pointed forward to Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection for us. He is the fulfilment of what is written in the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17).

Paul warned that "some people are not guided by the Holy Spirit so they become proud of their useless ideas" (Colossians 2:18). He asks, "Why do you act as if you still belong to the people of the world? 'Do not taste! Do not touch!' These rules are only based on human ideas and teaching" (2:20-21).

Our body is held together by muscles and bones. Christ's body, the Church, is held together and kept in harmony by being joined to Him, the Head (2:19). Some believers in Colosse were leaving the truth and following man's rules. These Christians were acting as if they still belonged to Satan. This is why Paul asked them, "You have died with Christ, and He has set you free from the evil powers at work in this world. Why do you keep on following the evil rules of the world?" (2:20).

In God's eyes, Christians are joined to Christ (Romans 6:1-4). He had set them free. For all believers, the rules and traditions of men are gone forever! The rules are "destined to perish" along with the people who live by them! However, "worldly rules may seem wise... but they do not stop people from chasing after sinful pleasures" (Colossians 2:23).



### **Talk about this:**

1. What mystery did God reveal to believers to share with others near and far away (2:1-3)? Why (2:4)?
2. How can a believer have all the fullness of God living in them (2:6-10)?



**Think about this:** Why did Paul mention Laodicea to the believers in Colosse? How can we care for other believers nearby and far away? What are some arguments that deceive people today and can cause us to sin?



**Pray about this:** Pray for unity within your group and fellowship and congregation. Pray also for guidance to encourage other believers in churches nearby and far away. Pray for the smaller churches to grow and for the larger churches to remain united and uphold Bible truth. Pray for God to show you how to help the young in faith to understand God's truth and His salvation through Christ.



## **Bible reading: Colossians Chapter 3**

### **WE HAVE BEEN RAISED WITH CHRIST**

Christ died on the cross and was raised from death. After forty days He went back to Heaven (Acts 1:8-11). Now He is "seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1). Only kings sat on thrones and the right hand was always the place of power and authority. Now Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God with all power and authority (Matthew 28:18). All believers have been raised from death through Christ. "You have been raised with Christ. So think about things that are in Heaven... not on Earth" (3:1-2).

God sees us as 'raised with Christ' in faith when we were baptized in water (Romans 6:4). This is why Paul said that we should think now of Heaven, not Earth, since our lives are "hidden (secure) with Christ in God" (3:2-3).

Because of this, Paul urged them to "set your hearts (minds) on things above". God's blessings in Christ was all that they needed (Ephesians 1:3). Christ is now

hidden from our eyes. But He will come again. Paul believed that “when He appears again, you also will appear with Him” (Colossians 3:4).

## **PUT THE OLD LIFE TO DEATH**

Paul said, “Put to death anything that belongs to your earthly nature. Get rid of your sexual sins and unclean acts. Do not let your feelings get out of control. Remove from your life all evil desires” (3:5). This includes thoughts of adultery or relationships with relatives or people of the same sex (Leviticus 18:1-20; 20:10-21). These things make God angry (Colossians 3:6). We must put our faith in facts not wrong ideas. Faith in God’s truth and His purpose and provision now and the future through Christ. Do not seek after your own selfish plans.

We cannot completely put off our old nature. It is with us until the day we die. But we can let the Holy Spirit guide us and “not live the way we did at one time” (3:7; Galatians 5:22-24). “Put away anger and rage, hate and lies, and all ‘dirty words’” (3:8-9). Why? “You have started living a new life which is being renewed... in the image of its Creator” (3:10). This will happen day by day, as we walk with Jesus, but we must do the walking! Then what we learn and understand is part of the truth and wisdom in God and nature of Christ Himself.

It was because of these sins that Paul knew God’s wrath was coming upon the earth (3:6). It may seem long in coming because He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish. He wants everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). God does not want anyone to go to Hell. But the signs are that we are now living in the final days before Jesus returns. We must stay faithful to the end (Matthew 10:22).

We must live to please God and do His will. We must act like His children (John 15:10). All other things are less important. As we seek Him in His Word, His Spirit teaches us right [righteous] living. We must obey the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus, and put off the sins that once held us down. So we should repent of our old earthly nature and prepare to meet our God by seeking a closer relationship with Him. We should give thanks for His forgiveness and new life through the sacrifice of His blood.

## **PUT ON LOVE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Paul next reminds his readers not to allow divisions between Jewish and Gentile believers, new or mature believers, slave or free believers. All are God’s chosen people (Colossians 3:11). “So put on tender mercy and kindness as if they were your clothes. Do not be proud. Be gentle and patient. Put up with each other. Forgive the things you are holding against one another. Forgive, just as the Lord forgave you. Above all of those good things, put on love. Love holds them all together perfectly as if they were one” (3:12-14). Patience is the ability to show loving kindness and self-control.

If we fail to ‘put on’ the nature of Christ, we will find we will not be ready to meet with God. We must desire to change our old ways. God works in us to make us a new person. His Spirit in us puts to death the sins and selfish ways of our old

life. He enables us to develop some of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Paul continued to describe how we should show the likeness of Christ. We should be ready to forgive others and do everything in love. Also, learn to live in the peace of Christ. Be thankful, seek wisdom, worship God and give thanks to Him. "Let the peace that Christ gives rule in your hearts. As parts of one body, you were appointed to live in peace... Let Christ's word live in you like a rich treasure. Teach and correct each other wisely. Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing with thanks in your hearts to God. Do everything you say or do in the name of the Lord Jesus. Always give thanks to God the Father through Christ" (Colossians 3:15-17).

## **RULES FOR THE HOME**

Paul then instructed wives who are married to a believer. "Wives, follow [submit to] the lead of your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (3:18). Elsewhere, Paul said, "There is neither male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). Before God, men and women are equal. This has nothing to do with the roles they play as a father or a mother. They are equal in their relationship to God and to each other. If the head of the woman is the man, and the Head of Christ is God, then men and women must be equal because the Father and the Son are equal (1 Corinthians 11:3).

Paul continued, "Husbands, love your wives and do not be unkind to them" (Colossians 3:19). When things go wrong, do not say it is your wife's fault. If Adam had joined with his wife to confess their sin before God, He would have forgiven them both.

Husbands and wives should go together to God and ask for His forgiveness and blessing. Husbands should pray with their wives every day. Hold hands while you pray. Share your wife's burdens with her and remember that you are both "heirs together of the gracious gift of eternal life" (1 Peter 3:7). Husbands, do not be unkind with your wife by recalling past failures. Put away the past and do not talk about it. God will lead you into a new day of blessing. Remember that God created you equal in His sight but with very different natures, abilities, physical and mental strengths, interests and personalities.

Paul also gives us instruction regarding families (Colossians 3:20-21). Children should obey parents and parents should show kindness to children. "Fathers, do not upset your children of they will become discouraged." God gave man to be head of the family. Every family must have a 'head' or leader and God holds the husband responsible for leading his family in right living. Headship means power to care, not to crush. It means power to serve our wives and families. It means loving our wives as Christ loves the Church and gave Himself up for her. The Bible does not speak of a man having power and authority over a woman. Neither is the word obedience used of a woman. The words are 'submit' and 'love', meaning for one person to give themselves up to the other. In Christ, both husbands and wives give themselves up to each another (Ephesians 5:25).



## SLAVES, OBEY YOUR EARTHLY MASTERS

Paul then gives advice to those who served willingly as slaves, which was common at the time he lived. A person with a heart that is right with God willingly obeys their masters. But Paul goes beyond obeying rules. He said, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men... Work well because you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as your reward (Colossians 3:23-24).

These verses make our work a very important part of our testimony. Paul was never a slave, but he worked for many masters making tents. He always did good work. Sometimes he was well rewarded. At other times he was not. This did not matter, because he knew God would reward him for good work.

Paul said that slaves must know this, too. Their true reward would be an inheritance from the Lord. The rule for all husbands, wives, children, slaves and workers is: remember you are working for God. He also instructed masters to be fair to their slaves (4:1).

Paul's teaching was not written for slaves who are trapped into working for evil masters. Today, there are many millions of people forced into 'modern slavery'. Pray for those who force people to do ungodly work in order to get rich and powerful and pray for their oppressed workers.



### **Talk about this:**

1. How are we "raised with Christ" (3:1)? What should our thoughts be about?
2. What must Christians avoid (3:8-9)?
3. What must they seek (3:12-17)?



**Think about this:** What guidelines should you uphold to maintain holy living personally and at home, at work and among your fellowship of believers?



**Pray about this:** Ask God to show you how to progress in love towards others even if it requires sacrifice of time and talents. Pray for your thoughts to be focused on God's truth and His plans for your future and not on your own ideas or fantasies.



### **Bible reading: Colossians 4**

## PERSONAL ADVICE AND REQUESTS

Paul warned, "Spend much time [continue] in prayer. Always be watchful and prayerful [thankful]" (4:2). This warning is immediately followed by a personal prayer request since he knew the value of prayer. Paul always prayed for them and he wanted the same in return. They must give time to prayer and thanks and be careful how they lived for Christ.

James wrote about prayer. He said, "the fervent prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). Two things are most important:

1. That a man be righteous in God's sight.
2. That he gives time to pray with passion and also with compassion.

God will answer that person's prayers!

Paul asked, "Pray for us too. Pray that God will open a door for our message. Then we can preach the 'mystery of Christ'. Because I preached it, I am being held by chains... Pray that I will preach the Good News clearly, as I should" (4:3-4). He made this request knowing the risk of persecution.

He then warns believers to act wisely and with compassion towards non-believers, with their salvation in mind. He told his readers to be prepared to answer their questions gracefully (4:5-6).

## FINAL GREETINGS

Finally, Paul sends his greetings to the church at Colosse through Tychicus. Tychicus knew many who had worked with him. Some had gone with him on his missionary journeys and he was one of them. He may have come from Ephesus (Acts 20:4; 2 Timothy 4:12). Some of these men from the churches in Asia Minor had gone with Paul to help him take the collection of money to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). The money was to help the believers and their leaders there.

Paul planned to send Tychicus to Colosse to tell the believers "all the news about me. He is a dear brother and faithful worker" (Colossians 4:7). Paul also wanted them to know that the Good News was still being preached even though he was prisoner. "I am sending him to you for one reason. I want you to know what is happening here to cheer you up and make your hearts strong" (4:8). He trusted Tychicus to rejoice how God was using Paul whilst "suffering for Christ".

Paul added, "He is coming with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother" (4:9). Onesimus was once a slave who had run away, but he had given his life to Christ and returned to his master. The Gospel reaches across all parts of society and makes all kinds of people "one in Christ".

Aristarchus and Mark, cousin of Barnabas, are called 'fellow prisoners' with Paul. They probably lived with him and helped to supply his needs. Ten years earlier, Paul was not pleased with Mark, who had left him on his second missionary journey. Now Paul asked the believers to welcome Mark into their fellowships (4:10). Justus also sent his greetings. These three were the only Jews with Paul at that time (4:11).

Epaphras was a pastor, a hard worker. Paul said, "he is always praying hard for you in prayer" (4:12). Prayer is perhaps the hardest work of all! Epaphras struggled in prayer for them as Paul did (2:1). He then writes down what it was that Epaphras prayed so hard about (4:12):

- "He prays that you will stand firm in holding to all that God has in mind for us."
- "He prays that you will continue to grow in your knowledge of what God wants you to do."
- "He also prays that you will be completely sure [confident] about it."

“I am happy to tell you that he (Epaphras) is working very hard for you (in Colosse). He is also working hard for everyone in Laodicea and Hierapolis” (4:13).

Luke, the doctor, and Demas also sent their greetings (4:14).

We note that Paul mentions the “brothers and sisters in Laodicea” for the third time. He wanted the church in Colosse to “give my best wishes” to the church there. Also to Nypha, one of the house owners where a number of them met for worship (4:15).

The believers did not have copies of the Scriptures themselves. And very few of their leaders and pastors had copies, so Paul’s letter would be read out at their meetings. In this way, the New Testament Church was taught God’s truth as well as the Good News of salvation through Christ alone. Paul then mentions Laodicea a fourth time. “After this letter has been read to you, send it on... to the church in Laodicea” (4:16). Paul also mentions a different letter he wrote to Laodicea but sadly this has been lost.

Finally, Paul mentions Archippus, a keen teacher of the Good News of Christ. “Tell Archippus, ‘Be sure that you complete the work the Lord gave you to do’” (4:17).

After these personal greetings “written with my own hand”, Paul asks them to remember he is still a prisoner in chains in Rome (3000km from Jerusalem). He ends by saying “May grace be with you” (4:18) which means “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (see Philippians 4:23).



### **Talk about this:**

1. What are Paul’s instructions for husbands, wives and children (3:18-21)?
2. What are Paul’s instructions for employers and masters (3:22-24)?
3. What did Paul advise and ask about prayer (4:2-4)?
4. What did Paul advise about witnessing to non-believers (4:5-6)?



**Think about this:** Are you prepared to preach (and live) the Good News of Jesus Christ boldly and clearly like Paul, even at risk of persecution and wherever He sends you?

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Paul provides wise personal advice as well as God’s truth from the Old Testament Scriptures and the Good News of Jesus Christ as Saviour. He warns against other forms of religious teaching or observing religious traditions.

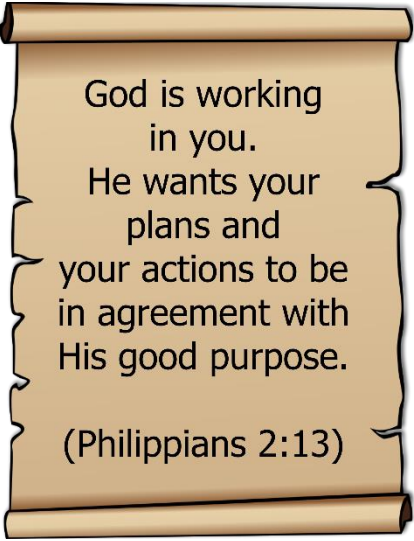
Paul knew that the bridge between God and mankind was finally completed in Jesus Christ, the Messiah. This had been promised by God to happen through the family of Abraham for the world to be blessed. Jesus, Son of Almighty God, sacrificed His life as Son of Man in order to save all who believe and repent. Paul was also prepared to suffer hardship and even death as he preached the Good News of Christ.

Paul gives advice for holy living at home, in the church and at work. He encouraged his readers, of very mixed backgrounds, to remain strong in their faith and live lives that bear 'fruit'. This is achieved by preaching the truth of God and witnessing the Good News of Jesus Christ all over the world, whatever the cost.

Paul gave thanks for the Colossian believers and supported them in prayer from his prison in Rome. In his letter, he continued to teach them the truth about Jesus Christ and how to live holy lives. He encouraged them to support each other and also the fellowships in nearby towns and cities.

## SUMMARY

Through Paul's ministry to the Philippians and Colossians, his teaching of God's purpose in Jesus Christ helped to fulfil the extension of God's promised blessing to the family of Abraham. The outcome of his ministry based in Jerusalem (Israel) and Antioch (Syria) was the planting of many church fellowships in Turkey, Macedonia and Greece and finally in the centre of the Roman Empire in Italy. By the end of the third century, the Christian Church had spread across Europe, Armenia and Russia. This group of people were mainly the descendants of Japheth, the eldest son of Noah. Later still, many European missionaries were called by God to take the Good News of Jesus Christ to the other descendants of Noah in Asia, Africa and further east and to the Americas. Paul's ministry in Turkey and Europe and its impact on the world is therefore the amazing result of the call of Jesus to Paul on the road to Damascus. His encounter with Jesus and his writings have dramatically changed the lives of millions of others during the past 2000 years. Praise be to God!



God is working  
in you.  
He wants your  
plans and  
your actions to be  
in agreement with  
His good purpose.

(Philippians 2:13)

Jesus certainly knew the impact His Holy Spirit would have on Paul and the other apostles when He told them before returning to Heaven, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. Then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and from one end of the Earth to the other" (Acts 1:8).



**Paul's final 3000 km journey from Jerusalem to Rome as a prisoner. The map also shows some of the many places where he helped to establish or support church fellowships of Jewish and Gentile believers. The church in Philippi was in the Roman Province of Macedonia. The church in Colosse was in the Roman province of Phrygia.**

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