



PHILIPPIANS; COLOSSIANS

CHRIST'S DIVINITY AND EXAMPLES OF SACRIFICE

CA. A.D. 62

PHILIPPIANS: GROW IN THE GOSPEL OF LOVE

Philippians Background

About twelve years before he wrote this Epistle, Paul first came to the walled city of Philippi. It had very few Jews. Many of the 10,000 inhabitants were Roman citizens, and was known as “Little Rome.”¹ Paul was preaching in Troas during his second mission when he had a vision of someone calling him from Macedonia (northern Greece). He and his companions, Silas and Timothy, sailed to the northeastern quadrant of Macedonia, just twelve miles from the Aegean Sea, and began preaching in Philippi, which sits at the foot of Mt. Pegasus.

Philippi was named after Alexander the Great's father, Philip II of Macedon (382–336 BC). It was a fertile plain where gold mines were discovered.² By the time Paul visited it, a major east and west highway that connected the Roman Empire (*Via Egnatia*) had been established next to it. Philippi was the “chief city” in northeastern Greece (16:12).

In Philippi, Paul converted and stayed with Lydia “the seller of purple;” he also cast out the evil spirits from a woman who was used by the soothsayers to get gain. The soothsayers then charged Paul and Silas with rabble-rousing, which led to their beating and imprisonment. The Lord miraculously released them, they converted the jailer and received an apology from the magistrates before leaving the city (Acts 16:14–30). Over the next decade, the young church grew in quality and quantity so that Paul refers to them as his “joy and crown” (Philippians 4:1), they have “bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1), and they sent Paul a gift while in prison.

Purpose

Philippians is one of Paul's four “Prison Epistles” that seem to come from the same time period and share many themes and names.³ Paul wrote to thank the Philippians for their thoughtfulness in sending Epaphroditus as a companion and co-worker for Paul in prison, and to let them know what had happened. Unfortunately, Epaphroditus became sick, but was well enough to make the return trip to Philippi (Philippians 4:18; 2:25–26). This letter also gives insight into Paul's autobiography and spiritual life. This is one of the six Pauline letters that set the sure standard as Pauline.⁴

Themes

1. Message of Love and Encouragement
2. Jesus is the Messiah/Christ
3. Obedience to Christ's Teachings
4. Salvation Requires Sacrifice

Outline

- 1:1–9 Greetings and Prayers of Thanks
- 1:3–11 Pray for More Love, Knowledge & Judgment
- 1:12–26 Paul's Imprisonment Advances the Gospel
- 1:27–30 Exhortation to Stand Worthy through Suffering
- 2:1–11 Unite with Christ's Nature by Selfless Service
- 2:12–18 Christian Obligations: Work & Shine as a Light
- 2:19–30 Coming of Timothy and Epaphroditus
- 3:1–11 Blessings and Sacrifices Come with Discipleship
- 3:12–21 Pressing Toward The Heavenly Goal

4:1–9 Last Advice: Appeal to Rejoice in the Lord

4:10–20 Thanks for the Philippians Gifts

4:21–23 Salutations and Final Wishes

PHILIPPIANS 1

Greeting and Prayers of Thanks

Philippians 1:1–2

Philippians 1:1–2 “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints . . . at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. Grace *be* unto you, and peace” Paul opens with the standard introduction. His mention of the plural “bishops and deacons,” is evidence that the church has growth since his first conversions a dozen years earlier. The word, “deacon/*diakonos*” was used for both males and females who helped as “a waiter, servant; then anyone who performs any service, an administrator.”⁵ Here it refers to Christians called to serve with a bishop in different of ways (also used with the female, Phoebe in Romans 16:1, and married men in 1 Timothy 3:8, 12).

Prayer for Growth of Love, Knowledge and Judgment

Philippians 1:3–11

Philippians 1:4–6 “In every prayer for all of you, I always pray with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now . . .” (BSB) Paul feels a great bond of friendship with the Philippian saints and has confidence that they will endure faithfully. His opening and the entire letter are optimistic and full of love. Regardless of his imprisonment, Paul finds things to be joyful about.

Philippians 1:7 “in my chains . . .” This reference to “bonds/*halusis*/chains” (KJV, NIV) helps us to date this letter to an imprisonment—either during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28) or in Ephesus.⁶ As mentioned in Ephesians 6:19–20, house prisoners were not chained to a wall, but their right hand was chained to a guard’s left hand. (This way the guard could be free to use his dominate hand, most likely.)

“and confirmation of the gospel, you are all partners in grace with me” (BSB) The last phrase is also translated, “partakers of my grace” (KJV). Both of those seem to say that Paul had the power to give grace. But grace is the Lord’s to give, so I prefer the NIV, “share in God’s grace with me.”

Philippians 1:8 “For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus” God is “*my record*” is also translated, “my witness”(RSV) or “God can testify” (NIV), or “God knows” (NEB). The KJV uses the word, “*bowels*,” for what we would call, “affection” (NIV, RSV, NAS).

Philippians 1:9–10 “I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” Paul expresses his greatest desire for them, and the thesis for this letter: to grow in the gospel in love, knowledge and judgment (or “discernment,” BLB, or “insight,” BSB). His instruction will focus on how to do this. He hopes they can discern between good, better, and best, to “be pure and blameless for the day of Christ” or when we all will stand for before Christ at the judgement day (1:10, NIV).

Paul’s Imprisonment Advances the Gospel

Philippians 1:12–26

Philippians 1:12 “I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel” (NIV) Paul addresses his audience as “brothers and sisters” as a title or name for members of the church, who were identified as sibling in the family of Christ. It is significant that Christian women were included in not only the worship services but in the communication with leaders. This was a radical departure from Paul’s Judaic pharisaic upbringing. In the KJV, “fallen out” is also translated, “served, been a help, or turned out.”

Paul is happy to observe that his imprisonment has actually brought growth to the church. When Joseph Smith was also imprisoned in Liberty Jail, the Lord taught him that all experiences—challenging and otherwise—“shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7). When we can internalize this, we can appreciate trials from an eternal perspective. Paul’s cheery attitude came in part because of the extra kindness that the Philippians had shown him (Philippians 1:4–6).

Philippians 1:13 “As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ” (BSB) “Palace” was translated from the Latin word, “Praetorium” (NHEB), In historical writings, the common meaning of praetorian during inscriptions of Paul’s century was for the “imperial guard” stationed in Rome (ESV), while the imperial guard was stationed only at Rome to guard the emperor. The praetorium may have referred to the military barracks, but probably the imperial guard in Caesarea or Ephesus.⁷ It sounds as though when Paul preached the gospel to his visitors, the Roman guards heard it, and spread the good news through Caesar’s staff (Philippians 4:22). As the Book of Mormon teaches, out of our small efforts, the Lord can create great things (Alma 37:6–7). These little miracles demonstrate God’s hand in our lives.

Philippians 1:14 “because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear” (NIV) Roman officials tolerated and recognized ten “imported” or foreign religions. They promised these members legal rights to practice without persecution. Judaism was one of them. Initially, Christianity received the same protection by piggy-backing on Jewish political protection. But, when Christians were separated by their choice or the local Jews’ choice, they no longer had legal status. This may be why the saints were reticent to testify. Paul’s example of missionary work, even while

in prison, motivated the other local saints to share Jesus' Good News more boldly. Paul became the yeast that motivated the whole branch of Christians.

Philippians 1:15–18 “It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill . . . whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached” (NIV) Unfortunately, some of their missionary motivation was only to compete with Paul, but others did so with honest hearts. Either way, the message was spread. The Book of Mormon also teaches that everyone can distinguish truth from pretense; all have the power to judge good and evil (Moroni 7:16, 18; D&C 84:45).

Philippians 1:19–20 “Through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit . . . I eagerly expect and hope that . . . Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death” (NIV) The KJV reads “Christ shall be *magnified* in my body” and the RSV, “will be *honored*.” Paul’s trial had yet to happen. Whether he would be acquitted or not does not seem to matter to him. He is just looking forward to the opportunity to testify again of Jesus as the Savior of the world. He is eager to honor the Messiah-Christ in his testimony during his trial.

Philippians 1:21–23 “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” Either way Paul looks at his future, it is good news. He has the attitude, “come what may and love it.”⁸ If he lives, he is Jesus’ servant, and if he dies, he will gain Eternal Life through Christ. Could he also be saying to God, “God’s will be done?” (The JST changes the verse order of 21 and 22.)

Philippians 1:24–26 “it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body . . . so that through my coming to you again, your exultation in Christ Jesus will resound on account of me” (BSB) Paul is old and tired so on one hand, he longs to leave his second estate and be united with Jesus in the heavens, but on the other hand, he is more useful to the saints if he continues to serve here on earth. Even though no verdict had been made, he felt he would be acquitted in order to continue serving the new Christians. He also mentions his hope to visit the Philippian saints, although we have no scriptural record that he returned there.

Exhortation to Stand Worthy through Suffering

Philippians 1:27–30

Philippians 1:27 “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel” (NIV) The KJV “conversation” in Greek is literally, “conduct” and means everything in one’s life, not just what one says.

Philippians 1:28 “in nothing terrified by your adversaries who reject the gospel, which bringeth on them destruction; but you who receive the gospel, salvation” (JST) Perfect faith casteth out fear. The KJV, “*perdition*,” is changed by most translations, such as the ISV, which reads: “they will be destroyed”

Philippians 1:29–30 “it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him” (BSB) Ambassadors of Christ often suffer for Him. Part of accepting our roles as Christ’s servants is to accept persecution and to plan on suffering for God’s sake. Bruce R. McConkie taught that the saints who “suffer persecution for righteousness’ sake, stand in the place and stead of Christ and are receiving what the ungodly would heap upon the Son of God were He personally present.”

PHILIPPIANS 2

Unit with Christ’s Nature by Selfless Service

Philippians 2:1–11

Philippians 2:1–2 “if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ . . . then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind” (NIV) With extraordinary pleading, Paul tells the saints the most important thing for them at this point is to strive for unity in love through the Holy Spirit. He asks them questions fully assuming that their answer is a resounding, “YES!” The KJV “bowels of mercy” is more often translated “affection and compassion” (Philippians 2:1).

Philippians 2:3–4 “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves . . . look out . . . the interests of others” (NASB) In this letter of joy and thanks, these few verses are Paul’s only counsel for improvement. For a people already living most of the commandments, he encourages them to not act for “vainglory” (KJV) or “empty pride” (BSB), but to sincerely turn their hearts away from any self-centered behaviors and to value each other more highly than themselves. Selfless service begins with our thoughts. Saints should esteem each person as a child of God with enormous potential. Then, our thoughts need to be consistent with our actions and carry out selfless acts of service for others.

Philippians 2:5 “Our Lord’s example is set forth as the pattern of that unselfish disregard of one’s own things, and devotion to the things of others” (NIV) Jesus left us a perfect example of putting other people’s needs before His own. He went to the extent of even disregarding His want of food and acknowledging that He would follow His Father’s plan on His Father’s timetable (Matthew 4:1–11). Paul repeats Jesus’ message.

“being in the form of God . . . and took upon him the form of a servant” In the next six verses, Paul lays out in a poetic or hymnal fashion, Jesus’ divine and human nature, or the doctrine of humility. The poem is filled with beautiful testimonies of Jesus as the Creator and Savior of the World—hence it is called in biblical vernacular, “high Christology,” and “the Christological Hymn.” It includes some of the most memorable lines penned by Paul.⁹

Different doctrinal interpretations of this verse have stimulated quite diverse translations.¹⁰ For example, those reflecting Trinitarian belief read: “. . . did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (RSV), and a less divine Jesus, “did not cling to his equality with God” (JB). Without modern scripture, these ideas are interpreted very differently by other Christians. Without the whole picture, some of the pieces are hard to fit in.

Through the restoration of Christ’s gospel, we learn that Jesus was a God before He came to earth (3 Nephi 9:18; 22:1; D&C 19:1; Moses 2:26). We see Paul referring to Jesus’ premortal existence by describing His Divine Nature—which included His intelligence, righteousness, majesty, and experiences.¹¹ He put His glorious nature aside to assume “the form of a servant.” This verse also can relate to Genesis 1:27 where Jehovah/Jesus created Adam “in His image.”

Hymn

*Philippians 2:6–11*¹²

Philippians 2:6 “In God’s own form existed he, and shared with God equality . . .” (ISV) This hymn is one of many witnesses that Christian worship included singing (probably acapella). Worship through music followed Jesus’ practice with His apostles (Matthew 26:30). We assume they had many hymns as we find traces of hymns throughout the New Testament (i.e. John 1:1–5; 11–14; etc.). Early Christian hymns were typically sung by two choirs facing each other—antiphonally.¹³

The hymn plays with opposites: Jesus’ lowliness/abasement (6–8) and exaltation (9–11). The movement of the hymn “exhorts the addressees for their own salvation to follow the exalted Christ, rather than looking out for their own interests and seeking to better themselves.”¹⁴ Christians are called to seek the mind of Christ by becoming humble, obedient, servants to God, and by serving their fellow men.

Philippians 2:7 “[Jesus] emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant” (BSB) This description of Christ as a servant is the most famous passage in Philippians. Jesus gave up His former heavenly status in order to come to

HYMN (PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11)

Jesus, being in the form of God,
Thought it not robbery
To be equal with God:
Laid aside his reputation
And took the form of a slave,
Being born like a man:
Assuming the likeness of mankind,
He humbled himself,
Becoming subject to death,
Even death on the Cross.
Wherefore God exalted him,
And bestowed on him a name
Above every name,
That in the name of Jesus
Every knee would bow
Under heaven, on the earth and under the earth;
And every tongue would confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord

earth with “no reputation” (KJV) or “made himself nothing” (NIV). Jesus’ example was to put aside His glorious nature and all self-centered desires, in order to do work as a slave. His servitude is even more impactful in His culture where the social strata was strictly enforced. Servants and slaves made up half the population of big cities at the time and everyone knew their station. Jesus’ devotion to teachings, healing, ministering, and preaching were all roles for servants and slaves. His prototype of service becomes an archetype for all Christians. Those who humble themselves in selfless service and figuratively empty all sense of pride and egoism, are following the example of our God, the greatest servant of all.

Philippians 2:8 “Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” Once Jesus became human, or a “being as all men are” (JB), He did not forget His Father’s will. Even as a man, He was obedient in all things even through crucifixion. His passion is described by Isaiah as a suffering servant (Isaiah 49:1–6; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12).

Philippians 2:9–11 “God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name above all names” (BSB) Paul describes two separate Divine Beings with distinct roles. When he addresses Jesus’ “name,” he does not mean just the pronunciation of the word “Joshua/Jesus” (Hebrew and Greek), but he refers to the authority and power that His name carries. “Every knee should bow” means not only that everyone will show reverence, but that everything in heaven and earth will worship the Great Creator. This great promise will be fulfilled when every voice will confess that Jesus is the Christ or Promised Messiah, the Anointed One.

Philippians 2:11 “Every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” Again Paul’s words can be interpreted as referring to two separate Godly beings. He also teaches that by confessing Jesus as our Lord, we also glorify God the Father. Gratefully, we have the perspective of Moses 1:39: “This is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and Eternal life of man.” Everything fits into place with this view.

Obligations as Christians: Work for Salvation, Shine as a Light

Philippians 2:12–18

Philippians 2:12–13 “my beloved . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” Paul praises the Philippian saints and calls them his “dear friends” (NIV). Judging from the canonized Epistles, they are his most valiant branch. Even in that state, he still points out how they can improve. They know that Christ brings salvation, but he reminds them that they must gain exaltation just as the Savior did.¹⁵ Christ set the pattern by working out His salvation, which in returned opened the possibility for all individuals to work out their own salvation. This does not negate the truth that we are saved by grace. Immortality is given by complete grace. Eternal Life is too, but humans must become like Christ, and the process requires work and sacrifice. “God . . . works in you to will and to act on behalf of His good purpose” (BSB). This does not mean that God controls the righteous, but rather, He encourages humility and eternal happiness through doing His will.

Philippians 2:14–16 “Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, ‘children of God’ . . . that I did not run or labor in vain” (NIV) I fear our generation has forgotten this commandment to not complain, or else we are just out of the habit of obeying it. It was first given by Moses to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:5.

In the Bible, the phrase “children,” or “sons of God” (KJV), is used in conjunction with becoming or working toward developing a Christlike nature. In Greek philosophy, “children” was interpreted literally, but other Christian faiths interpret “children of God” as those adopted through Christ. By following His example, saints follow Jesus’ call to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount “to shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15).

Philippians 2:17–18 “if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you” (BSB) Paul sees his years of sacrifice and service as an offering on God’s temple altar. Even in times of hunger and need, the Israelites offered their own meat and drink offerings to God out of obedience. The drink was poured onto the altar to be evaporated and burned in in the fire as a selfless gift to God. In spite of all the hardships Paul had endured (including now possibly facing death), he feels it was worthwhile if his converts continue to follow the Lord Jesus.

Coming of Timothy and Epaphroditus

Philippians 2:19–30

Philippians 2:19–20 “I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you” Paul hopes to send Timothy soon, so that Timothy can return to tell Paul how the Philippians are doing. This would give a more accurate and detailed report than another letter. He also hopes to come shortly (Philippians 2:24). He assures them of Timothy’s kind nature, and I assume that Timothy was needed to accompany Epaphroditus as a companion (2:25).

Philippians 2:21–22 “For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (NIV) Paul contrasts Timothy’s sincere care with the normal self-centeredness that plagues nearly every generation of the world. Timothy has been loving; like “a son with the father, he hath served with me” (KJV).

Philippians 2:23–24 “I hope to send him as soon as I see what happens with me” (NIV) This gives us a clue that the letter may have been written near the end of Paul’s two-year Roman imprisonment (Acts 28). He expects to receive his verdict and release soon so that he can visit them.

Four of the five “Prison Epistles,” appear to be written within close proximity (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). Paul mentions in the letters that he hopes to send his companions to visit the saints in various locations (Philippians 1:7–22; 2:19–30; 4:18; Ephesians 6:19–24; Colossians 4:7–18; Philemon 1:19–22).¹⁶

Philippians 2:25–27 “I thought it necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier” (BSB) These verses hint at Epaphroditus’ mission situation. If we try to piece together the history, it sounds as if the Philippians sent Epaphroditus as a companion to Paul while in prison. However, while there, Epaphroditus became deathly ill and the Philippians heard about it. They were worried, which Epaphroditus heard about, also making him upset. So Paul carefully sends him home in hopes of keeping everyone happy.

Philippians 2:28–29 “. . . when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less anxious. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him” Paul asks his audience to welcome Epaphroditus home with open arms, understanding that this is an honorable release from his mission. By asking them to “hold such in reputation” (KJV), he asks them to honor missionaries who willingly accept their call and try to serve, even if they become ill, like Epaphroditus, and it does not work out as they had hoped in the beginning. Paul rejoices in Epaphroditus’ good heart and willingness to serve.

Philippians 2:30 “he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for your deficit of service to me” (BSB) Throughout the history of the world, there have been many noble saints who have worn out their lives in serving God. Many in this dispensation serve like this too, including the families of our General Authorities—who care more about others in their work to build the kingdom than their own lives. The last phrase means that Epaphroditus served Paul in behalf of the Philippians who were not able to take care of Paul from a distance. The RSV translation reads, “to complete your service to me.”

PHILIPPIANS 3

Blessings and Sacrifices Come with Discipleship

Philippians 3:1–14

Philippians 3:1 “Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord!” Paul is suffering in prison, most of the early saints are struggling with serious difficulties and apostasy (Corinthians, Galatians, etc.), and yet he still finds a way to see the beauty of life through the gift of the Savior. He repeats this again with more fervor in Philippians 4:4. No matter how bad our lives are, we can always rejoice in our Redeemer. The rest of the verse refers to him having to rewrite a message: “It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again.” We do not know if he wrote an earlier letter that got lost, or if the saints needed to work on the same problem, or something else.

Philippians 3:2 “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers” The word “dogs” had a double meaning. In the Law of Moses, they were unclean or unholy (Leviticus 11:27; Matthew 15:26). “Dog” was also used for Greek leaders who were cynical or skeptic. The warning against “dogs” is also used in 2 Peter 2:22, against unworthy or unclean

persons. Paul did not have anything against the animal, canines. Some have suggested that Paul was attacking Judaizers. “Evil workers” indicates those who thought they were righteous but were not. The last word in this verse, “concision” means those people who mutilated the flesh. Strangely, “concision” was used by some Greeks instead of circumcision.

Philippians 3:3–4 “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” Paul also uses a different definition of two words: 1) “circumcision” as one of the covenant—which is extended to Christians who have not been physically circumcised; and 2) “flesh” as the unclean lusts of the world. The Greek, “*sarx*/flesh,” can mean many things: “body, human nature, materiality; or kindred.” But, Paul most of the time uses it to describe “lusts of the flesh” or “the natural man”¹⁷ (i.e. Romans 8:1–13; 1 Corinthians 2:14 Galatians 5:17; etc.) Prior to his conversion, Paul, an Israelite, thought he was saved through living the Law of Moses. But, he now shares that he was not saved because of the outward ordinances, the laws of circumcision, or things done in the “flesh,” but only through his faith in Jesus as his Savior. However, he used to completely trust in the flesh or rules of the Law.

Philippians 3:5–6 “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal . . . touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” Paul shares an autobiographical section on his strict observance of the law of Moses during his childhood and young adult years. He was named after King Saul, who was also a Benjaminite and became a shining example of orthodox Jewish zealotry. To claim that he was “blameless” in 1st century Judaism was quite a claim. It meant that he lived all 613 written Laws of Moses and the 10,000 Oral Laws. However, living the Mosaic laws was never intended to save one. They were there to prepare one to come unto Christ.

Philippians 3:7–8 “. . . compared to the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (BSB) By converting to Christianity, Paul lost everything that he once thought was important. Everything the rising young Pharisee valued was lost when he gained Christ. As a result of his conversion, he probably lost all of his influence, close family, and friends. Even his education had to be realigned. All those years of study and living the law meticulously were “but rubbish/*skubalon*/dung, refuse, dregs.” Either rubbish or dung (KJV) was a polite translation for the refuse that was thrown to the dogs.¹⁸ So, Paul refers to all his Jewish learning to garbage as compared to the “surpassing worth of knowing” (RSV) Christ. Giving up his remarkable past was worth it for an even more remarkable future serving Christ.

Philippians 3:9 “not having mine own righteousness . . . but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” Paul came to realize that salvation did not come through the 10,000 oral laws of the Pharisees, which he had strongly defended, but rather, “through the faith of Christ.” Many Jews

at that time thought that they were saved through their obedience to the Law of Moses. There have been several ideologies—whether religious, health, environmental, or political—that fall into a similar camp. Paul’s warning words are not just for Judaism, but anything that takes one away from Christ.

Philippians 3:10–11 “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to Him in His death and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection” (BSB) Paul seeks to know Jesus and share in the power of His resurrection and His sufferings; he even feels comfortable with dying, thanks to the glorious truths of the resurrection.

Pressing Toward the Heavenly Goal

Philippians 3:12–21

Philippians 3:12 “I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (NIV) “Press” connotes the image of an olive or wine press that is a crushing, arduous process to achieve a goal/mark. Paul humbly acknowledges that he is not finished or perfect, but is merely pressing forward. It is the direction one heads that is important (The word repent means to return to God). He wants to grasp or “take hold of,” to “apprehend” (KJV) Jesus. Paul recognizes the challenge and difficulties that come with resistance from the world. Theodore Burton observed, “Life is a constant series of challenges and trials. Notwithstanding, we should never fail to strive for that perfection of life which can bring us closer to harmony with God.”¹⁹ The image of holding onto the iron rod from the Lehi’s Tree of Life vision seems applicable (1 Nephi 8:19–24).

Philippians 3:13–14 “Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ” (NIV) As long as Paul is reaching, growing, learning, and straining in the right direction, that is **the goal**. Learning through the journey or process of gaining experience is the goal of life. It is an actively challenging process at which Paul continues to labor. This is a good example of Paul’s theology. He does not promote push-button salvation. He knows it is a long hard struggle that requires his best efforts even at this stage of his life.

Philippians 3:15–16 “Let us therefore, as many as would be perfect, be thus minded . . . [that] which we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule” (KJV, 2000) The word “perfect” is also translated, “mature” (NIV, RSV, ESV, BSB). This gives a different twist to the verse, Paul is not sarcastically denouncing the conceited members who think they are perfect, but I see him asking those who are spiritually mature in the gospel to carry on with full steam ahead. Sounds like: “lengthen your stride.”²⁰

Philippians 3:17–19 “Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters . . . as I have often told you before . . . many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction” (NIV) Paul warns them

to follow a good example, as there were some Christians who not only had left the faith, but were now fighting against Christianity. He denounced those as following the devil and being governed by their selfish appetites.

Philippians 3:20–21 “**But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there . . . [to] transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body**” (NIV) These verses open by speaking of celestial citizenship—or “homeland” (JB), and “commonwealth” (RSV). However, the KJV does not follow the same Greek meaning of “*politeuma*/a form of government” with its translation, “our conversation.” Paul may be yearning for his heavenly home, or for the Second Coming when many will be resurrected with glorious bodies in a twinkling of an eye” (1 Corinthians 15:52).

Last Advice: Appeal to Rejoice in the Lord

Philippians 4:1–9

Philippians 4:1 “**my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!**” (NIV) The love between Paul and the Philippian saints is strong. He admired them enough that it appears he had his wife stay there with them. She is included in this “joy and crown” (4:3).

Philippians 4:2 “**I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord**” (NASB) Paul begins his concluding notes with several person messages to individuals. He must have heard about two sisters in the Philippian branch who had some sort of disagreement, and he asks them to be reconciled and return to focusing on their unified faith in the Lord.

Philippians 4:3 “**I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers**” For centuries, Bible readers have wondered who Paul meant by his “yokefellow/*suzugos*/those united by the bond of marriage, relationship, office, labor, study, business, or the like, . . . consort, comrade, colleague, partner.”²¹ An early church father recorded that it referred to Paul’s wife.²² I agree, especially as the assignment is with other women, it was probably a very close female, whom the local saints knew as Paul’s “yokefellow.” Other debate covers the gamut from a proper name for Luke; another thought he meant Luke, or even Lydia. Whoever Paul meant, it is significant that he regards the men and women who labored with him as equals.

Paul also refers to Clement, which was a common name at the time. We do not know if this Clement is the third Bishop in Rome who wrote, 1 Clement in AD 95 or 96.²³

“**whose names are in the book of life**” Paul links his fellow servants with the Book of Life. This is the only time Paul refers to it, but the Book of Revelation includes seven references that attach the righteous to Heavenly Father and His angels.²⁴ It is found only once in the Old Testament, which happens to be in a negative context:

“May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous” (Psalms 69:28). We learn much more about this topic in modern scripture. Alma teaches us that the “names of the righteous shall be written in the book” (Alma 5:58). The Lord revealed several references to the “Lamb’s Book of Life” to the Prophet Joseph Smith (D&C 132:19; 76:68; 128:7; etc.).

Philippians 4:5 “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (NIV) The different translations of this verse communicate a different message. The KJV “moderation,” is also translated: “gentleness” (BSB), “forbearance” (ASV), or “humility” (ABPE).

Philippians 4:6 “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (NIV) Paul calls on the saints to use prayer and gratitude to overcome undue worry. The KJV used “careful” which missed the meaning of our use of the word “*merimnaó*/ anxious, to care for.” It is most often used to explain, “I am over-anxious; distracted.” It figuratively means, “to go to pieces.” The word was used in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34), and ten other times in the New Testament. The Lord and Paul called on disciples to not fret, but to treat their distractions and extreme worry with the healing power of supplicating the Lord with thanksgiving to keep perspective on life. Prayer can lead one to stronger faith, trust, and hope.

Philippians 4:7 “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” Peace becomes the guardian for Christians as it “guard[s]” one’s heart and mind (NIV, ASB, BSB, etc.). We find “peace/*eiréné*” ninety-two times in the New Testament, with half of those coming from Paul. This favorite Christian gift, is never used as a political statement, but always as an attribute of God, the glorious Spirit, or as a greeting and farewell in the Lord. In D&C 6:23, we learn more— that peace is a sign and witness of the Holy Spirit. Paul claims this great gift of peace from God even with a death sentence hanging over his head.

Philippians 4:8 “whatsoever things are true . . .” These verses were incorporated into part of Joseph Smith’s thirteenth Article of Faith.

KJV

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things.

NIV

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

13TH ARTICLE OF FAITH

We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things.

If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

Two words have changed meanings since the seventeenth century translations: 1) Honest in Greek meant, “*seminos*/reverent, venerable, serious, dignified,” and three centuries ago meant: decent, honorable, suitable, and 2) Virtue, which initially in Greek meant “*areté*/goodness, a gracious act, uprightness.” It was for prowess on the battlefield, and skill in living. In the personal sense, and in modern translations, it means “excellence” (RSV, NIV). Semantics aside, there is an important underlying principle here, “It is only when gospel ethics are tied to gospel doctrines that they rest on a sure and enduring foundation, and gain full operation in the lives of the saints.”²⁵

The Prophet Joseph Smith loved the writings of Paul and often recited or referenced them. They appear approximately 140 times in the sermons recorded in Nauvoo.²⁶ Even more telling, these sermons were spontaneous, not written out or researched ahead of time. When he was speaking from his heart and head, phrases from the Pauline Epistles often came to his memory. As a child he his family had read from the Bible every morning and evening in family devotionals. He knew these books well in his youth, and even better after making his own inspired translation of them in his early twenties.

Philippians 4:9 “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (NIV) Again Paul asks the saints to follow his example. His verb

choice, “saw in me, these do” (NKJV) gives more evidence that he expects the saints to live the higher laws. Paul is an action man. This comes as a reassurance; when he refers to freedom from the law, he is not talking about a lack of Christian obedience. He has set an example to live a life within God’s guidelines (Galatians 3:13; 4:5; 5:1; etc.).

Thanks for the Philippians Gifts

Philippians 4:10–19

Philippians 4:10 “I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it” (BSB) The Philippians may have given Paul something recently in addition to sending him Epaphroditus as an assistant. It sounds as though he wrote the second sentence to clarify the first (rather than waste the space on the page with very high cost of writing). The context of the rest of the letter does not suggest that Paul meant, “it is about time you helped me out.”

Philippians 4:11–12 “I have learned to be content regardless of my circumstances” (BSB) Paul’s message is even more powerful coming from his current condition in bonds. Wherever or whatever we do we can find joy and contentment. Throughout his life he lived in the contrasts of plenty and poverty. He claims that he has learned to be “abased” and to “abound” (Philippians 4:12, KJV). One of the places he learned this was about a decade earlier when he was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi. The saints knew well how that scenario turned out with the conversion of the jailor and his household.

Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” God empowered Paul through His Spirit. Paul sounds like Nephi when he said: “I will go and do the things the Lord commands, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them” (1 Nephi 3:7). The key to finding strength to overcome and endure is through the Spirit of God.

Philippians 4:14–17 “you have done well to share in my affliction . . . no church but you partnered with me in the matter of giving and receiving” (BSB) Paul had opened at least a few branches of the church in Macedonia a dozen or so years earlier, yet only generous Philippi sent funds to him (2 Corinthians 11:7–9). Generosity is a not a matter of means as much as it a matter of the heart and habit. This may be how I think they shared in Paul’s “affliction,” repeatedly (while he was in Thessalonica, now, and probably at other times). Paul was not as interested in receiving more of their gifts (Philippians 4:18), as much as he was thrilled to see their gratitude as a fruit of righteousness.

Philippians 4:18 “he gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (ESV) Paul likens the Philippians’ gifts, including Epaphroditus, to a temple incense or sacrificial offering to the Lord

(Exodus 29:18, 25, etc.). For Paul, it is a beautiful image bridging the old and new laws. The Philippians' sacrifice of a broken heart was a sweet sacrifice in the Lord (D&C 59:8).

Philippians 4:19 “my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus” Paul blesses the saints with a promise that the Lord will provide for their needs too. The same promise is given with the law of tithing (Malachi 3:10, “Bring ye all the tithes . . . and prove . . . if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing . . .”)

Philippians 4:20 “To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen” Paul concludes by glorifying God and witnessing of Him in testimony.

Salutations and Final Wishes

Philippians 4:21-23

Philippians 4:21-23 “The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings . . . especially those who belong to Caesar’s household” (NIV) Paul’s final farewell is not just to the responsible leadership or to certain people, but to all of his beloved saints in Philippi. His benediction also includes a salutation from those converts who were part of “Caesar’s household.” The Caesar reigning at the time was Nero. His “household,” included the building, goods, property, or means. As mentioned in the Philippians 1:13, it may refer to the Roman praetorian or “imperial guard” (stationed in possibly Rome, Ephesus or Caesarea), or possibly Caesar’s staff.

COLOSSIANS: EVIDENCES OF JESUS’ DIVINITY

Background of Colossae

Colossae was built in the Lycus River Valley in Asia Minor, 110 miles east of Ephesus in modern day western Turkey. A major east-west trade route connected it with two larger cities: Laodicea, ten miles west (a famous textile center), and Hierapolis, eleven miles north (with famous medicinal hot springs and a temple to Apollo). The Roman philosopher and statesman, Cicero (106–43 BC) estimated that 10,000 Jews lived in these three cities in his day. Colossae lay on a beautiful volcanic mountain range with arid grazing valleys. Even though Colossae was a small town, it was famous for its black sheep that produced black wool for the Laodicean’s cloth-dyeing industries (especially the dark red wool was known as “*colossinum*”). It is the smallest town where we have communication from Paul.

The audience appears to be both Jewish and Gentile converts from Phrygian and Greek lineage. Paul knew at least three of the saints named in the letter: Epaphras, Philemon and Onesimus. All three are mentioned in other letters (Philemon 1:1, 10, 23). Epaphras was staying with Paul in prison (Corinthians 1:7; 4:12–13). But the general letter suggests Paul did not know many of the saints there.

Dating the Letter

The Epistle falls in the latter half of Paul's writing. All three cities experienced a major earthquake in AD 63–64. The third century Christian historian, Eusebius, reported that Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were destroyed and rebuilt later.

Purpose

Colossians is to arm the early saints with evidences of Jesus' divinity in order to attack falsehoods. Paul and Timothy list several heretical ideas and provide evidence on how to battle them. He intended for it to be circulated to the three neighboring towns (4:15–16). It also was sent to strengthen the branch on the return of Onesimus, and to correct the false doctrines. The Letter focuses on the following:

Themes

Colossians is Paul's most philosophical Epistle. He discusses the creation, cosmology, wisdom, and a new order for social duties. These topics were all debated in the Hellenistic world. The region was filled with students of science and philosophy.

1. Testify of Jesus Christ
2. Warns against falsehoods
3. Christlike Principles

Outline

A proclamation of the Christian Worldview

1:1–2 Opening Greetings

1:3–14 Thanksgiving and Prayer for Redemption

1:15–23 Hymn: Jesus Christ is Creator

1:24–29 Paul's Labor for The Church

2:1–5 Built Up in Christ—Beware of Deceivers

2:6–8 Walk in Christ and Beware of Tradition of Men 2:9–15 We are Made Complete in Christ

2:16–23 Avoid False Worship of Angels' Asceticism

3:1–4 Set Your Affection on Heavenly Things

3:5–17 Develop Christlike Qualities

3:18–4:1 Household Relationships

4:2–6 Concluding Exhortation: Pray, Live Wisely

4:7–18 Final Personal Greeting

COLOSSIANS 1

Opening Greetings

Colossians 1:1–2

Colossians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus *our* brother” (NIV) The letter opens with Paul and Timothy’s greeting—the same co-senders from two other “Prison Epistles,” Philip-pians and Philemon. Writing a letter from two authors was unusual for Greek correspondence.²⁷

Colossians 1:2 “Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God . . .” We find that this standard greeting for both Greek and Hebrew speakers begins thirteen of the fourteen letters attributed to Paul. (The one exception is the Epistle to the Hebrews.)

“To God’s holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ” (NIV) In most English transla-tions, Paul greets his audience as “faithful brethren” (KJV). Yet, the Greek “*adelphoi*,” meant, “a fellow believer, united to another by the bond of affection,” which applies to both genders (also see Corinthians 4:15, NIV). Paul and Timothy write this as a public letter to be read to the whole congregation.

Thanksgiving and Prayer for Redemption and Good Works

Colossians 1:3–14

Colossians 1:3–5 “We give thanks to God . . . for the hope which is laid up for you” Paul and Timothy pray for the saints and are grateful for their faith and love. The Colossian saints have a reputation of great faith and love, which should give them hope for their afterlife.

Colossians 1:6 “All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you” (BSB) The JST clarifies that the gospel truths will be available to all generations: “which is come unto you, as in all generations of the world.” Just as the gentiles can be adopted into the fold, so too will all generations have the opportunity to hear and learn the gospel at some point. This is made possible with missionary work in the spirit world and vicarious work for the dead. A slightly different passage is found in D&C 84:17 where the priesthood will continue in the church for all generations: “Which priesthood continueth in the church of God in all generations, and is without beginning of days or end of years.” Yet, this is puzzling as the scriptures say the priesthood has been take from the church at times; this makes more sense in an eternal perspective (also see D&C 110:12; Exodus 3:15).

Colossians 1:7–8 “**Epaphras our dear fellow servant . . . also declared unto us your love in the Spirit**” Epaphras is introduced as the fellow servant or missionary. It appears that he served with Paul in Ephesus and opened the city of Colossae to the gospel (Colossians 4:12–13). This gives credence to the idea that many outlying areas of Ephesus heard Paul speak during the three-year mission there (“all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord” Acts 19:10). Epaphras’ name is shortened from the common Greek name, Epaphroditus, meaning, “lovely, fascinating, charming.” He was in prison visiting Paul at one point and is mentioned in Philemon 1:23. Epaphras is probably the one who gave Paul a positive report of the Colossian saints (Colossians 1:4–5).

Colossians 1:9 “**We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives**” (NIV) Note the subject of Paul’s prayer for the Colossian saints. He prays for what is most important from an eternal perspective—their spiritual understanding. Saving knowledge comes through the Holy Spirit. Applying the preeminence of what is most important to our prayers rather than just good can open the windows of heaven in a better way.

Colossians 1:10 “**walk worthy of the Lord . . . being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God**” To walk with our Savior, we must “live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way” (NIV). The increase in “knowledge” of the Lord is also prioritized so that the saints’ learning can direct them to salvation and Eternal Life. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, “Others may equal or excel [the saints] in scientific knowledge, in philosophical comprehension, or in any of the things of the world, but only the saints... can understand the atonement, comprehend the doctrines of salvation...and have a sure hope of eternal life.”²⁸ To those “saints” I would add all sincere disciples of Jesus.

Colossians 1:11–12 “[**You**] **being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father . . . to share in the inheritance**” When we have more patience and endurance, do we see God’s hand as blessing us? The sanctification of the Spirit “qualifies” (RSV) disciples for the Father’s inheritance. It requires joint team work between the Savior’s atonement, the Spirit’s cleansing and sanctification, and the disciple’s hard work to make one “fit” (NEB).

Corinthians 1:13–14 “**He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins**” (NIV) The letter beautifully outlines Jesus’ mission to create and redeem. It begins with the Father’s plan to bring exaltation through the sacrifice of His Son, our Redeemer (These verses are similar to Hebrews 1:1–3, 6). These verses are the clearest identification of the Father and Son as separate beings within the Godhead that we have in Paul (reaching back to Colossians 1:8 for a description of the Spirit’s role).

HYMN: Christ the Creator and Redeemer

Colossians 1:15-23

Most biblical scholars suggest this was an established hymn quoted or adapted by Paul.²⁹

Colossians 1:15 “The Son is the image of the invisible God” (NIV) This is also translated, “who cannot be seen” (CEV), and “the image of The Unseen God” (ABPE). This verse speaks of the separate natures and beings of the Godhead. The Son looks like His Father. This refers to Jesus sharing a visible likeness with His unseen Father.

Jesus also referred to this by teaching about Caesar’s image on a coin in Matthew 22:20, and later at His last supper (John 14:9). The first creation story also states: “God created man in his own image” (Genesis 1:27). Paul identifies Jesus’ pre-mortal position as the spiritual firstborn of every human on earth. This idea confuses most biblical scholars who have no understanding of the first estate. John’s Gospel prologue opens with the same theology and truths, but the rest of Christianity (and all other religions) do not understand the truth of our premortal existence. We are so blessed to have the perspective of the Restoration as we study the New Testament.

Colossians 1:16 “. . . visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him” (BSB) Jesus created not only the physical world, but unseen elements and other worlds (Moses 1:33). He has also prepared for after earth-life with future “thrones, or dominations.” The last phrase, “for Him” can be interpreted through the perspective that Jesus’ glory is enhanced by having children of God exalted too; “This is my work and my glory, to bring to pass the immortality and Eternal Life of man” (Moses 1:39)

HYMN 1 COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

Who is the image of the invisible God

The firstborn of every creature:

For by him were all things created

That are in heaven, and that are in earth

Visible and invisible,

Whether they be thrones, or dominions,

Or principalities or powers

All things were created by him, and for him

And he is before all things.

And by him all things consist.

And he is the head of the body, the church:

Who is the beginning,

The first born from the dead;

That in all things he might have preeminence.

For it pleased the Father that in him

Should all fulness dwell;

And, having made peace through the blood of his cross

By him to reconcile all things unto himself,

Whether they be things in earth

or things in heaven.

Colossians 1:18 “He is the head of . . . the church” God gave Christ authority as the head of His kingdom and church. Peter is not the head, nor Paul, nor Joseph Smith, nor Russel M. Nelson. The Savior is our Head.

“the firstborn from the dead” So far in this letter, Paul has referred to Jesus as the “firstborn” in three different ways: 1) Firstborn as the literal Son of God in mortality (1:3); 2) Firstborn of the Father pre-mortality (1:15); and here as the 3) Firstborn of the dead—or first to be resurrected.

Colossians 1:19 “For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all fulness dwell” Christ carried out the Father’s plan, so the Father gave Jesus of His fullness (Matthew 28:18). However, we learn in the D&C 93, that Jesus did not receive that fullness at first but as He progressed from “grace to grace,” until the Father gave Jesus “of His fulness” (D&C 93:3–5, 12–14, 16–20). The same revelation taught how the fulness is inherited: “if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness . . . he keepeth his commandments. He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things” (D&C 93:20, 27; also see D&C 76:71; 76–77; etc.). This is such an important and sacred doctrine that it is also found in the Book of Mormon. When Jesus visited the Nephites he touched on this important doctrine as well: “Ye shall have fulness of joy; and ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, your joy shall be full, even as the Father hath given me fulness of joy” (3 Nephi 28:10).

Colossians 1:20 “to reconcile all things to Himself, by . . . having made peace through the blood of His cross” Jesus’ atoning sacrifice was the way and means that reconciliation occurred. Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, King Benjamin, Alma, Mormon and many more Book of Mormon prophets each beautifully taught about Jesus’ atonement in far more detail than we find in the Bible.³⁰ The only account of the Savior’s suffering written in first-person is found in D&C 19:16–19. This verse can also include the work of repentance in spirit prison. Jesus reconciles us on earth and in heaven. In the Restoration we are blessed to learn more of the missionary work that goes on in the after-life (D&C 138).

Colossians 1:21 “Once you were alienated from God . . . because of your evil deeds. But now He has reconciled you by Christ” (BSB) We estrange ourselves from God by wickedness. (Paul elaborates on this again in 1:27.) We are not only reconciled or cleansed, but as our Mediator, Christ will also present the saints, clean and holy, to His Father, if they ground their faith in Him.

Corinthians 1:23 “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven” Paul teaches that everyone has already heard the Gospel—note the past tense in this literal translation, “having been proclaimed in all creation under heaven” (BLB). Without an understanding of our premortal state, biblical commentaries interpret Paul’s “hyperbole . . . insist[ing] on the universality of its proclamation.”³¹ Yet, we have a sec-

and witness that is more clearly explained in the Book of Abraham. The phrase, “every creature heard the gospel preaching” may refer to the premortal counsels, or first estate, when all heard God’s plan and chose to follow Jesus through their own agency and mortality (Moses 3:5; 4:2–4; also see Jude 1:6).

Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was . . . And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; And they who keep their first estate shall be added upon (Abraham 3:22; 25–26).

Paul’s Labor for The Church

Colossians 1:24–29

Colossians 1:24–25 “I rejoice in what I am suffering for you . . . I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness” Paul is writing while imprisoned—probably chained to his guard as was the practice. A list of his major physical sufferings over the past two decades was recorded in 2 Corinthians 11:23–26. Paul refers to himself as “*diakonos*/a servant/minister,” which literally means, “to kick up dust,” as one *running an errand*.³² As discussed in the Gospels, Jesus choose to serve and not be served. His example to the apostles was to serve—even as a slave would.

Colossians 1:26 “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints” There are many mysteries that the early church knew. The apostles knew the Lord’s plan of salvation, the mystery that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and the ordinances of the temple endowment and sealing. Joseph Smith taught that, “Paul . . . knew . . . all the ordinances, and blessings that were in the Church.”³³

Colossians 1:27–29 “He is the one we proclaim . . . To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me” Paul leaves us a valiant example of consecrating his time, talents, money, physical stamina, and energy to building the kingdom. It is those who are “valiant in the testimony of Jesus” who will receive a celestial reward (D&C 76:79, also see 53–60). He “contended,” or “labored and fought” (ABPE), because the powers of the adversary fought against him. He did not just share the good news or his testimony of Jesus, but he also warned his audiences against the powers of Satan.

COLOSSIANS 2

Built up in Christ—Beware of Deceivers

Colossians 2:1–5

Colossians 2:1–3 “I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea . . . That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches . . . of the Father, and of

Christ” Paul assures these neighboring congregations, even those whom he does not know personally, that he worries about them and hopes the best for them. The saints are unified or “knit together” when they value and understand the same things. Jesus’ life and death answers so many Old Testament questions and mysteries. The revelation received as part of the Restoration answers even more Christian mysteries.

Colossians 2:4–5 “I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments” Those who intentionally perverted Christ’s doctrines crept into the church early on. Paul’s letters are filled with examples of deceptive arguments that led the saints astray, even without their notice. His warning to be on guard is needed in our generation where wolves in sheep’s clothing can inundate our minds at the click of our fingertips (Matthew 7:15). The marketing of falsehoods has been refined over the centuries by the adversary. Whenever I dive into an attack on truth, I usually find a shallow observation that is blown out of proportion. We are fortunate to have many resources to analyze our sources.³⁴

Walk in Christ and Beware of the Tradition of Men

Colossians 2:6–8

Colossians 2:6–7 “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith” The best way to avoid falling away is to remain anxiously engaged and build your faith with hearts “overflowing with thankfulness” (NIV). When we are focused on growing our faith and serving others, when questions arise, we can seek answers without us falling into a faith crisis.

Colossians 2:8 “See that there be no one who shall lead you away as a prey through philosophy and vain deceit” (DBT) or **“Do not let your minds be captured”** (NEB) or “take you captives” (NIV) Paul repeatedly warns against false teachings (Galatians 4:17; Philippians 3:2). The source of the information was crucial. He wants the saints to carefully guard their faith and rationally discern when truth or falsehoods are being discussed. No matter how enticing they may appear, Paul’s warns all Christians to beware of philosophy and “tradition of men” who beguile “after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” In the Hellenistic time the term “rudiments” also referred to the cosmic rulers or spirits that dominated the world.³⁵ In this scenario it may refer to devils.

We are Made Complete in Christ

Colossians 2:9–15

Colossians 2:9 “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” We now come to the first specific heresy of the letter: the physical nature of God’s body. This verse needs clarifying, but many commentators avoid the word “bodily.” Richard Anderson observed, “Paul used *somatikos*, formed from *soma*, the Greek word for ‘body,’ which Paul uses equally for man’s earthly body and Christ’s resurrected body. Thus, Paul testifies that Christ possesses godhood physically.”³⁶ This word translated here as “Godhead” is only used once in the New

Testament, and it also means “deity *theotés*.” Paul clarified what he meant by the Godhead earlier in this same letter (Colossians 1:14–15), and again in 3:1. Christ’s body was a revolting concept to the Greeks. His death and resurrection conflicted with their philosophy of what a God should be like.

Colossians 2:10–11 “**In Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority**” (NIV) Paul and Timothy correct the second heresy by explaining that Christ is the head of all “authority/principalities.” Only through unifying our desires with Christ can we find complete fulfillment or perfection, not in laws of men (Colossians 2:14–16).

Colossians 2:11–12 “**The circumcision made without hands . . . Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God**” Paul describes the covenant to follow Christ as a symbolic circumcision—of God’s covenant cut into our hearts. Paul would have known that this was the ideal application of the Law, as it was spelled out over and over in the Old Testament: “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25). Paul also taught this earlier in Romans 2:18.³⁷

Christian baptism is to represent the burial of our old self and sins, thus best enacted by immersion. When one comes out of the water one figuratively has a new life in Christ (also see Romans 6:3–6). Early Christians saw baptism as a dramatic reenactment of Christ’s death and resurrection as they walked into the water as a symbolic grave and rose as a symbolically resurrected being following Jesus’ example (Colossians 1:19–23).³⁸ The sinful life is buried and a new life in Christ is born again. The sign of circumcision has been done away with and the ordinance of baptism has become the sign of the covenant.

Colossians 2:13–15 “**When you were dead in your trespasses . . . God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our trespasses . . . He took it away, nailing it to the cross!**” (BSB) When Jesus suffered for humanity’s sins, He redeemed us from the fall (Galatians 3:13). Paul refers to Jesus’ crucifixion, or being nailed to the cross, as if our sins were also being nailed, as Jesus carried them. Interestingly, “one ancient mode of cancelling bonds was by striking a nail through the writing: this seems at that time to have existed in Asia.”³⁹

Colossians 2:16–17 “**Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath. Which are a shadow of things to come**” The next heresy Paul denounces deals with the Judaizer trying to enforce Jewish worship as part of Christianity. He explains that they were only to foreshadow their promised Messiah. As he described earlier, the Law of Moses was given as a “schoolmaster” to lead the Israelites to God (Galatians 3:24). “Meat” means food in this context. For over a decade, Christians no longer were required to follow the Mosaic dietary laws of clean and unclean animals. After Paul’s first mission to the Gentiles, a Jerusalem Council was held where Peter and the other leaders decided that the only food

restrictions placed on Christians would be to “abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled” (Acts 15:29).

The reference “new moon” and “holydays” could refer to Jewish celebrations that Christians should not follow (Isaiah 1:13–14; Ezekiel 45:17; Hosea 2:13, etc.). The day that a new moon rose, the priests added an additional animal sacrifice: two bullocks, a ram, and seven sheep (Numbers 10:10; 28:11–14). When a new moon fell on their fall month of Tisri, they celebrated the beginning of their new year (Leviticus 23:24–25).

A sabbath was still honored by Christians, but they moved it from Saturday to Sunday—in honor the Lord’s resurrection. But Christians no longer needed to keep the hundreds of Jewish sabbath restrictions as part of their rest and worship.

Colossians 2:18 “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels” (NASB) Paul warns the saints that some will defraud or “beguile you of your reward” (KJV), or “disqualify you” (RSV). There were some who worshiped angels in conjunction with fasting, which may be what is meant by the “ascetic practices” (CSB).⁴⁰ Humility is a wonderful attribute, but “false humility” (NIV) in order to entrap the disciples is what Paul complains about. These practices of asceticism and angel worship were also seen in some pagan practices that Paul and Timothy attack next.

The false teachers had beguiled Christians by combining Jewish and pagan ideas into a hierarchical system of heavenly beings. Even Christ was supposedly subordinate to these angelic powers. Some of the problems sound similar to the Gnostic practices of inflated mind, visions, and angles. It wasn’t until the medieval age that Christianity added the theory that angels needed to intercede for mortals to get to heaven.⁴¹

Colossians 2:21–22 “Which are after the doctrines and commandments of men, who teach you to touch not . . . all those things which are to parish with the using. Which things have indeed a show of wisdom . . . neglecting the body as to the satisfying the flesh not in any honor to God” (JST) These verses are a helpful addition that explain what the opponents were falsely teaching.

Colossians 2:23 “Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (NIV) Paul denounces those who act out of pretense, and those who come up with their own “man-made worship”. The last phrase is also translated, “no use at all in combating sensuality” (NEB), and “no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh” (RSV). Neglecting the body was a tendency of the Gnostics, who believed the physical body was evil. This led to two extreme behaviors: complete denial of marriage and sexual relations or complete indulgence of physical urges. Both negated the purpose and value of the human body.

COLOSSIANS 3

Set your Affections on Heavenly Things

Colossians 3:1-4

Colossians 3:1-2 “Since you have been raised with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (BSB) Once Christians repent of their past sins, thanks to Jesus’ Redemption, they can receive the cleansing of baptism by water and spirit. They can enjoy a new life as they are born again and focus on building the Lord’s kingdom. Disciples who have been raised to holier things focus their heart and mind on seeking and serving Christ. Christians align their desires or “affections” (KJV) with “things above,” not materialism, where “moth and rust” corrupts (Matthew 6:19). This is another verse that distinguishes God the Father from His Son as separate beings (also see Colossians 1:14-15; Hebrews 1:3; Romans 8:34).

Colossians 3:3 “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” The overall meaning of the verse is quite simple: through the sanctification of conversion, disciples selfish appetite driven behaviors, defined as the “the natural man,” dies. While the real person, who is raised in Christ, grows more Christlike.

But how is our life ‘hid with Christ’? The Greek word, “*kruptó*/to hide, conceal, lay up,” is used 18 times in the New Testament. The verb is used in the parable of the talents when the man hides his talent (Matthew 25:25). It is used when the wicked ask to be covered or rescued from the sight of God (Revelations 6:16). Metaphorically, it was used to conceal the unknown, and for God’s saving counsels (Matthew 11:25; 13:35). However, this three-word-phrase, “hidden with Christ” (NAS), is unique to this verse. Similar words are also found in D&C 86:9, “For ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God.” Joseph also included the biblical phrase and interpretation in a journal entry now printed in the History of the Church. I have compared Joseph’s interpretation with the standard Christian perspective below.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES

“As we are hidden with Christ in God in heaven with Christ according to the letter to the Colossians, we will appear in glory together with **Christ**.”⁴²

“The spiritual life in man is a ‘hidden life,’ having its source in God; the full conviction of it, as distinct from the mere instinctive consciousness of it in the mind itself.”⁴³

JOSEPH SMITH USAGE

On May 16, 1843, Joseph wrote:

“. . . putting my hand on the knee of William Clayton, I said, ‘**your life is hid with Christ in God**’ and so are many others. Nothing but the unpardonable sin can prevent you from inheriting eternal life for you are sealed up by the power of the Priesthood unto having taken the steps necessary for that purpose.”⁴⁴

We can find in scripture and from the Prophet Joseph Smith's writings and sermons, at least four other phrases used to describe some aspects of this same sealing:

1. "Calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10; D&C 53:1),
2. "Holy Spirit of Promise" (Ephesians 1:13; D&C 76:53; 88:3; 124:24; 132:7, 18–19, 26),
3. "More sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:19; D&C 131:5)
4. "Rest of the Lord" (Moroni 7:3; D&C 101:31–32)

The sacred doctrine will be discussed in more detail in 2 Peter 1:10.

Colossians 3:4 "When Christ *who is our life* appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (NKJV)

Paul continues to encourage his readers to focus on living with Christ—either in the afterlife, or, as the early Christians thought, at His imminent return. John touched on this same principle, "when he shall appear, we will be like him" (1 John 3:2). Paul suggests the transformative power of Christ: it is in fact what he wants Christians to focus on. When we are consumed by Him, He changes us—both in mortality and beyond. And thus we can appear with him "in glory."

Develop Christlike Qualities

Colossians 3:5–17

Colossians 3:5–7 "Put to death, therefore, the components of your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry" (BSB) Paul's list of vices is described differently in each translation. In the KJV, "fornication/*porneia*," encompasses all sexual sins. All five vices listed in this verse destroy our relationships with each other and with God. Paul asks the saints to "deaden" their carnal desires through a change of heart and repentance. It is easy to pass over the lists of vices. However, a close analysis of idolatry includes several insightful points that can apply to our Christian devotion as we "mortify" (KJV for the BSB's "put to death") carnal desires. The scripture reminds the readers that when we "walked some time" in our own evil desires or "will," we superseded God's will (Colossians 3:7). That is how it becomes idolatry. This may extend to when we pray or act "in vain." In doing so, we may also be taking the Lord's name in vain (Exodus 20:7). When we idolize something ungodly, we dabble with idolatry. Many sins are a form of idolatry.

Colossians 3:8–9 "put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another" Certain archaic words are also translated: "rage . . . slander, and filthy language from your lips" (NIV), or "hateful, and evil. . . insulting or cruel things about other" (CEV). These translations make it more applicable to the modern reader.

The KJV, "*put off*," is actually, "*stripping off*" the old sinful ways and implies baptismal language too.

Colossians 3:10 “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (NIV) By putting on a “new self,” Christians are not only born again, but they are clothed in Christ’s atonement. The Hebrew word for “atone/*kaphar*” implies “covering.”⁴⁵ For more, see Hugh Nibley’s explanation of the etymology of the word.⁴⁶ Becoming a “new man” connotes dressing in the image of the Lord by “covering” ourselves in His atonement. It is through the cleansing power of the at-one-ment that we are thus clothed and covered.

Colossians 3:11 “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond *nor* free: but Christ *is* all, and in all” (NIV) The Judeo-Greco-Roman society was laced with distinct social classes. Paul emphasizes this in particular by mentioning the “Scythian tribe.” They lived around the Black Sea and were at the time deemed the lowest of barbarians. Josephus refers to the Scythians as “little more than wild beasts.”⁴⁷ Paul chose them to make the contrast more extreme. God is absolutely no respecter of persons by race, gender, education, handicaps, wealth, beauty, or profession. In Christ, all are the same.

Colossians 3:12–13 “As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another . . . as the Lord forgave you” (NIV) Paul asks us clothe ourselves in seven virtues (the symbolism of his numerology is probably intentional). Roman dress codes communicated one’s station, privilege, or lack thereof. Paul asks Christians to adorn their internal thoughts with Christ’s covering of the at-one-ment. He admonishes his readers to “put on” or internalize the teachings of Jesus—to develop an attitude of meekness, kindness, humility, forgiveness, etc. “*Bowels of mercy*” means “compassion” (RSV, NIV, JB).⁴⁸ These verses sound a lot like the verses Joseph Smith received when he was incarcerated, “. . . no influence can or ought to be maintained by persuasion, by long suffering, by gentleness, and meekness, and by love unfeigned” (D&C 121:41–45).

Colossians 3:14 “Above all, put on love—the perfect bond of unity” (HCSB) The Greek, “*agape/love/charity*” is chosen by the New Testament to describe Christlike love. Disciples strive to have a loving attitude as the underlying motivation of all actions. The KJV connects a powerful idea: love is the bond of “*perfection/teleiotes*,” which can also mean “*completion/maturity/combination* of truths or stages of spiritual growth.” Many things can bring us together, but nothing can truly bind us in unity the way love can.

Colossians 3:15 “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts. . . and be ye thankful” (NIV) Peace is a witness of the Spirit (D&C 6:23). When disciples internalize Christ’s teachings they may also be blessed with His peace. Paul reminds the saints to be thankful. Gratitude is a key to meekness and humility. He then goes onto to describe how we can express our gratitude to God.

Colossians 3:16 “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your

hearts” (NIV) When we ponder the words of Christ, they will bless us richly with wisdom. Good music can edify and uplift us. Throughout the letter, Paul and Timothy repeated different approaches to encourage us to sing uplifting music. In this case, Paul uses music as part of his three-fold means of giving thanks: hymns, psalms and songs.

Colossians 3:17 “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (NIV) Baptized disciples who have taken on the name of the Lord, and especially those called to serve him as missionaries and special witnesses who represent the Lord in a more literal way, need to do everything in the name of the Lord. This includes sanctifying our daily actions in the name of the Lord. As Nephi taught: “Ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul” (2 Nephi 32:9). If we disciples hold God at the center of our lives, then everything we do and say is in the name of the Lord: we will be fulfilling our covenant to “always remember Him” (Moroni 4:3). This will lead us to be filled with gratitude and give thanks to God the Father through Jesus.

Household Relationships

Colossians 3:18–4:1

Colossians 3:18–19 Wives, submit yourselves to the husbands, as is fitting in *the* Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” Paul gives a much shorter list of domestic instructions to the Colossians than he did to the Ephesians. Again, the women/wives only submit to their husbands if it is congruent with the Lord, or “fit in the Lord.” Submission indicates a willingness to give oneself over to the guidance of another. This should not interfere with the principal of agency, or the ability to act and not “be acted upon” (2 Nephi 2:13). It is best if our submission to God and each other is voluntary, filled with love, and following Christ’s example (1 Peter 3:5–6; John 13:6–9).

Husbands should “love/*agapao*/charity” in a social or moral sense, the highest form of love. This is completely unlike the Judeo-Greco-Roman discussions of a husband’s household duties. Love was not conventional counsel then. If Christian husbands loved their wives and were not harsh or “bitter” (KJV) it would be easier for their wives to unite in their counsel. This is added right after Paul described love as the culmination of the virtues (3:12–13). One commentary described:

The exhortation to sacrifice one’s own interests for the welfare of others, which was so necessary for the harmony of the community, now finds a more specific application in the husband’s role in contribution to marital harmony. Husbands are asked to exercise the self-giving love that has as its goal only their wives’ good and that they will care for their wives without expectation of reward.⁴⁹

Colossians 3:20–21 “Children, obey *your* parents . . . Fathers, provoke not your children *to anger*, lest they be discouraged” The cultural place of children was often equated to a slave or servant. They often shared the same responsibilities. The father or guardian had complete control over the child—the right to sell them into slavery, and legal or not, there is pervasive evidence of infanticide.⁵⁰ In the Jewish tradition, “if you honor your parents you will be pleasing before God.”

However, in Christianity, the cultural norm was dramatically changed. Fathers are to control their tempers, not “exasperate,” or “embitter” their children (NASB, NIV). The writer exhorts children to obey their parents in everything (although Ephesians 6:1 added, “in the Lord”). And, there is no distinction for the age of a child—no matter how old we are, we must honor and obey our parents—when they are in line with the Lord’s teachings. Paul sets bounds for this authoritative use though and directs the fathers to not aggravate their precious children.

Colossians 3:22 “Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only to please them while they are watching, but with sincerity of heart and fear of the Lord” (BSB) Paul’s next household relationship mentioned is between servants or slaves and their masters. Average “middle class citizens often owned eight slaves.”⁵¹ As mentioned earlier, a servant/slave/master relationship was often like an indentured servant, often for only a few years before they received their freedom. Paul’s statement is almost verbatim to his admonition in Ephesians 6:5–6, so I will not repeat the commentary.

Colossians 3:23–24 “Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being, for the Lord and not for men, because you know that you will receive an inheritance . . . It is the Lord Christ you are serving” (BSB) Whatever circumstance we find ourselves in, whatever we are doing, do it “*heartily*” with “in singleness of heart” unto God (KJV). Similar council was given at least twice before. By Jesus: “if ye do it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” (Matthew 25:40); and King Benjamin, “when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17).

Colossians 3:25 “Whoever does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism” (BSB) There will be an unbiased judgment day. We must be accountable for our thoughts and actions. This is a regularly repeated topic by Paul and most prophets, with hundreds of references across scripture.

COLOSSIANS 4

Colossians 4:1 “Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven” Christianity encouraged masters to be “right and fair” (NIV) or literally, “righteous” (BLB), in their care of servants or slaves. In Christianity called for love and cooperation in relationships—especially in

families. We see the same thing in our modern dispensation.⁵² One of the masters in Paul's immediate audience probably was Philemon. This counsel may have been directed towards him as Paul sent his runaway slave, Onesimus back to Philemon (4:9).

Concluding Exhortation: Pray, Live Wisely and Speak Graciously

Colossians 4:2-6

Colossians 4:2-4 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message . . . for which I am in chains" (NIV) Prayers can help disciples "to watch," meaning both to be alert to the Spirit's promptings, and aware of the deceptions of the devil. Prayers are sometimes most worshipful when they are filled with expressions of our gratitude toward God.

Paul also asks the saints to pray for him that somehow, he might be allowed to share the gospel while in prison. Significantly, Paul does not ask them to pray that he can be released, but rather that he can be about the Father's business while imprisoned. It can be interpreted that a date has been set for his trial and he solicits their prayers in order to testify as God would have him. For more on Paul in chains see commentary on Ephesians 6:19-20.

Colossians 4:5 "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity" (NASB) The KJV is hard to understand, but Paul's message is still focused on the saints' responsibility as member-missionaries to share Christ's message of redemption. His sensitivity to "walk with wisdom" as we take every opportunity to share the "Good News" with those not of our faith.

Colossians 4:6 "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (BSB) Paul's reference to salt, may have meant more than adding flavor. Jesus admonished to be "the salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13). In addition to salt acting as a preservative and enhance flavor, it was also a symbol of the covenant in ancient temple rituals. If we remember our covenants, then we will know what and when to say something because we will be blessed with the direction of the Holy Ghost in our lives.

Final Personal Greetings

Colossians 4:7-18

Colossians 4:7-8 "Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant" (NIV) Tychicus and Onesimus (v. 9) are the men who carry Paul's letter to Colossae. Tychicus is also mentioned in Acts 20:4 as one of the nine men who traveled with Paul to carry the offerings from Ephesians to Jerusalem (about six years earlier). His name is found again in 2 Timothy 4:12 and Ephesians 6:21-22. The word "servant" here is the same word as "slave" (NET) or "bond-servant" (NASB). If we can peel away the cultural evils of slavery, I think this image can add a powerful dimension to our discipleship as we think about God as our master and we as bondservants.

“I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances” (NIV) The KJV reverses the meaning of the last phrase. Rather than, “he might know your estate,” all of the other English Bibles end this verse with the direction that the audience will learn about Paul (i.e. “news about us” (NEB), or “know the things concerning us” (BLB).

Colossians 4:9 “With him I am sending Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you” (BSB) Onesimus was a runaway slave who joined the church and helped Paul. But it sounds as if his master was in the church of Colossae. Paul carefully points out that he is “*a faithful and beloved brother.*” See the letter to Philemon for more.

Colossians 4:10 “My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas” (NIV) Aristarchus is Paul’s fellow prisoner who was one of those who were dragged into the theater in Ephesus when the great outrage blew up about the silver smiths (Remember, “Great is the goddess Diana!” Acts 19: 29). He also journeyed with Paul to Jerusalem with the offerings (Acts 20:4), and then after Paul appealed to Caesar, he sailed with Paul to Rome.

“Marcus” (KJV) or Mark the scribe of the Gospel is traditionally thought to be John Mark (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13;15:37–38; etc.) who joined Paul as a junior companion on his first apostolic mission. Mark’s relationship as a “cousin” or “nephew/*anepsios*” of Barnabas gives additional insight as to why Barnabas tried so hard to have Mark join him on his second mission. It sounds as if Mark were visiting Paul at the time. If that is the case, this speaks to the healing of that relationship. Also, the early Christian Papias, claim that John Mark was Peter’s companion and scribe in prison in Rome.

Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, and I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded . . .he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in him.⁵³

This may help us with the location and timing of the prison letters.

Colossians 4:11 “Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me” (NIV) The name “Jesus /Joshua” was a common Jewish name because of the great deliverer. Paul listed at least five men, who by the context may all have been Jewish-Christian converts who had ministered to him in prison.

Colossians 4:12–13 “**Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you . . . I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis**” (NIV). Epaphras is also mentioned at the beginning of the letter (Colossians 1:7) as Paul’s information source on the Colossian saints. He was a devoted church worker laboring on their behalf.

Colossians 4:14 “**Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas send you greetings**” (BSB) Luke, the Greek author of the Gospel and Acts, was also Paul’s missionary companion and “physician.” Both men are mentioned in three Epistles in close proximity (Philemon 1:24; 2 Timothy 4:9–11).

Colossians 4:15 “**Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house**” (NIV) Paul sends personal greetings to the Laodicean saints, too. Nympha is a woman’s name, and the Greek reads “her house.” This is one of five women who are mentioned as offering and serving the church by providing a meeting place in their home as a “house church”:

1. Mary, the Mother of John Mark: Acts 12:12.
2. Chloe: 1 Corinthians 1:11
3. Lydia: Acts 16:14, 40
4. Priscilla/Prisca: Acts 18:2–3, 18–19, 26; Romans 16:3–5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19
5. Nympha: Colossians 4:15

Colossians 4:16 “. . . see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the *epistle* from Laodicea” Paul mentions yet another lost letter—giving more evidence that the canon of sacred writings is not complete. The extra letters and several forgeries have created quite a debate among Christian scholars over the centuries.⁵⁴

Colossians 4:17 “**Tell Archippus: “See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord**” (BSB) This is good advice for all. When we have a call to serve in God’s kingdom, “*fulfill it.*”

Colossians 4:18 “**The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen**” Paul’s personal handwritten note at the end of most letters, gives evidence that he used a scribe.

Header Image: Philippi’s forum and basilica B seen from the acropolis. Photo by Marsas via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. John Reumann, *The Anchor Bible: Philippians* (New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 2008), 3.
2. Richard N. Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 2006), 241.
3. The “Prison Epistles” include: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. (Paul was also imprisoned when he wrote 2 Timothy, but that falls in a different category.) For the imprisonment information, see Ephesians background. Visiting these four cities would have been more problematic for Rome than it would have been in Ephesus. Though we have no evidence of an imprisonment in Ephesus.
4. Thirteen letters claim Pauline authorship, but only six are undisputed to be written or dictated by the apostle: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon. The others have slight differences in style, vocabulary, messages, and theology that have made scholars question if the letters were only directed, outlined, or signed by Paul. There are also those who see no Pauline attachment to some letters (i.e. Hebrews) and question if the letter only his name and style to claim apostolic authority.
5. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* is the source of all my Greek definitions.
6. Reumann, *Philippians*, 171–172. Paul’s imprisonment may have been Rome, Caesarea, or Ephesus. See earlier notes on Ephesians 3:1, and Ephesians “Background.” The details about Paul’s prison described in 2 Timothy much harsher (i.e. cold and alone), so many assume that it was a second Roman imprisonment. However, without the book of Acts collaborating on that theory, we have no clear knowledge of it.
7. Ibid.
8. Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Come What May and Love it,” General Conference October 2008.
9. Other examples of hymns tucked into the New Testament can be found in: 1 Corinthians 13; Ephesians 1:3–14; 5:14; Colossians 1:15–20; 1 Timothy 3:16; 2:11–13; etc.).
10. *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, Philippians 2:6. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/philippians/2-6.htm>
11. Abraham 3:21–28; Colossians 1:17; John 1:1–13; 5:58; D&C 76: 88:47; Exodus 24:10, 11, etc.
12. Holzapfel, Huntsman, Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the New Testament*, 132.
13. John W. Welch and John F. Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 13–1. We learn of this in part from a letter dated a110 and 120 AD. Shortly after 98 AD when Trajan became Caesar, the governor, Pliny, wrote him about some judicial proceedings about Christians. In the letter he said that the Christians met early in the morning and “sang hymns to Christ as though he were a God.” Holzapfel, Huntsman, Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the New Testament*, 132.
14. Brown, *Intro to the New Testament*, 493). Scholars debate where the strophes fall, in the poem, but I have chosen the translation in Holzapfel, Huntsman, Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the New Testament*, 132.
15. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 297.
16. The travel to these four locations across modern Turkey and Greece, would have been more problematic from Rome or

Caesarea than Ephesus. This is one of the reasons why Scholars suggest Ephesus as a possibility. However, in the Book of Acts and Paul's Epistles, we have no evidence that he was ever imprisoned in Ephesus.

17. The “natural man” is mentioned once in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 2:14), but many more times in restored scripture (Mosiah 3:19; Alma 26:19–22; 41:11; 42:7–24; D&C 20:20; 29:41; Moses 5:13, 6:49; etc.). It is another example of the Prophet Joseph Smith taking a word or phrase from the Bible, and expounding on it through revelation in beautiful clarity (also see “Holy Spirit of Promise”).
18. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*: “4657 *skýbalon* (from 2965 /*kýōn*, “dog” and 906 /*bállō*, “throw”) – properly, *waste* thrown to dogs, like filthy scraps of garbage (table-scraps, dung, muck, sweepings); (figuratively) *refuse*, what is good-for-nothing except to be discarded (used only in Phil 3:8)” <https://biblehub.com/greek/4657.htm> (accessed 9–24–19)
19. Robert L. Millet, Kent P. Jackson, *Studies in Scripture: Acts to Revelation* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1987), 132.
20. Spencer W. Kimball,
21. The word is only used once in the New Testament, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4805.htm> (accessed 9-24-19)
22. Reumann, *Philippians*, 608–609. The Anchor Bible translates it: “faithful partner” though the early church fathers, Clement and Origin, record that it was his “lawful” wife. We assume as a “pharisee of the pharisees” Paul would have obeyed the law of marriage.
23. The letter from Clement focused on peace and concord among the Saints. He was influenced by popular Greek and Roman philosophies. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/1clement.html> (accessed 9-24-19).
24. Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19.
25. Elder Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*, (SLC, Deseret Book, 1985), 700.
26. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 423–424.
27. Marcus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *The Anchor Bible: Colossians* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 117–122. Some biblical scholars doubt complete Pauline authorship. Others find plenty of early authentication by the Church Fathers, and stylistic vocabulary. Joint authorship allows for many ways that Timothy and Paul may have worked out the writing, with Paul adding his personal handwritten greeting at the end (see 4:18.)
28. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary: Volume 3*, (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 2002), 23.
29. Holzapfel, Huntsman, Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the New Testament*, translation in text is from 132. Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 229 (193–250). The translation of the Hymn below is quoted here is from Barth and Blanke's Anchor Bible, 193.
30. 2 Nephi 2:7, 10; 9:7, 26, 10:25; 11:5–6; Jacob 4:11; 7:12; Mosiah 3:11–15; 4:6–7; Alma 7:11; 13:5, 28; 34:9; 42:15; Moroni 7:41; 8:20; 10:33; etc.
31. Herbert E. Ryle, ed., *Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, 58 volumes, 1 Colossians 1:23. John Gills, *Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*, 1 Corinthians 1:23; “This must be understood not of every individual creature, even human and rational, that was then, or had been in, the world; but that it had been, and was preached far and near, in all places all over the world, to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews; who are sometimes styled “every creature.” <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/colossians/1-23.htm> (accessed 9-26-19).
32. Strong's Concordance, #1249 diakonos, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1249.htm> (accessed 9-26-19).

33. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 10; also 9, 42, 110, 210, 327–331.
34. BookofMormonCentral.org; FairMormon.org; JosephSmithPapers.org; BYUStudies.byu.edu; MormonHistoryAssociation.org; rsc.byu.edu; PearlOfGreatPriceCentral.org; churchofjesuschrist.org; etc.
35. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 606. “Rudiments” included astrological bodies that they thought controlled human affairs.
36. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 254.
37. Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 319.
38. David Bercot, ed., *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 54–57. Immersion was also clear in Tertullian’s statement: “It makes no difference whether a man I swashed in the sea or a pool, a stream, or a fountain, a lake or a trough . . . we are plunged in water . . . He commands them to baptize into the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—not into a unipersonal God. . . . we are immersed into the three Persons, at the mention of each individual name” (57).
39. *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*, Colossians 2:14. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/colossians/2-14.htm> (accessed 9-26-19).
40. Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 314.
41. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 607.
42. Hans Burge, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: WIPF and Stock, 2009), 220.
43. Charles J. Ellicott, *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers* (Harrington, DE: Delmarva, reprint 2015 from 1878), Colossians 3:3.
44. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 5:391.
45. Strong’s Concordance, *kaphar*, “to cover over, pacify, make propitiation;” <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3722.htm> (accessed 9-27-19).
46. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, 558–559. “The basic word for atonement is *kaphar*, which has the same basic meaning in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, that being ‘to bend, arch over, cover; . . . to deny, . . . to forgive, . . . to be expiated, . . . renounce.’ The Arabic *kafara* puts the emphasis on a tight squeeze, such as tucking in the skirts, drawing a thing close to one’s self. Closely related are Aramaic and Arabic *kafat*, meaning a close embrace, which are certainly related to the Egyptian *hpet*, the common ritual embrace written with the ideogram of embracing arms. It may be cognate with the Latin *capto*, and from it comes the Persian kaftan, a monk’s robe and hood completely embracing the body. Most interesting is the Arabic *kafata*, as it is the key to a dramatic situation. It was the custom for one fleeing for his life in the desert to seek protection in the tent of a great sheik, crying out, “*Ana dakhiluka*,” meaning “I am thy suppliant,” whereupon the Lord would place the hem of his robe over the guest’s shoulder and declare him under his protection.” We see this image in the Book of Mormon too (see 2 Nephi 1:15; 4:33; Alma 5:24).
47. Flavius Josephus, Steve Mason, ed., *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary: Against Apion* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2007), 321.
48. John Durham Peters, “Bowels of Mercy,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 4, 27–41.

49. Leander Keck, *New Interpreters Bible* (1994), 655.
50. Brent D. Shaw, *Brill: Mnemosyne*, “Raising and Killing Children: Two Roman Myths,” *Fourth Series*, Vol. 54, Fasc. 1 (Feb., 2001), 31–77. www.jstor.org/stable/443318 (accessed 9-27-19).
51. Heshey Zelcher, *A Guide to the Jerusalem Talmud* (Universal Publishers, 2002), 92. “The middle class citizens often owned eight slaves, the rich from five hundred to a thousand, and an emperor as many as twenty thousand.”
52. Forty-eight General Conference talks span from 1972–2018. See on line <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/general-conference/topics/fatherhood?lang=eng> (accessed 9-27-19).
53. Joel Marcus, *The Anchor Yale Bible: Mark 1–8* (New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 2000), 21–22.
54. Brown, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 600. Early Church Fathers debated Paul’s Epistle known as 2 Corinthians as supposedly this letter to the Laodiceans, but the Marcions thought it was Ephesians (remember that letter had no addresses or names mentioned). Other early Christians mention of a letter the Laodiceans that the Marcionites forged. In the fourth century, the Eastern church challenged apocryphal letter to Laodiceans. Catholics circulated a Latin apocryphon, “To the Laodiceans” between the sixth and fifteenth century, but the council of Trent rejected it. John the Revelator wrote of the Laodiceans too (Revelations 1:11; 3:14).