

# Colossians

UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



## Colossians Chapter 4 Inductive Bible Study with Discussion Questions

### Outline

- I. Reminder to masters (1)
- II. Reminders about Christian conduct (2-6)
- III. Final greetings (7-18)

### I. Reminder to masters (1)

### Discussion Questions

- How does verse one relate to the previous passage on slaves?
- What instruction is given to masters?
- How can we apply this verse in our lives considering that we don't have actual slaves?
- How can you treat your children/students/employees with fairness and justice?
- What reason is given for us to behave this way?
- What kind of master do we have?
- How should this knowledge about our own Master affect us in everyday life?



### Cross-References

Proverbs 22:16 – One who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and one who gives gifts to the rich—both come to poverty.

Romans 4:4 – Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation.

# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Ephesians 6:9 – And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.

Leviticus 19:13 – “Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. “Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight.

Leviticus 25:43 – Do not rule over them ruthlessly but fear your God.

### Verse by Verse Commentary

1. *Instructions to masters* – Paul continues giving instructions about various relationships, this time focusing on masters. Masters should treat their servants justly and fairly. In other words, they should treat their servants like people, not like property. Brutal treatment in the form of abuse, verbal or physical, was not allowed.

In the Bible, the equality of all persons in the sight of God is continually taught (Galatians 3:28). No person should use his authority or position to mistreat others. In the book of Philemon, Paul says that Philemon should treat his former slave Onesimus as a, “beloved brother.” (Philemon 16) He then encourages Philemon to set Onesimus free so that he might serve the Lord and help him in his ministry. Paul does not want to start a revolution with slaves everywhere revolting as this would distract from the gospel message and hinder its spread. At the same time, he instructs masters that they should be righteous and fair in their dealings with slaves, treating them as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The motivation for treating servants in this manner was not financial. Paul was not saying, “if you take care of your slaves, they will work harder!” The motivation was the fact that even masters had a higher authority in heaven, God their own ultimate Master. One day they would have to give an account for how they treated their servants. Everything that they do would be judged by a holy and righteous God. If they mistreated people created in God’s image, then they would have to face the consequences for that.

# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



**Application:** Every person, no matter what their position in life is, has a higher authority in heaven. God is the judge. He is on His throne. He sees and hears all we do. And we will be held accountable for how we use the authority he has given to us.

Parents should remember that there is a higher authority above watching how they treat their children. In the home they may feel that they are the biggest and the strongest. No one can seemingly stop them from carrying out their will or discipline them when they go astray. But wise parents soberly remember that their heavenly Father sees all and will deal with them if they use their God-given authority in the wrong way.

Teachers, church leaders, and government leaders are held to the same standard. God puts people into positions of authority so that they can humbly lead and serve those whom they are called to minister to. Believers should never use their power to extort, abuse, manipulate, or benefit from those they serve. Serve - that is the key word. Many leaders think that the people under them exist to serve their every desire. The opposite is true. Leaders are called to serve those they are responsible for through word and action.

Perhaps the area this is most applicable to in the modern-day world is to bosses. There are many unfair and harsh bosses in the world today. Some bosses can be harsh and rude to employees, belittling them and making their lives miserable. Some bosses can be unjust, or unreasonable.

If you have employees, you would do well to remember what kind of boss you serve. Our boss is considerate and kind. He didn't come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. Although Jesus deserved the disciple's obedience and could have rightly demanded anything from them, He instead set an example for them of love and service, even stooping to wash their feet (John 13:1-17).

Here are some questions to consider:

- What can you do as the boss to make the work environment at your company more pleasant?

# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



- How can you support and show kindness to employees who are having a hard time?
- What is the right way to motivate them or correct them when needed?
- If you switched places and were employed to yourself, what complaints might you make about the way you are treated?
- Do you regularly pray for your employees?
- Do you care for them as people?
- Do you regularly ask questions about their lives to show your concern?
- How can you be a good testimony to your employees and lead them to Christ?

## II. Reminders about Christian conduct (2-6)

### Discussion Questions

- How can we devote ourselves to prayer?
- How can you be alert in prayer?
- What other ingredient are essential in prayer?
- What prayer request did Paul ask the Colossians to pray for?
- Are you regularly praying for others?
- Can you think of examples in the Bible of people who devoted themselves to prayer?
- How about examples where people should have prayed, but didn't?
- Who are the outsiders in verse 5?
- How should we act toward them?
- What does it mean to conduct yourselves with wisdom?
- What is a good use of time? What is a poor use of time?
- What should your speech be like?
- How can we give grace to others in the words that we say?
- Do you go out of your way to say positive things to others?
- What is the purpose of salt?
- Why should speech be "seasoned" with it?
- Should we respond the same way to every person?



# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

- How can we know how we should respond to different people with different personalities?

### Cross-References

James 5:16 – Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Ephesians 6:18 – And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Matthew 5:44 – But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Ephesians 4:29 – Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Proverbs 18:20-21 – Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Proverbs 17:28 – Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.

Proverbs 15:4 – The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.

### Verse by Verse Commentary

1. *Be steadfast and watchful in prayer* – Paul encourages the Colossian believers to have a lifestyle of prayer. The word “steadfast” indicates that they need to be firm in the midst of challenges and temptations. It is not easy to maintain a lifestyle of prayer. Something that is the same at that time and now is that most people are busy.

# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



Quite often when I ask friends, “how are you?” they will answer, “busy!” There are so many distractions in life, forces which pull our attention in many different directions. From this aspect, it is even harder to focus on prayer than it was in the past. In addition to family, chores, and career, media is a constant presence. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok are making inroads into household and sucking up people’s free time. Smart phones are often the last thing people look at before they sleep (not their spouse), and the first thing people look at when they wake up.

The age of instant gratification means we can get pretty much anything we want almost immediately. With rush shipping, people can purchase and receive almost anything delivered right to their door. With credit cards, they can charge it even without having the money. Already poor attention spans are diluted even further by short videos, electronic devices, and YouTube. Children are overstimulated, leading them to lose focus in schoolwork. Higher and higher percentages are diagnosed with ADD and other similar conditions. Kids become bored easily with normal activities and need more and more exciting things to interest them. And adults are often the same way.

It is no wonder, that in a world like this it is increasingly difficult to find the time and focus to calm down, put aside distractions, and spend time in meditating on God’s character and talking to Him.

Jesus is the perfect example. He led a very busy life with meaningful activities. And yet He always made time to pray.

The disciples didn’t have many of the distractions we did. But they too found it difficult to be steadfast in prayer. On the night Jesus was betrayed, they fell asleep multiple times instead of praying as Jesus requested.

Matthew 26:40-41 – Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



It is indeed difficult to pray for one hour. Either you may feel sleepy if things are very quiet or you may be distracted by a phone, messages, or the internet.

**Application:** Spend some time to evaluate your own prayer life. How much time do you spend praying on a daily basis? How much time would you like to spend praying? Begin by setting aside a regular time to pray. Don't shoot for the moon on the first day. Set a reasonable goal. If you don't pray often, set a goal for five minutes of uninterrupted prayer time. If you already reach that, set a higher goal. During that time put aside all distractions. Turn off your phone or put it in another room. Shut your door and just pray. Do this daily for a week and then start increasing the time.

We are also commanded to be watchful in prayer. Know that you will be tempted to stop praying. You will be tempted to fall asleep or give up. Be alert and continue to evaluate your progress.

2. *With thanksgiving* – Here is one of the ingredients which should often show up in your prayer life. Spending time thanking God is not only showing a polite, and gracious spirit, but it will affect your own outlook and attitude. The opposite of thanksgiving is complaining. When you think through what God has done for you, you will start to realize how truly blessed you are. As you count your blessings, it will transform your outlook, making you more optimistic and joyful.

**Application:** One simple idea is to write down all the prayer requests you make. When God answers, write down the answer and thank Him (even if it is not the answer you are hoping for). As you add to this list, you will start to see God working in your life. You will train yourself to be observant to actively look for how God is moving.

3. *Pray for us that God will open a door for the word* – Paul gives guidance as to what the Colossian believers should pray for. We can learn two simple things from this.

Firstly, we learn that we should pray for others. People are inherently selfish. Selfishness is the most basic sin that is common to all people. Selfishness can manifest itself in many areas. It shows itself in conversation when people talk almost exclusively about themselves

# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



and do not show concern to others by questioning them on how they are doing. It can also show up in our prayer life if the bulk of our prayers are focused on our own needs. While we can and should pray for ourselves, it is very important that we steadfastly lift up others. We should not only lift up others in our family and friends, but we should make a habit of praying for Christian workers all over the world. Pastors, evangelists, elders, missionaries, disciple makers, and every other kind of Christian worker should often be on our lips as we intercede for them to our Heavenly Father.

Secondly, we learn a key lesson about the content which we should pray for others. Paul asks that they pray for the advance of the gospel. This is a spiritual need. Many prayers are dominated by physical concerns: health, finances, studies, and career. While there is a place for these, a cursory glance at the epistles will quickly reveal that prayers for spiritually meaningful matters should be the meat of our prayer life. Spiritual things to pray for include: the advance of the gospel, fruit of the Spirit, character building, lost souls, the persecuted church, wisdom from above, God's glory, and the like.

**Application:** Take a moment to consider your own prayer life. When was the last time you prayed for the advance of the gospel? How much of your prayers are spent on temporal things compared to God's kingdom things? Think of one person who is laboring at building God's kingdom. Pray for them each day this week. Also, call that person and ask how you can pray for them. Let them know that they are on your heart and you are praying for them. It can be a great encouragement to yourself and others if you do this regularly.

4. *On account of which I am in prison* – Paul was persecuted for his work in spreading the gospel. In the Western world some people may think that persecution is a thing of the past. It is not. In 2022, advocacy group, Open Doors, said that at least 360 million Christians experienced, “high levels of persecution and discrimination.” This was 20 million higher than 2021. The group also estimated that the number of Christians killed for their faith rose to 5,898 in 2022, up from 4,761 in 2021 (these verified cases are likely much lower than the actual number). Persecution is increasing, not decreasing. Muslim countries and North Korea top the list.



# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



**Application:** Spend some time to lift up persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. They need your prayers.

5. *Making the best use of time* – Life is short. In James 4:14 our lives are compared to a vapor which appears for a little while and then vanishes. One need only turn on the news to see how many people’s lives are snuffed out unexpectedly.

A person once compared people to candles. Two candles represented two people’s lives. One candle was tall, almost new, having only burned for a short time. The other candle short, almost spent. The tall candle represents a young person who likely has most of their life in front of them while the short candle represents an older person. Both candles have something in common. Each day they keep burning. And each day they are one day closer to finally burning out.

Our lives are the same. God has put us onto this earth for a reason. He has prepared certain good deeds, missions if you will, which He wants us to accomplish for Him (Ephesians 2:10). Every day is an opportunity to fulfill the missions God has for us that day. But if we do not do them, they are gone and will never come back again.

**Application:** Do you make a habit of redeeming the time? When you have completely free time what will you normally do? Is there anything in your life which you feel wastes your time or distracts you from using your time well?

6. *Let your speech be gracious and seasoned with salt* – Words are very important. One chant that often rings out at the playground at school is “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Kids say this to protect themselves, but it is not true. Words can be very destructive (James 3:1-12). Hurtful words can leave behind an aftermath of broken relationships, simmering anger, and sullen silence. Once spoken, words can never be unspoken. The world of social media exacerbates this problem. Many people have been shamed as old, hastily written and ill-thought-out posts have been dug up. In the digital world, once “send” is pushed, there is typically no going back.

# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

That is why self-control is very important. Each of us should install a filter over our mouths, stopping to think before we speak (or push send). Even that is not enough.

Eventually your thoughts will come out through your mouth. Though you may try to control it, a moment of anger or haste will reveal what you really think. Although we should exercise self-control, it is also not the answer to simply remain silent. While the tongue can be a great evil, it can be a great good as well. The tongue has great power to heal, encourage, build up, and restore.

And that is why the only hope for us is to be transformed from the inside out. As we get closer to God, He will renew our hearts from His Word and through His Spirit. And then gracious, kind, and encouraging words will overflow from our hearts to the people around us. At the same time, practice makes perfect. When you practice encouraging people with your words, it will get easier and more natural.

We can either use our speech as a weapon to cut and belittle, or we can use it as a healing salve to edify and build up. Paul says that our words should be seasoned with salt. In the ancient world, salt was something that preserved. Food was salted at that time, not primarily for flavor like it is today, but in order to prevent rot. Salted food provided sustenance, sustaining life and keeping away any form of corruption. In a similar way, our speech should bring life. The ultimate way our words can bring life is when we use them to tell people the good news of Jesus and teach His words.

**Application:** Think of one person who is in need of encouragement. Can you make an effort to get in touch with that person this week and build them up through your words?

### III. Final greetings (7-18)

#### Discussion Questions

- Why does Paul mention all these various brothers?
- What can we learn from this passage about Paul's ministry?
- What insights can we get about his team?

# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



- What type of people made up his team?
- What can you learn about Tychicus? What was his role toward the Colossians?
- Who is Onesimus? What do we learn in the book of Philemon about him? For what purpose do you think he was going to inform the Colossians about Paul?
- What happened in the book of Acts between Paul and Barnabas and Mark?
- What insights do we get from this event based on the fact that Mark is once again ministering with Paul?
- What could these brothers do for Paul while he was in prison?
- What was Epaphras' strength?
- What did he pray for the Colossians about?
- Who is Luke? Demas?
- What final instructions did Paul leave with the Colossian church?
- Why would Paul mention that he wrote this greeting with his own hand?
- Are there any important lessons we can take from these extensive greetings?

### Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 – Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Ephesians 4:11 – So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.

Romans 12:8 – If it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Acts 15:36-41 – Sometime later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the believers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued

# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

with them in the work. They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the believers to the grace of the Lord. He went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. (See also 1 Peter 5:13, 2 Timothy 4:11 to see Mark's change.)

2 Timothy 4:10 – For Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia.

2 Timothy 4:7 – I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

### Verse by Verse Commentary

1. *Paul's team* – John MacArthur in his commentary calls this section of the book a, “verbal group photograph,” which is a very apt description. Here, Paul includes a greeting from and a mention about many members of his team. Many of these were helping him in his ministry. Some were fellow workers who ministered together with him. Others were vital because they were able to come alongside Paul and encourage him in this difficult time while he was imprisoned. For every Paul or Peter or David or Moses in the Bible, there are fifty or a hundred Tychicuses and Epaphrases. These are the people who are serving in the background, the “unsung heroes” of the early church.

At first glance, we may think that this passage is boring. There is not a lot of in-depth teaching. But actually, this passage gives us a vital look behind the scenes of Paul's ministry. The key point we can get from this is that Paul could not do this on his own. Paul was not a lone wolf. He didn't and couldn't carry out an effective ministry on his own. God has not designed the church to function with a single alpha leader.

1 Corinthians 12 shows us that God designed the church like a body, giving each member his and her own gift to properly fulfill their own functions. Even “Paul the Great” needed help. He needed prayer warriors to help him shoulder the burden of praying for churches and individuals stretched across the Roman Empire. He himself needed people to come alongside him, praying for and encouraging him when times were tough.

# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



Without these people to help, support, encourage and work together with him Paul could not have accomplished what he did. He would have burned out long before.

Moses realized more than a thousand years before that he could not shoulder the load of ministry on his own (see Numbers 11:11-17). God answered Moses' prayer by giving him the help he needed.

All of us need to be sharpened by other believers around us. We need to be humble and teachable so that we can be supported and helped by others. We also need to be willing to offer support and encouragement to others to sharpen those who may grow dull otherwise.

You would think if there were ever a time that Paul would be alone it would be while he was in prison. But even during this time he was surrounded by brothers working together with him.

What can we learn from this? What lessons can we apply to our lives?

These were guys who took a serious risk to associate with a "criminal" like Paul. There was no monetary benefit and there would be little recognition. But they sacrificed their own time and energy to help Paul. Let's take a closer look at the eight guys mentioned here (the titles are from John MacArthur's Colossian's commentary).

### Tychicus - The Man with the Servant's Heart

- Mentioned five times in the NT
- He was going to travel with Paul to Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-9).
- He was going to deliver this letter to the Colossians.
- Also delivered the letter of Ephesians (Ephesians 6:21) and probably Philemon.
- Beloved brother.
- Fellow bondservant.
- A faithful steward of the ministry (1 Cor 4:2).
- An encourager.

# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



### Onesimus - The Man with a Sinful Past

- Onesimus is a runaway slave and the subject of Paul's letter to Philemon.
- Before, a slave; now, a brother.
- An equal peer and companion in the family of God.
- Onesimus would act as a spokesman to give more information to the Colossians about Paul, presumably for the purpose of prayer.

### Aristarchus - The Man with a Sympathetic Heart

- He was taken by the mob in Acts 19:29.
- He went with Paul to Jerusalem in Acts 20:4.
- He voyaged to Rome with Paul in Acts 27:4.
- Aristarchus seems to be referred to as a prisoner because he accompanied Paul during all of these difficult times and was therefore a prisoner by choice.
- It seems he could have left at any time, but chose to stay with Paul and share in his sufferings for the sake of encouraging and supporting Paul. This speaks very highly of his character and commitment to the cause of Christ.
- We don't have to fear persecution.

### Mark - The Man with a Surprising Future

- Mark deserted Paul during his first missionary journey.
- Later he was changed through Peter's ministry (1 Peter 5:13).
- Paul asks for Mark because of his usefulness (2 Timothy 4:11).
- God can change sinners. We can have victory even if we have failed in the past. Do not live in your past mistakes, but push forward to a victorious future.
- Paul commands the Colossians to welcome Mark. Would you want to welcome Mark if you knew what he had done?
- We should be forgiving and give second chances to others. Do not be quick to judge or treat people harshly.

# Colossians

## UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



### Justus - The Man with a Strong Commitment

- One of very few fellow workers who were Jewish.
- The lack of response from the Jews was discouraging, but although in general most did not believe a few did and these were a great encouragement to Paul.

### Epaphras - The Man with a Single Passion

- Probable founder of the Colossian church.
- A bondsman of Jesus. Are you a bondsman of Christ? Do you submit yourself to His authority always or only when it suits you?
- Epaphras labored in his prayer for the Colossian believers. Prayer is a very important work of believers in the church.
- Prayed for their growth and maturity as well as their direction.
- His deep concern for them pushed him to action. Do you have a deep concern for the lost (or the saved) around you? Is it pushing you to action?

### Luke - The Man with a Specialized Passion

- He was Paul's personal doctor.
- He often traveled with Paul his journeys.
- The gospel of Luke shows us that he was very well educated and cultured.
- First known medical missionary. Served God whole-heartedly with the talent he had. How can you use your special talents for God?

### Demas - The Man with a Sad Future

- Deserted Paul because of his love for the world (2 Timothy 4:9-10).
- Not everyone who starts well finishes well.
- Ministering for the Lord does not make us immune to temptations.
- Demas is a stark contrast with Mark. One failed, but repented and turned back to a faithful life of service to the Lord. One started well, but turned away never to be seen again. When you fail, will you be like Mark or like Demas?
- What temptation may be your Achilles heel?

# Colossians

UNDERSTANDING CHRIST AND THE CHURCH



**Application:** What can we learn from these men? Which one do you hope to be more like? If you were with Paul at this time, what would he say about you?

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