

Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. ² Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; ³ meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, ⁴ that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak. ⁵ Walk in wisdom toward those *who are* outside, redeeming the time. ⁶ *Let* your speech always *be* with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. ⁷ Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. ⁸ I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, ⁹ with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is *one* of you. They will make known to you all things which *are happening* here. ¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹ and Jesus who is called Justus. These *are my* only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. ¹⁵ Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that *is* in his house. ¹⁶ Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the *epistle* from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." ¹⁸ This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace *be* with you. Amen.

Introduction

Over the Summer period while I was in England for 3 weeks I asked our guest speakers if they would work through the first three chapters of the book of Colossians.

In case you haven't been here over this period, I would like to give you a brief summary of the book and the three chapters that have been covered so far by our guest speakers.

Briefly Colossians is a book that helps us to discover new things about Jesus Christ.

The key theme is that "Jesus" is our all sufficient saviour, able to meet all of our needs.

Paul was a prisoner in Rome when he wrote this letter.

Epaphras, one of Paul's converts, came to visit him and reported about problems in the Church at Colosse. Epaphras who founded the Church at Colosse told Paul about a new false teaching that was invading the Church.

The heresy today is generally called "Gnosticism"

It comes from the Greek word "**gnosis**" which means "**to know**".

The "Gnostics" professed to have a superior knowledge of spiritual things.

Their doctrine was a strange blend of some Christian truth, Jewish Legalism, Greek Philosophy and Eastern Mysticism.

Their system of religion was supposed to give the believer a special "full knowledge" that was not possessed by others.

The Gnostics used the word "**fullness**" many times and this is why we discover Paul using it in this letter.

The doctrine of the "**Gnostics**" called for "**Legalistic Practices**" (Chapter 2: v. 16)

They also promoted strict discipline of the flesh, which is commonly called asceticism. (Chapter 2: v. 18-23)

Their mantra saying was "Touch not, taste not, handle not."

They taught that certain days were "**Holy**" and that certain foods were "**sinful**".

Although the "Gnostic" teaching seemed to appear "**spiritual**", it had no spiritual value because it **added to the Gospel** something that was not required and that led Christians away from Jesus and the true teaching of the Bible.

It was a man-made religion, that appealed to the carnal mind.

It had no value for the heart and soul of any believer.

Paul wrote this letter to challenge the believers to return to Jesus Christ by declaring that **“Jesus Christ is all that they need.”**

Paul wanted the believers in Colosse to be spiritually mature by believing and applying ALL that Jesus was able to supply them.

Jesus was enough to meet all of their needs.

They didn’t need anything else.

In Chapter 1 Paul stresses the need for the **“Gospel”** to be the main focus of their spiritual lives.

Paul challenged the believers to look back on how they were saved, and to review the evidence of their Salvation. (Chapter 1: v. 1-12)

Also in Chapter 1 Paul told the believers to focus upon the **“Cross” of Jesus Christ and all that Jesus had done for them.**

Paul told the believers that Jesus was involved in **“Creating this world, establishing the Church and the guiding Paul in His ministry.”**

In Chapter 2 Paul warns the believers about the “Gnostic” teachings.

He also teaches the believers to **“Walk” in Christ and “Grow up” in Christ.** (2: v. 6-7)

The believers were told to put **“Jesus Christ first”** in all matters and draw on **HIS** fullness. (2: v. 8-10)

In Chapter three Paul taught about “Personal Purity” in all the areas of our lives.

In particular, he encouraged this **“Personal Purity”** in our Christian fellowships, our lives at home and in our daily work.

We now continue with the Colossians series in Chapter 4.

This chapter is an extension of what Paul started to teach in Chapter 3.

1. A Challenge to Slave Owners – 4: v. 1.

It is important for us to understand that when slavery is mentioned in the New Testament, that it is not the style of slavery that existed in 19th century America.

Being a slave in the New Testament era was actually quite a good job.

In fact, even when people had the opportunity to be set free, they often chose to remain as slaves, **because they were better off financially.**

There was only one problem with slavery at this time.

The problem was with some slave owners.

The Law of the land gave the owners of slaves the legal right to beat and even kill their slaves for **minor offences.**

This meant that if the slave owners were not a nice people, that they would probably abuse their power and not treat their slaves well.

This is why Paul challenges the slave owners in the Church at Colosse to treat their slaves in a **right and fair way.**

Paul goes on to say in this verse that these slave owners are accountable to God for their actions.

Paul was saying that it “Matters” how you treat people.

We may not be slave owners, but if we are in any position of authority, then we need to be careful that we treat everybody with dignity and respect.

There is NEVER a reason to treat any Christian in an ungodly way.

I have been surprised over the last 30 years how some Christians have behaved towards other Christians and also towards Pastors of their congregations.

As a Pastor who has been on the receiving end of some ungodly behaviour, what has spoken to me about those incidents has been this.

God has been very severe, in time, to judge those people who have behaved in an ungodly way.

This has challenged me to be VERY careful in the way in which I deal with people and situations, even if I am called upon to have to discipline somebody for behaviour that is against the clear teaching of the Bible.

Christian believers matter to Jesus, He died for them.

Therefore, these people should matter to us, whatever their job or status in society.

2. A Challenge towards our Christian Witness – Chapter 4: v. 2-6.

There are three main challenges in these verses.

- a) **Watch and Pray** - Different Bible translations have a slightly different emphasis on watching and praying. In the N.K.J it says “continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.” In the E.S.V. it says “continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

The N.I.V. says “Devote yourself to prayer, being watchful and thankful”

There is a challenge here to have a “lifestyle” of prayer.

Paul is promoting a life that is soaked in prayer.

The Japanese Summer is very “Mushi- Atsui”, the English word means muggy or sweaty.

In the same way as we get absorbed in sweat during the humidity of the Japanese Summer, Paul wants us to get absorbed in prayer.

I can assure you that get absorbed in prayer is a much better experience than the hot humid season of a Japanese Summer.

Both the E.S.V. and the N.I.V. use the word “watchful” and the N.K.J. uses the word “being vigilant”.

This truth first appears in Nehemiah Chapter 4: v. 9 when the enemy threatened the Jews as they tried to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah 4: v. 9.

⁹ Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night.

In fact, Jesus Christ also teaches us to “watch and pray” in Mark Chapter 14: v. 38.

(Mark 14: v.38)

³⁸ Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.”

Jesus tells us why we should watch and pray. He tells us that our **Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.**

We will not be able to overcome temptation, unless we are constantly on our guard so to speak and praying at the same time.

We should not only be watching and praying to keep ourselves pure, but also watching and praying for opportunities to share the Gospel message.

Remember Paul when he was in prison in Philippi.

Paul prayed for the Jailer and kept his eyes open.

He saw the Jailer reaching for his sword, about to kill himself, Paul cried out and stopped him.

Thank God Paul had his eyes open as he prayed for the jailer.

We pray for opportunities, but when they come, we need to act upon them.

- b) **Walk in Wisdom** - We are told in v. 5 to be “wise” in the way we act towards outsiders. In v. 6 we are told how to act wisely.

Let us examine these challenges.

Firstly, we need to understand who these “outsiders” are.

These people are “Without Jesus Christ” in their lives.

It is a very sad thing to be “without Jesus Christ”.

This means that you are “**without hope”, “without peace” and “without forgiveness”.**

We need to be “wise” when mixing with these people.

Whether we like it or not, these people are examining our lives to try and find things to criticize.

In 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4: v. 12 it says “walk properly towards those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing”

We must be very honest in all of our dealings with Non- Christians.

Never give a Non-Christian an opportunity to be critical of your life-style.

Always pay your bills on time, do business fairly, never speak in a negative way about anybody.

You never know if that person who you might speak against is related to the person who you are talking to?

It says in verse 6 that our speech should always be seasoned with salt.

The “salt” of Holiness must always flavour our speech.

In the Old Testament the Jews used salt in their sacrifices.

This was “symbolic” of purity and the preservation of all that is good.

The Greek word for “salt” is the word “charitas” which means “grace”.

They called it this word because it gave flavour to things.

We are told in Ephesians Chapter 4: v. 29 that our speech must not be corrupt.

It is God’s “Grace” that holds back corruption.

A thoughtless word of criticism, a questionable remark, an angry word could tear down your witness for Jesus Christ.

I know that none of us are perfect and we all make mistakes but we need to work hard on our “Grace” witness to people outside the Christian faith.

Even being a “Trump” basher or critical of his office and decisions is wrong.

You may not like prime minister Abe but that does not give you the right to be critical of him in public.

3. A Challenge to those in Christian ministry – v. 7-18.

Paul couldn’t have done his ministry without a good support base backing him up.

No Christian worker can do his ministry alone. We are all labourers together with God.

1 Cor. 3: v. 9.

⁹For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, *you are* God’s building.

In v. 7-18 Paul acknowledges all those people who helped him in his ministry.

These were very important people in Paul’s life and he wanted them to know that they were appreciated.

- a) **Tychicus** - He is described as a beloved brother, faithful minister and fellow servant. Paul was sending him to the Church at Colosse to understand fully their circumstances and comfort them. This man was entrusted with carrying the letter that we can now read.

Paul had worked with **Tychicus** for about 3 years. We read about him with Paul in Greece on his missionary journey.

(Acts 20: v.4)

Being independent in Christian ministry often leads to pride and big mistakes of judgement.

However, working together as part of a team, being inter-dependent, produces humility, and results in God’s blessing.

Paul was happy to acknowledge the support of his fellow workers and so should we in the ministries where we serve.

I appreciate everybody at O.I.C. who supports me in my ministry here.

The reason I appreciate it is because it is not my ministry, it is our ministry and we are all working to serve Jesus.

It is the ministry of Jesus that is happening at O.I.C. when we all work together.

When you support me, you are serving the ministry of Jesus at O.I.C.

Together we are serving Jesus. You are really important.

- b) **Onesimus** - He is also described as a faithful and beloved brother.

If we know our Bibles well, we will know that Onesimus was not always a faithful brother.

He was actually a thief who stole money from his slave master and ran away.

Paul met Onesimus in prison and won him to Jesus Christ.

His life was totally changed, he became a new person.

No longer was he captivated by money, he was captivated by Jesus Christ.

If you read the book of Philemon you will discover that Paul had to write a letter to Onesimus’s slave master, who was called Philemon.

Paul asked Philemon to forgive Onesimus for his sin of stealing money from Philemon’s house.

God had forgiven Onesimus for his sin, because Jesus Christ had taken his punishment.

However, it wasn't easy for Philemon to forgive Onesimus.

This forgiveness took a lot of GRACE and HUMILITY.

It is never easy for us to FORGIVE people who do bad things towards us.

Jesus says in Matthew Chapter 6: v.14-15 that our forgiveness of other people is so important, that God will hold back His forgiveness towards us, if we do not forgive other people.

Matthew Chapter 6: v. 14-15.

¹⁴ "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

These verses come directly after Jesus teaches the disciples how to pray.

It is the one thing in the Lord's Prayer that Jesus focuses upon.

It is only as we understand our forgiveness through Jesus, that we can fully forgive other people.

I hope that there is **nobody** in the congregation today that has an unforgiving spirit towards anybody.

If there is then I can only appeal to you to find GRACE in your heart to forgive that person.

If you don't forgive that person then your Christian life will never be what it should be. By this I mean blessed of God and full of JOY.

- c) **Aristarchus** - This man is described as Paul's fellow prisoner. We know from Acts Chapter 19: v. 29 that this man was arrested in the riot in Ephesus.

At the time he was one of Paul's travelling companions.

Aristarchus also went with Paul on his missionary journey to Greece.

(Acts 20: v.4)

This man was with Paul when he was shipwrecked in the storm that is described in Acts Chapter 27. (Named in Acts 27: v. 2)

Aristarchus stuck closely with Paul and supported him in the difficult challenges of Christian ministry.

It takes great maturity, wisdom and God's grace to support a Christian worker when they are going through a difficult time.

Many people give up supporting Christian workers when times are difficult in their lives.

Wendy and myself are very grateful for people who have prayed and supported us for 32 years.

We may not have been in a riot and been arrested or in a ship wreck in the sea, but we have gone through difficult times.

It was during those difficult times that our supporters have been of great value to us.

We didn't give up, because God and His servants didn't give up on us.

People need your **support** when they go through difficult times, not your **rejection**.

Pastors, Missionaries and Christian workers need lots of people like Aristarchus to support them in their ministry. I hope that you are one of them.?

- d) **Mark** - Paul had once rejected Mark as a person who was **not suitable to be a companion in ministry.** Mark had left Paul after being with him in Cyprus.

(Acts 13:13)

There was also a division which is described in Acts 15: v.36-41.

³⁶ Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, *and see* how they are doing." ³⁷ Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. ³⁸ But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. ³⁹ Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; ⁴⁰ but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. ⁴¹ And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.

Barnabas believed in Mark, but Paul did not.

In 2 Tim. 4: v. 11 we are told that Paul had changed his mind about Mark and that Mark was now useful to him in ministry.

(2 Tim.4: v.11)

¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.

There is a very important lesson to learn from the situation concerning Paul and Mark.

It has been said by some wise person that:

“There are no failures in Christian ministry, only people in wrong positions, or people in right positions at the wrong time of their lives”

Jesus doesn't call people into Christian ministry to be successful.

He calls them into ministry to begin a journey of **growth and grace and servanthood.**

At the beginning of our Christian journey it would not be possible to do things that we can do later on when we are more mature and have grown to be better servants of Jesus.

Both Mark and Paul were not ready for **the GRACE and HUMILITY required for a close relationship.**

However later on in life, after God had changed their hearts, they could then work together.

God will always try and move us on to the next stage in our ministry, when we are ready and capable to handle that ministry.

So when things are not quite working out, you may be in the wrong place, or the right place at the wrong time of your life.

We must realise that we are ALL a work in progress, the work of sanctification does not stop until we reach Heaven.

- e) **Jesus who is called Justus** - We don't know very much about this person. We do know that his Hebrew name was Joshua which is translated "Jesus" in the Greek language.

His other name Justus means "someone who obeys the Law".

We know that this man was a comfort and support to Paul.

Apart from this verse, there are only two people mentioned by the name Justus in the New Testament.

The first reference is in Acts 1: v. 23. The surname of the person was called Justus.

He was one of two people selected to replace Judas as part of the 12 disciples. We know that this Justus had witnessed the life of Jesus personally from the baptism of John the Baptist until the resurrection of Jesus.

The other reference to Justus is in Acts 18: v.7. It was in Corinth.

This Justus had Paul as a lodger for a time. His house was next door to the Jewish Synagogue.

Paul was probably a lodger in this home for 18 months. (Acts18: v. 11)

This is more likely to be the person that Paul was referring to in v.11 of Colossians chapter 4.

So the big thing about this Justus if it was the same person is that he did **hospitality well.**

It was a big commitment to have a person as a lodger in your home for 18 months.

One thing for sure is that Paul would have got to know Justus well.

And of course Justus would have got to know Paul very well.

When someone is a guest in your home, you get to know how they think, act, and behave.

The life-style of Paul must have impressed Justus and Paul must have got on well with Justus.

I guess the challenging application for us is to open our homes to provide hospitality for God's servants, so that we might bless them and that they might be a blessing to us.

Hebrews Chapter 13: v.1-2.

Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels.

We don't have time to review all the other names in the text but we need to mention their names.

Epaphras who had a great zeal for the people in Colosse, labouring fervently in prayer.

Luke – he was a doctor and no doubt attended to Paul's medical needs.

Finally Paul mentions Demas and Nymphas.

Paul asks the believers to remember him in prayer.

Conclusion - Being part of a team, supporting people who are involved in Christian ministry is a very valuable and worthwhile ministry.

Be encouraged that you are appreciated by the people who you support and Jesus is also encouraged too, because it is His ministry really.