



UNITE!

A COACHES OUTREACH STUDY OF THE PRISON EPISTLES

ברוך אתה יהוה



COACHES
OUTREACH

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

This playbook is a self-study of biblical truth, tailored to coaches and the issues faced in coaching life. God himself wants to teach you. But his benefits don't come without your efforts.

DO THE LESSONS BEFOREHAND

This playbook includes **four short devotionals weekly**. Writing down your answers will help you learn and remember what God is revealing in his Word.

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THOUGHTFULLY

This playbook includes questions designed to help you easily move through each step of **the Inductive Bible Study Method** which we explain in detail on the next page. Each step is instructive and helpful.

USE THE STUDY NOTES

Next to each day's questions, you'll find **study notes** to help you more fully understand the passage. Written with coaches in mind, they summarize the best research and provide background on words, history, and theology. Though scholarly, they're easy to read with illustrations from sports and coaching. Underline or highlight things that impacted you to share with the group.

SHOW UP READY TO SHARE

These studies are designed for **group discussions**. God has given every coach different insights and life experiences to share with others. Don't keep what God has shown you a secret. Share it.

ANSWER THE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

We've designed our application questions specifically for coaches. **Let what you learn change you**. Fill out the black "Primary Application" box at the end of each week to keep track of what you are learning.

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

Most believers neglect prayer and often bear their own burden alone. **Share honest prayer requests** during this journey together. Prayer will knit you together in Christ and help you grow in your faith too.

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

All Coaches Outreach Bible studies use the **Inductive Bible Study Method**. It's a three-step process: Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Each step is designed to ask and answer one key question.

1. **Observation** asks, "**What do I see?**" Look for the following: context, topic, speaker, audience, location, commands, tone, and atmosphere. Ask questions like Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? Look for key words like "therefore," "but," "likewise," "if," and more. Don't miss critical facts, people, or the words and/or actions involved. We'll highlight these in both our daily questions and our Study Notes.

This first part, taking only a few minutes, establishes a biblically-grounded reference point for the next two steps. The better you get at observation ("What do I see?"), the better you'll be at interpretation.

2. **Interpretation** asks, "**What does it mean?**" Good interpretation considers all we noted in observation and consciously prohibits our own personal feelings, perspectives, or opinions from distorting its meaning. It might require understanding a key word or phrase, a cultural practice, or historical background. Don't be afraid to leave a passage with questions unanswered. "I don't know" enables you to learn more from further thought, friends, Scripture, or prayer.

Interpretation concludes by developing a timeless truth or principle—a truth valid for all times and cultures. Coaches Outreach Bible studies provide this principle for you in our Day and Week statements. By the way, a given passage may contain more than one such principle. This brings you to the final step...application.

3. **Application** asks, "**What should I do?**" God's Word should impact us, not just inform us. As you work through application, consider the following areas: **Doctrinal**: What teachings or beliefs does it impact? **Personal**: How should this impact my personal life? **Expressional**: What truth can I share with others?

Coaches Outreach studies will always specifically apply biblical truth to your coaching life. We consistently and specifically apply biblical truth to the unique trials, joys, opportunities, and issues facing coaches on a regular basis. Yet these biblical truths will certainly relate to other areas such as friends, marriage, family, church, and more.

UNITE!

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All Scripture is from the English Standard Version (ESV Bible) unless otherwise noted. The ESV does not use upper case letters in its pronouns when referring to God. For consistency, when we integrate the biblical text into our Study Notes, our Notes reflect this as well.

Written by: Mark Chalemin
Edited by: Richard Wells and Dan Mitchell
Layout Design by: Nick Richards

Coaches Outreach wishes to thank the coaches and spouses who contributed their true stories for publication.

WE ALSO THANK GOD FOR ALL THE COACHES AND THEIR SPOUSES WHO MINISTER DAILY IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST.

ZERO WEEK



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Audio version**

When the New England Patriots won their first Super Bowl in 2002 against the St. Louis Rams, they were huge underdogs. The Rams had a high-powered offense racking up points on a weekly basis. They averaged 31 points per game over the 16-game regular season and 32 points per game in the two previous playoff games. The Patriots, many believed, were lucky just to be in the game.

As the Super Bowl began, each team was asked to choose either their offense or defense to be introduced. Of course, having your name announced at the Super Bowl in front of millions of fans is what kids dream of while playing ball in their youth.

As expected, the Rams chose their offensive starters to be introduced. One by one, each player ran onto the field to the sound of his own name. Some jogged slowly, savoring the moment. Others danced through the tunnel of cheerleaders.

The Patriots' introduction followed. It was *very* different from that of the Rams. The Patriots chose to be introduced as a team. ESPN commentator, Trey Wingo, called it, "the coolest thing I have ever seen in 36 years of Super Bowl history."

The Patriots ran onto the field as *one*—not as a group of individuals wearing the same uniform, but as *one* team rallying passionately around *one* mission. These guys gave up the opportunity to broadcast their *names* to millions of viewers, choosing instead to broadcast their *unity*.

The unity of their team was inspiring. It left fans crying and announcers speechless. Once the game began, the Patriot's fierce unity became powerfully evident as they unleashed their collective energy on a common goal and, ultimately, to victory. They won 20-17. Nearly 2,000 years earlier, the Apostle Paul faced a prison sentence. Prior to his sentence, this evangelistic dynamo had spent nearly a decade travelling thousands of miles to numerous countries. Wherever he went, he boldly spoke about the saving work of Jesus Christ and planted churches in his wake.

During his 4-year prison term, he wrote four letters with one theme...unity. Paul could have focused on himself and his limitations. However, Paul focused on others and saw his circumstances as God did. He knew that, in reality, he wouldn't *lose* anything of eternal value. Quite the contrary. With a God-centered attitude, strong relationships, and commitment to unity, Paul effectively served both God and others. Therefore, no matter his circumstances or consequences, he passionately followed the Lord's call to unite.

Who wrote the Prison Epistles and what are they about?

Paul authored these four Prison Epistles. In Week 1, we'll study the circumstances behind these letters as described in Acts 28. In the course of our study, we'll look more closely at Paul's life through his mini autobiography found in *Philippians*.

Paul penned these letters during his 4-year confinement—roughly two years in Israel and another two years under house arrest in Rome. He probably wrote these letters during that second period. An easy way to remember these "Lockdown Letters" is to recall the

first letter of each book, and then picture the Apostle Paul, sitting next to a Roman Guard, sipping a *Pepsi* (PEP-C).

Letter #1 — Paul wrote *Ephesians* to the church at Ephesus and it became a widely circulated document among numerous churches. We won't be studying *Ephesians* in this playbook since we went through it in detail just a few years ago. What follows is the order in which we will study each remaining "Lockdown Letter."

Letter #2 — Paul wrote *Philippians* to address matters in the church at Philippi, a prominent city near the east coast of Northern Greece. Paul had visited that city on his 2nd missionary journey (Acts 16:14-34). Ironically, almost immediately upon arrival, the apostle's faith led him to be tortured and imprisoned. Literally overnight, his captivity ultimately led his jailer's entire household to become Christ followers.

Letter #3 — Paul wrote *Colossians* to the church in Colossae, a city we don't read about in Paul's journeys. Given its location, however, it was probably a church planted as a result of Paul's ministry in Ephesus.

Letter #4 — Finally, Paul wrote *Philemon* to one of the leaders of the church in Colossae. It contains very personal communication on a very sensitive topic...how a Christian master, Philemon, can and should receive Onesimus, his runaway slave who had now become a brother in Christ.

Although these four separate letters address four distinct recipients with distinct concerns, they all share a common theme—unity in the Body of Christ. Unable to speak to the issue in person, in about 62 AD, Paul poured his heart out to these recipients experiencing division of some kind. How can they solve the problem of *disunity*? Christ. Although every problem was somewhat different, they all shared one solution. *All* these situations could find unity in some aspect of the Person of Christ. The chart below provides a summary of the four letters.

Why should a coach study the Prison Epistles?

You're a coach, not a prisoner or church planter. So, why should *you* study these letters? Thankfully, you aren't literally behind bars. However, every life faces *some* kind of confinement. We might be or feel confined financially, geographically, emotionally, racially, physically, or some combination of these. This confinement and restriction can make us feel like we are less valuable and less useful to God than one who is "free" of such limitations.

Let's make it personal. If you think that the circumstances brought on by COVID-19 means you're not able to do what you were called by God to do, think again. Our sovereign God has not been taken by surprise nor rendered impotent by this virus. If you are restricted in any way, look for the opportunities the Lord is laying before your eyes and at your feet.

Paul's letters remind us to see our life as God does. He proves that, when in God's will, we have more freedom to serve the Lord than under *any* other conditions. The apostle wrote, "[Christ] said to me,

The Prison (PEP-C) Epistles

Book/Letter	Conflict Specifically between	Conflict Principally Between	Resolved Through	Look to Christ, Our
<i>Philippians</i>	Sister & Sister	Others in church	Humility	Model
<i>Ephesians</i>	Jew & Gentile	Factions in Church	Acceptance	Maker
<i>Philemon</i>	Master & Slave	Households	Forgiveness	Master
<i>Colossians</i>	Church & Truth	Philosophies	Submission	Mind

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). These letters reveal the sincerity of those words.

These letters also remind us of the power of our own words to encourage, challenge, comfort, teach, and more...no matter what restrictions you may need to overcome. In fact, as you have probably experienced yourself, the words of encouragement you offer from a position of struggle can often carry more weight than those very same words coming from a position of ease or comfort.

What kind of study is *Unite!*?

These days, it's considered impolite to read someone's diary. However, we will feel like we're doing just that as Paul pours out his heart in each letter to those he loves. As mentioned earlier, this playbook will look at three of Paul's four letters from prison, *Philippians*, *Colossians*, and *Philemon*, in that order. These letters contain doctrinal and biblical truth, as well as expressions of very close, personal relationships.

On the night before Jesus' crucifixion, he prayed in Gethsemane for one thing...unity among his followers (John 17). That alone should help us pursue unity as our biggest “win” from God's perspective. To read the comments from believers to other believers on Twitter and Facebook these days surely exposes the need for Christ's prayer. Regarding biblical doctrine, contemporary politics, or personal taste, modern followers

of Christ need help in expressing the unity Christ both desires and commands.

Considering Paul's circumstances, he offers a challenging perspective on the value of being in God's will and helping God's people become unified. As we can see from the chart, to enjoy Christ's unity, we must embody Christ's Spirit. Unity requires humility, acceptance, forgiveness, and submission.

What's the Game Plan?

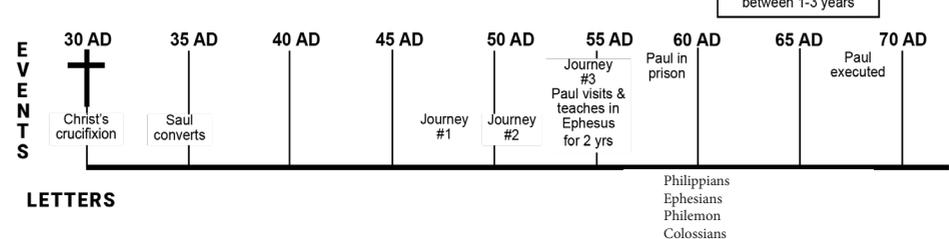
We're going to look at these letters from prison in their chronological order. Not only will this sequence reinforce the history behind this correspondence, it will reveal how critical it is to courageously express our faith horizontally (with one another) in *Philippians*, vertically (with God) in *Colossians*, and personally (one on one) in *Philemon*. We'll start with the background story in *Acts*. Next, we'll look at *Philippians* (believers in a city where Paul experienced jail for the first time). The focus here will be on relationships within the church. We'll then look at *Colossians*, a letter to a church in a city Paul had never visited. The focus here will be on our relationship with God. Finally, we'll end with *Philemon*. In this very personal *letter* to a very influential church leader and slave owner, Paul addresses the very personal *issue* of forgiveness and reconciliation between believers.

Our cover image depicts an athlete surrounded by his peers, praying over him. Their powerful expression of unity demonstrates their commitment, loyalty, and support. Perhaps you're experiencing disunity and division and need this kind of team around you. On the other hand, perhaps the Lord has already blessed you with unity, but you just need some encouragement and tools to sustain and grown it. Either way, we believe you'll gain much from this study.

“*Unite!*” is God's call for all who follow him. As a coach, the most common measure of victory can be seen on the scoreboard. However, in *God's eyes*, unity is the biggest “win.” The Lord never promised that our faithfulness would bring worldly success or ease. Paul's faithfulness landed him in prison, eventually leading to his execution. Still, no matter his circumstances, Paul could still score the biggest win of all by achieving unity. So can you.

If you have any hindrances or restrictions (as we all do), you only have them because the Lord has allowed it. God has plans to use you in ways that extend far beyond your wildest imagination. As you follow him and yield to his mysterious plan, you can lead the call to *Unite!*

TIMELINE OF EVENTS RELATED TO PRISON LETTERS*





BIG PICTURE

To more fully appreciate Paul's letters from prison, we must understand his circumstances. Paul's presence in Jerusalem had led to a riot among the Jews. Because of their disturbance, the Romans arrested him not for any wrongdoing on his part, but for his own safety. After his earlier hearings in Israel before Felix and Agrippa, he sailed to Rome and was shipwrecked along the way.

Rather than fighting his arrest, Paul saw it as a God-given opportunity. Eventually, God would use his 4-year captivity to bind and heal a variety of wounds in both churches and individuals. The Lord would give Paul unique opportunities to speak and serve in ways that still bring unity and wisdom to the church today.

OBSERVATION

- Summarize the segments of Paul's trip to Rome, by mode and/or duration of each segment (11-14)
Shipwreck to Syracuse (11):

In Syracuse (12):

Syracuse to Rhegium (13): Duration unknown
Rhegium to Puteoli (13):

In Puteoli (14):
- Where did Paul end up? (16)
- Who met Paul there and how did he respond? (15)
- Describe Paul's housing circumstances. (16)

INTERPRETATION

- Paul's journey to Rome originated in his obedience. However, it took him away from his usual missionary work. In your opinion, what critical perspective kept Paul's spirits high through this experience?
- Based on this passage, how important do you think it was for Paul to have ongoing connection with other believers? (15) With unbelievers? (16)

APPLICATION

- Consider your current limitations. What obstacles do they present? What opportunities?
- Which of the two, obstacles or opportunities, will dominate your perception and attitude? Why?

ACTS 28:11-16

¹¹ After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. ¹² Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. ¹³ And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. ¹⁴ There we found brothers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵ And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. ¹⁶ And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

In his first 6 seasons, Michael Vick became a nightmare for defenses while establishing himself as the NFL's fastest quarterback. However, just before the Atlanta Falcon's 2007 season, Michael faced his own nightmare. Vick received a 21-month prison sentence for his involvement in dog-fighting. He had no choice but to suspend any future accomplishments for imposed confinement.

Vick's time in prison moved him to prayerfully return to and lean on the childhood faith that he'd been running from for years. After serving 18 months, Vick was released in 2009. Naturally, he wanted to return to the NFL, but now he realized, "My faith was the best thing that I could have, more valuable than money or anything else."

In August of 2009, the Philadelphia Eagles offered Michael a 1-year contract after intervention by Tony Dungy, his recent mentor. Michael and fiancé, Kijafa, married in the offseason and he thrust himself into charitable work through The Michael Vick Foundation. He also worked to strengthen animal welfare laws and wrote a book entitled: *Michael Vick: Finally Free*, chronicling his journey. Now Vick testifies, "Even in my darkest moments, those are the times to lean on Christ. Why wouldn't you? Who else are you going to lean on?"¹ The Apostle Paul understood this better than most.



If you study Paul's evangelistic travels in the book of *Acts*, you'll see that he rarely stayed in one place for very long until his arrest and imprisonment in Israel. Now, after two years in Israel, he travelled to and settled in Rome for the *last* two years of his 4-year imprisonment. With a strong confidence in God's sovereignty, Paul reasoned that this journey to the Empire's capital was primarily a spiritual investment, not a worthless imprisonment.

First, he traveled for free to the world's most influential city—Rome. *Second*, he could personally communicate the gospel to the city's leaders, Jew and Gentile. *Third*, through correspondence and personal visits by his protégés, he could still develop churches and leaders.

On the way to Rome, Paul's transport ship became shipwrecked on the island of Malta. However, thanks to Paul's intervention, all 270 on board survived. Luke recorded that story in Acts 27:1 through 28:10. This seemingly incidental story shows us how God watched over his servants down to the tiniest detail. That must have encouraged Paul as he waited on Malta for God's timing for the next phase of his ministry. Starting with a viper's bite miraculously having no effect on Paul, God transformed an island. God physically healed people through Paul. In this way, you and Paul have much in common. More on that shortly.

Finally, *after three months*, once the rough winter weather had passed, the Romans opened the seas again.² Setting sail for Rome, Luke again provides a meticulous itinerary of times and places. Passengers and crew *set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island—a ship of Alexandria*, with the *twain gods*, Castor and Pollux from Greek mythology, *as its figurehead*. Sailors venerated these gods as their protectors. Seeing their constellation in

the sky was always considered a favorable omen for a smooth voyage.³ The sailors learned that Paul's God would save them. Indeed, God's self-revelation on this journey must have boosted Paul's confidence in God's providential care.

Before arriving at Rome, they sailed roughly a hundred miles⁴ to *Syracuse* and *stayed there for three days*. *From there they made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day they came to Puteoli. There we found some brothers and were invited to stay with them seven days*. So, after a 150-mile walk along the Appian Way, they *came to Rome*. The church in Rome had already received his letter (written only a few years earlier), so now they welcomed their apostle in person.

“ THE LORD CAN HEAL OTHERS THROUGH YOU

What better way to begin a stay in the Empire's capital *than with the brothers there! When they heard about Paul coming to Rome* (along with Luke and Aristarchus), they *came as far as the Forum of Appius* (43 miles southeast of Rome) *and Three Taverns* (33 miles from Rome) *to meet them. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. When the group came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him*. We'll discuss this arrangement in more detail tomorrow.

Whether you feel like you have chosen where to serve or *God* has, the Lord can heal others through you. Besides physical, that healing may be relational, emotional, financial, or spiritual. The late Bob Cook used to say, “Walk with the King today and be a blessing!” That's sound encouragement. You may not always know what to say or do, but

walk with God. He'll bless others through you. Count on it.

Coach, keeping a godly perspective through difficult circumstances and challenges of your life. COVID-19 is just *one* example of how out of control our world is... to us. Like Paul, you can choose to see your circumstances as an unwelcome *obstacle* or as an unprecedented *opportunity* for you to serve God.

You can't plan ahead for every act of ministry God has for you to accomplish. Sometimes—probably more often than we realize—you just have to be where the Lord wants you to be and ready to do what he wants you to do. In short, our obedience and God's perspective will guide us to his will.

“ I THINK HE MADE ONE LAW OF THAT KIND IN ORDER THAT THERE MIGHT BE OBEDIENCE. IN ALL THESE OTHER MATTERS WHAT YOU CALL OBEYING HIM IS BUT DOING WHAT SEEMS GOOD IN YOUR OWN EYES ALSO. IS LOVE CONTENT WITH THAT?

-CS LEWIS



OBSERVATION

1. After 3 days, who did Paul meet with and what did he talk about? (17-20)
2. How did they respond to Paul? (21)
3. What did they want from Paul? (22)

INTERPRETATION

4. Why do you think Paul explained how and why he was there? (17-20)
5. What new opportunities opened for him? (22)

APPLICATION

6. Think about your past or current circumstances. What new opportunities have they opened to do God's work?

ACTS 28:17-22

¹⁷ After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. ¹⁸ When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. ¹⁹ But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—though I had no charge to bring against my nation. ²⁰ For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain." ²¹ And they said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. ²² But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against."



Paul had been imprisoned in Israel for about two years and then travelled a few months, under guard, on his way to Rome. Now, after a long and difficult journey at sea, he had finally arrived at the capital of the Roman Empire. Although still a prisoner, as a non-violent citizen, he awaited his trial under medium security conditions (see No Equal Time). For the next two years, Paul remained under house arrest, watched by a Roman guard.

Paul planned his work and worked his plan without delay. *After just three days* in Rome, he went "to the Jew first" (Romans 1:16). On his multi-year missionary journeys, he ran this exact pattern in city after city. He made a beeline to the synagogue to speak with its leaders at the earliest possible opportunity. He identified as a Jew and then told them about the Person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. He explained how Christ had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of their long-awaited Messiah. Once they heard Paul preach, he usually experienced acceptance by some and rejection by others. His strategy continued while under arrest in Rome.

Thus, Paul *called together the local leaders of the Jews. When they had gathered, he* introduced himself and the story of his past two years. Paul began, "*Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers*" The apostle continued his story, explaining that, despite his innocence, he *was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.*

Paul continued to explain that *when they* (the Romans) *had examined him, they wished to set him at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty* in his case. *But*



NEVER PUT A PERIOD WHERE GOD HAS PUT A COMMA.

-ANONYMOUS

because the Jews objected, he was *compelled to appeal to Caesar*. On making this point, Paul immediately clarified that he appealed to Caesar even though he *had no charge to bring against* his own nation, the Jews. Rather, he explained, the *reason* he *asked* for the formal hearing was *to see and speak with* all of the Jewish leaders standing in front of him. Perhaps raising his shackles high, he declared, *“It is because of the hope of Israel I am wearing this chain.”* Paul had used this phrase, “hope of Israel” earlier in Acts to describe his heart’s passion for Israel (Acts 23:6; 24:15; 26:6–7) to believe in the resurrection of Jesus. However, it meant so much more. The “hope of Israel”⁵ meant Jesus’ fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to Israel. The essence of Paul’s words meant that he gladly accepted his *physical* chains if they could bring Israel’s *spiritual* freedom.

The Jews’ response indicated unfamiliarity with Paul or his legal case. Further, although the gospel had reached Rome long before Paul’s arrival (~49AD),⁶ these leaders seem equally unfamiliar with the brand of Judaism he preached. That would soon change.

Paul may have been surprised that no one had “poisoned the well” before his arrival. *These leaders had received no letters from Judea about* him and none of the brothers coming there has reported or spoken any evil about him. That may explain their *desire to hear what* Paul’s *views are* regarding *this sect* of Judaism (Christianity). Three sects are mentioned in Acts: the Sadducees (5:17), the Pharisees (15:5), and the Christians (24:5 and 28:22).⁷ What did they know of Christianity? *Everywhere* they go, *it is spoken against*. How would you like to live with that reputation and challenge?

Coach, as mentioned earlier, you and Paul have much more in common than you might think. Just like Paul, very often, God will allow your obedience to him to change your circumstances. The Lord will change your life to work

through you. Sometimes we can see it *before* it unfolds or catch it *during* that time of ministry. Sometimes we may not see it until *after* he has used us. Finally, he may not reveal why he acted as he did until we see him face to face. In all these times, especially the last kind, trust his goodness and look for the opportunities to serve him which he will certainly offer.

Some circumstances will feel very restrictive, but we must ask God for his wisdom to see his plan. He may move you to a school or town you would not have chosen if the choice were fully yours. He might place you with co-workers who are so difficult you could never have imagined the trial. Despite these hardships, God can use you to bless others beyond your imagination.

“**GOD CAN USE YOU TO BLESS OTHERS BEYOND YOUR IMAGINATION**”

NO EQUAL TIME

Although Paul remained a prisoner, not all time was equal time. Rome employed a three-tier system of incarceration. The specific tier a given prisoner experienced all depended on the prisoner.

- 1) Public jail: Severe imprisonment, possibly including dungeons with prisoners chained and possibly tortured.
- 2) Military custody: Medium security, usually in army barracks or a private house, often required chaining a prisoner to a soldier.
- 3) Free custody: “Easy time” with no actual confinement. “Convicts with clout” (e.g., a Roman Senator) were merely held responsible for their own court appearance.⁸

Rome probably received information about the official legal opinion regarding Paul (Acts 26:31) and deemed it appropriate to keep him under military custody (28:16). This relatively light confinement confirms that Rome believed that Paul posed no threat, although he did not receive the lightest custody (i.e., without chains).⁹

TRUE COACHING STORY

Coaching is God’s calling in my life. However, over the years, I’ve learned that calling can be difficult to follow amidst life’s circumstances. During a recent transition, I began to question my own conviction some, but never God’s calling to coach. These difficult times included family health issues, returning to school full-time, and a much different road than I thought I would be traveling. What I never realized at the time I questioned my own conviction was that God would use all these things to prepare me for my current position.

As a coach, I have the greatest potential to build into kids’ lives and make a difference for decades to come. I believe that God can take our desires to impact, and even disciple, our kids and turn any circumstance around for his glory. Today, you may be facing one of the toughest challenges of your entire coaching career, but God will turn it around. Time and time again, he has been faithful to prove this in my life and also in my calling to coach.



OBSERVATION

1. What do we know about Paul's meeting with the Jewish leaders? (23)
Attendance:

Duration:

Content:
2. What happened just before they left? (24-25)
3. Summarize the passage Paul quoted. (26-27)

INTERPRETATION

4. Evaluate the interest level of the Jewish leaders in Paul's message. Explain your answer. (23)
5. Why would the Isaiah passage cause such a stir? (26-27)
6. What character trait(s) did Paul reveal in quoting this passage?

APPLICATION

7. Who comes to mind when you envision people who don't want to hear the truth? How can Paul's example free and empower you?
8. What do you most need to remember when speaking to those who resist the truth?

ACTS 28:23-27

²³ When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. ²⁴ And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. ²⁵ And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶ "Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." ²⁷ For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them."

CO

After arriving in Rome, Paul had barely set down his bags in his new living quarters when he arranged a time to meet with the local Jewish leaders. They had heard of him and his teaching, but had no *detailed* knowledge of either. However, these leaders did tell Paul that they hadn't heard anything *negative*. That statement alone may have indicated to Paul that either this particular group of Jews had truly not heard much of his teaching or that they chose to hide that knowledge from him. Nevertheless, at this initial greeting, they agreed to meet again sometime soon for an extended discussion.

So, **when they had appointed a day** to meet with Paul, **they came to him at his lodging** in even **greater numbers**. Evidently, Paul set the local Jewish conversation ablaze! No surprise. The apostle had the unique status of simultaneously being a mystery, celebrity, and lightning rod. A person with even a mild interest in spiritual things would crave this gathering.

Especially with Paul teaching, what would you expect when this many people came together with just as many opinions? It became an apostolic marathon! **From morning till evening he expounded to them**. Say what you will about Paul, he had a passion for "the game" any coach could appreciate. His stamina—physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional—could not be exhausted. Nothing lit him up and kept him on fire like the joy of **testifying to the kingdom of God**. That's *what* he talked about. However, in our day, where "truth" is established by personal experience and feelings, we must notice *how* Paul talked about it. He did it persuasively, scripturally, and factually...like Christ's resurrection.

In previous cities, Paul went to the Jews first and preached in

their synagogues (Acts 13:44-49). Here, *they* came to *him* as he kept **trying to convince them about Jesus**. Although exceptionally well-educated about Jewish laws and traditions, the former Pharisee didn't come to Rome to be another scholar, impressing others and passing on his knowledge. No. Through God's power, he sought to change their minds about who Jesus is and what he had done for them.

He wanted them to believe in Jesus' death and resurrection, while also recognizing Jesus as their long-awaited Messiah. As he wrote to the Romans earlier, *"My heart's desire and prayer to God for [Israel] is that they may be saved"* (Romans 10:1). That goal raises the next question, "How did he try to convince them?" Answer: common ground.

Paul spoke to these Jewish leaders **from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets**, what we call the "Old Testament," Jesus took the very same approach after his resurrection when he spoke with two travelers on the road to Emmaus about his death and resurrection (Luke 24:13-35). So what happened when Paul did likewise?

Here in Rome, Paul experienced exactly the same response as in virtually every other discussion with Jewish scholars throughout Israel, Greece, and Asia Minor. In the Empire's capital, **some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved**. As before, these leaders ended up **disagreeing among themselves**. Then **they departed**, but only **after Paul made one last statement**.

Paul rebuked his unbelieving listeners, **"The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet**. Then, apparently from memory, the former Pharisee quoted the passage: **'Go to this people, and say, "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see, but never perceive."**' For the fifth time, the prophecy of Isaiah 6 was fulfilled, quoted from Scripture, and directly applied to the Jews (see Not Again!).

Then Paul applied this ancient passage to his current hard-hearted audience, **"For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them."** Can you feel his blend of frustration and passion? Can you relate?

Coach, your combination of competitive intensity and relational passion means you probably relate to Paul more than most people could ever understand. God has placed you in your position to speak truth into young hearts and minds. Today, that job is harder than ever before. Most people—parents and youth alike—don't believe in absolute truth. They only desire a certain end result. Further, many of those who *do* believe truth exists choose to reject it.

“ **GOD HAS PLACED YOU IN YOUR POSITION TO SPEAK TRUTH**

This modern rejection of truth can show up in everything from your teaching about a particular technique in your sport to teaching basic life lessons. Either one can lead to your frustration. That's why we must remember two things. 1) God has given you a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to speak truth into their lives. Don't ever *stop* speaking it. 2) Like what happened to the Apostle Paul, some people will listen to you and some won't. God has not given you the responsibility for the choices others make once you have spoken. Don't ever *start* carrying it. Remembering both truths will relieve much stress from your coaching ministry.

NOT AGAIN!

Over 700 years earlier, God had told Isaiah that Israel would reject his Word and refuse his message. Jesus quoted this prophecy when Pharisees accused him of being empowered by Satan (Mt. 12:24) and when he gave the Parables of the Kingdom (Mt. 13:14-15). At the close of his ministry, Jesus spoke of this prophecy again (Jn. 12:37-41). Paul quoted it in his earlier letter (Ro. 11:8) and now he used it for the last time. God had been speaking to his people for over 700 years. What patience! What persistence!¹⁰

TRUE COACHING STORY

One of the toughest decisions I've had to make as a coach was dismissing a kid from the team during the middle of the season. He was a starter and a senior, but his attitude and behavior had gotten so bad that we had no other choice. I had a close relationship with the young man at the time, so I had to give him the news.

I told him about our decision to let him go, and he was very angry. I also told him that if he didn't realize that this was a "wake-up call," he was likely going to end up dead or in jail. He was so angry that he didn't speak to me from that point on.

Last fall, nearly three years later, I had a knock on the door to my office. In front of me stood that young man we'd dismissed from the team. He stood before me proudly, dressed in a sailor's uniform. After his senior year, he'd joined the US Navy and served in Iraq. He had just gotten back on leave and came back to see me to thank me for the wake-up call in his life. You just never know.



OBSERVATION

1. What thought is “therefore” connected to? (see previous verse)
2. What did Paul make known? (28)
3. Describe Paul’s experience in Rome from this point forward. (30-31)

Duration (30a):

Finances (30b):

Social Life (30c):

Evangelism (31):

INTERPRETATION

4. Although physically confined what work continued? (28, 31)
5. What do these verses convey about Paul’s attitude and activity re: his confinement (30-31)

6. In what ways did Paul experience freedom?

APPLICATION

7. Consider your current circumstantial limitations. Who can you now serve with greater freedom?

ACTS 28:28-31

²⁸ Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

³⁰ He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

PRAYER REQUESTS

PRIMARY APPLICATION - RECORD ON PAGE 100

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Why does God make life “easier” for some and “harder” for others?



Paul tried to convince these Jewish leaders that Jesus was indeed the prophesied Christ, the long-awaited Messiah. He opened their Scriptures—the Law of Moses and the Prophets—and pointed out this truth. Yet after all of Paul’s efforts, as also prophesied, most rejected Jesus.

Therefore, since Israel rejected their promised Messiah, Paul *let it be known* to these leaders *that* the prophesied opportunity for *this salvation of God has been sent to*

the Gentiles because *they*, unlike Israel, *will listen!* For a Jew, these words violated centuries of a perceived favored position and almost exclusive access to the one true God. Gentile conversion was permissible, but evangelism rare (e.g., Jonah).

All that would change. Paul told these leaders that their rejection had caused God to open wide the door to Gentile

salvation. At this point in the passage, some translations (NASB and KJV) insert a verse 29 here, describing the tension Isaiah's prophecy raised (see Where's Verse 29?).

Paul didn't want to irritate or exclude anyone. However, such reactions wouldn't stop him. Indeed, he continued his teaching ministry while he **lived there** in his rented quarters for **two whole years at his own expense**. He likely covered this cost through both donations (Philippians 4:10-14) and tent-making as he did earlier in Thessalonica (Acts 18:3; Philippians 4:15-16).

Throughout this time, he **welcomed all**—Jew and Gentile—**who came to him**, without favoritism. In his earliest letter (Galatians), he defied tradition and culture by teaching the spiritual equality of all believers, “[If you have put on Christ], *there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:28). Pay special attention to that last truth: You are all one in Christ Jesus.

The night before his crucifixion, after celebrating Passover, Jesus walked with his disciples to Gethsemane, an olive grove on Jerusalem's eastern edge. Upon arrival, he could have prayed for many things, but he mainly focused on one.

Although Jesus did pray for himself, the overwhelming majority of his prayer focused on those who currently believed and those who *would* later believe...including you and me. As recorded in John 17, of all the things Jesus could have asked the father for his people, the main focus of his entire prayer for believers was our unity with God and others. This was Jesus' #1 desire for us.

So it shouldn't surprise us that Paul considered and evaluated every problem in light of its impact on the unity of Christ's body. As mentioned in Zero Week, when he sent letters to local

“ **HIS CHAINS GAVE OTHERS FREEDOM AND POWER!**

churches (like *Philippians* and *Colossians*) and individual Christ-followers (*Philemon*), he focused on how their problem affected the unity of believers.

You already know this powerful truth. On your team, when one player underperforms, it doesn't just harm *them*. It harms the entire *team*. Likewise, when we, individually, lie or hate, it doesn't just harm us, individually. It harms every relationship we have, *especially* those in the body of Christ. We'll see this played out as we dive deeper in the coming weeks. For now, let's return to Paul.

To close his entire two-book (*Luke-Acts*) story, Luke announced that Paul continued, as we might expect, **proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance**. God had led him to this place and Paul honored the Lord by making the most of every opportunity God gave him.

Luke's abrupt ending leaves us asking, “What happened with Paul going before Caesar?” Luke probably finished writing *Acts* before that trial. However, the bigger question we should be asking is, “What happened to Paul's mission of spreading the gospel?” Did it stop? In Paul's view, his imprisonment really served to advance the gospel (Philippians 1:12-14). His chains gave others freedom and power for Christ!

After being released, Paul wrote to his two young protégés, Timothy and Titus, explaining how to lead a church. A few years later, Paul was arrested again. This second arrest led to his final imprisonment in *much* harsher conditions and eventually to his execution. During those final months, he wrote his second letter to Timothy.

Coach, Paul allowed himself to be placed in confinement so that the message of the gospel could spread. Allow me to return to a previous question. In what ways are you confined? How do you handle such difficult circumstances? Do you grumble as you cry out with David, “How long, oh Lord, how long?” There's nothing wrong with being honest before God in prayer. However, God wants something greater for us and from us.

If you haven't already done so, take a fresh look at your particular confinement. Now, instead of seeing only its negative side, consider why God might have put you there. Does he want to use its abrasiveness to smooth some lingering character issues? Has he placed someone around you to reach out to that others may have ignored? God may very well have bound you to your current circumstances in order to serve in ways that would be otherwise impossible. Make the most of it!

WHERE'S VERSE 29?

Sometimes in copying Scripture, scribes add their own minor details as helpful commentary on the actual Scripture. That appears to be the situation here. After Luke finished his original manuscript of Acts, a scribe likely inserted his own words to describe the widely-known response of the Jewish leaders (verse 29) after Paul referenced Isaiah's prophecy. This copyists commentary was later included as the original manuscript (as verse 29 when numbered chapters and verses were inserted in Bibles during the 1500's). Since then, thousands of earlier manuscripts which do not include these words revealed them to be additional commentary. Therefore, modern translations have removed the verse.



BIG PICTURE

Now that we understand the reason for and circumstances of Paul's imprisonment, we'll look at his first letter from Rome. He wrote it to the church in Philippi, the first church he planted in Europe. Unlike the earlier cities he visited, this Roman colony had very few Jews. Two important converts were a woman named Lydia and her household, then a jailer along with his entire household.

Due to Gentile converts, this church soon grew strong, both numerically and spiritually. During Paul's imprisonment in Rome, they provided financial support as mentioned in Philippians 4:10-14. Paul wrote his letter to encourage them to rejoice even in difficult circumstances, *remind* them about humility, thank them for their financial support, and stress the importance of unity.

OBSERVATION

1. ID the names and self-description of this letter's senders. (1a)
2. ID the letter's recipients and their description. What does he wish for them? (1-2)

INTERPRETATION

3. Based on Paul's self-ID in this passage, what can we learn about the way he sees...
- himself and Timothy? (1a)

- the church at Philippi? (1b)
4. As you understand it, what is a "saint"?

APPLICATION

5. Paul and Timothy saw themselves as servants, not missionaries. They also saw the Philippians as saints, not sinners. Consider your roles and the people around you. How do you see...
Yourself?

Your staff members?

Your athletes?
6. How do those perspectives affect your relationships with each?

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1660, the British imprisoned John Bunyan for conducting services outside the control of the Church of England. They probably thought it would teach everyone a lesson. They were right. However, the lesson wasn't what they intended.

While in prison, Bunyan penned *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a Christian allegory which became one of the most significant religious works in English literature. Since released in 1678, it has been translated into more than 200 languages and has never been out of print.

Perhaps this British captive received inspiration from the most famous Christian prisoner-author of all time. While forcibly confined, the "apostle to the Gentiles" wrote letters to churches and people, none more beloved than the believers in Philippi. This letter, inspired by God, has been greatly appreciated by believers throughout the centuries.



Roman correspondence typically named the sender and recipient, often with a brief greeting. Occasionally, they added thanks to the Roman gods and prayers for well-being. Paul's letters followed this custom, but used it to communicate God's relevant truth to a particular recipient. ¹

In Acts 9, **Paul** was originally introduced as "Saul." Most Jews living outside Israel received two names at birth. The apostle's parents named him "Saul" (Hebrew) and "Paul" (Greek).² In Acts 13:9, Luke recorded, "*Saul who was also called 'Paul'...*" after which Luke consistently used his Greek name, probably to better relate to the Gentiles.

Paul began by acknowledging **Timothy**, his son in the faith. On Paul's *first* missionary journey, the bold apostle preached in Iconium, mere miles away from Lystra, Timothy's home

town. Rebuking the Jews in Iconium led to their stoning him in Lystra, leaving him for dead. Presumably, through Paul's ministry in Lystra, Timothy's mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, heard and believed the gospel of salvation (Acts 14:19).

On Paul's *second* journey, Timothy joined him. Soon, despite vastly different personalities, their mutual zeal and love for Christ forged a powerful partnership and inseparable bond. Timothy became such a prominent team member Paul names him in six letters (*2 Corinthians; Colossians; Philippians; 1 and 2 Thessalonians; Philemon*) besides the two written to him (*1 and 2 Timothy*).³ Over two decades together, Paul's relationship with Timothy grew from supervisor, to coach, to spiritual father.

These three terms describe their *horizontal* relationship—with one another. However, their special relationship to one another came primarily by their *vertical* relationship—with the Lord. It's no coincidence that what brought Paul and Timothy together, *always* brings believers together—the depth of their commitment to the Lord. Paul and Timothy saw themselves as God saw them. That is, as *servants of Christ Jesus*. Each Greek word of this phrase paints a sharper picture.

First, “servants” (*douloi*) is far from a cliché or disposable label. It didn't mean “hired help,” but “bond slaves,” the lowest of household servants. It conveyed great humility and total submission.⁴ Indeed, this view of self is the predominant message in this letter to the Philippians. *Second*, “Christ” means more than just the second person of the Trinity. It literally means, “Anointed One,” the long-awaited Messiah who would establish and rule over his kingdom. *Third*, “Jesus” (“deliverer”) emphasized his work and gift.

Paul and Timothy knew that *all the*

saints in Christ Jesus could experience joy (1:26), hope (2:19), confidence (2:24), acceptance (2:29), glory (3:3), agreement (4:2), rejoicing (4:10), provision (4:19), and fellowship with each other (4:21). However, to understand what believers should *do*, we must understand what believers already *are*... “*saints*” (see Saints Alive!).

Every Christian is a saint, because God has set them apart through the perfect righteousness of Christ. Paul isn't writing to a few spiritual superheroes, but all living believers who are *in Christ Jesus*. This phrase, “*in Christ*,” occurs numerous times and always refers to the position of a true believer.

Although we enjoy this letter, Paul originally sent it (likely carried by Epaphroditus, Philippians 2:25; 4:18), to the believers *who are at Philippi*, a Roman colony city of Macedonia, ten miles inland from Neapolis, a port city on the Aegean Sea. Paul established the Philippian church in AD 50, during his second missionary journey (Acts 16:11–40).⁵

Now, about 10 years later, the church had grown in numbers with new believers and *with the overseers* (who shepherd the entire church) *and deacons* (who shepherd a particular ministry). Together, they formed the leadership team of the congregation. Paul intended this letter to help bring *grace to* the Philippian church *and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*.

SAINTS ALIVE!

For some, the word “*saints*” refers to people of high piety who (after death) receive this special title for special veneration. Paul, however, consistently uses “*saints*” in referring to *all* Christians. The Greek word for “*saints*” (*hagios*) literally means “set apart” or “holy” ones. It does not imply some kind of spiritual hall-of-famer.⁶

“HIS CHAINS GAVE OTHERS FREEDOM AND POWER!”

Coach, you can see yourself in many different ways. You can look in the mirror and see an athletic instructor, a disciplinarian, a counselor, or countless other titles. You can also see yourself as others see you, with all the benefits and liabilities such a choice brings. Neither option is ideal. God wants us to see ourselves and others as he sees us. When we do, we're bound to unify.

TRUE COACHING STORY

What a great letter to share. Sometimes as coaches we don't always know what impact we have on a young man or woman until later in life. It makes doing what we do more rewarding. The breakdown of the family has become such a prevalent problem into today's society. Young men today need more male role models in their life. Not only are we their coach, but their father, their mother, their grandparent, their role models and, when the time is right (after graduation), their friends. I thank God that he has put me in the position I am in for the last 33+ years as a teacher and coach. Don't get me wrong, wins are great. However, hopefully, I won't be remembered for the scores on the scoreboard, the games, or championships won. Rather, I hope to be remembered for the relationships that I've made and young men I have helped to mold into good sons, husbands, fathers, and productive citizens. Most of all, I hope that my faith has been portrayed to those that I have come in contact with a seed has been planted.



OBSERVATION

1. What is the main verb in this passage? (3)
2. Regarding that verb...
When is it prompted? (3b)

What emotion does it lead to? (4)

3. Why does Paul feel this way toward them? (5)
4. What will result? (6)

INTERPRETATION

5. How had this church partnered with Paul? (5)
6. What was Paul confident about? (6)

APPLICATION

7. As a coach, who partners with you and supports you?
8. Have you thanked them and in what ways?

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

CO

Having finished his formal introductions, Paul praised this beloved congregation. He would later challenge them in some spiritual areas, but his deep love for them could not wait. Paul opened by focusing the Philippians on three things—his profound *appreciation for them*, *confidence in them*, and his supreme *confidence in God*.

Paul wrote, “***I thank my God***,” because he knew that any gratitude he would express to the Philippians began with God’s goodness. *God* brought Paul to himself. *God* commissioned Paul to bring the gospel to the Gentiles and powerfully guided Paul to their city (Acts 16:6-12). *God* rescued Paul from jail and then enabled him to convert the jailer’s household. Most recently, *God* sustained Paul through their generosity. How could he *not* thank God?

That gratitude arose ***in all*** of Paul’s ***remembrance of*** these believers without any prodding. No team, staff, or congregation is perfect, but Paul’s memory habitually sparked gratefulness. That discipline requires God’s perspective, perhaps made possible by another habit.

Always, in every prayer which Paul regularly prayed, his gratitude seems to have grown. Further, he told the church that he invested his time and affection ***for you all***. He didn’t pick and choose favorites to lift up before heaven’s throne. Paul gratefully prayed for the entire congregation without exception.⁷ That’s *who* he prayed for. Next he’ll tell us *how* he prayed for them.

Paul was always ***making*** his ***prayer with joy***. That’s the key heart attitude throughout this lockdown letter. The Greek word for “joy” (*chara*) is used four times (1:4, 25; 2:2; 4:1). A *form* of that word, “rejoice” (*chair*), occurs eight times (1:18 [2X]; 2:17-18; 3:1, 4:4 [2X], 10). In addition, a similar word, “glad,” occurs three times (2:17-18, 28).⁸ Paul’s overflowing joy came from their commitment to each other and, more importantly, to God’s work.

Specifically, Paul experienced joy *because of* their *partnership in the gospel*, deeper than just a human friendship, their “partnership” refers to their financial gifts to support his work (4:15).⁹ They had skin in the game. Just as *we* have a choice, they could have found something else to spend their hard-earned money on or make their own life more comfortable.

However, they chose to invest in Paul and in eternity. They weren’t pen-pal friends who supported “their team” only when they’re on top. The Philippians had partnered with *Paul from the first day until now*. While they relished their deep, personal fellowship, they both knew that their ultimate partnership goal was in spreading the gospel through their regular, systematic, and sacrificial giving.¹⁰ Bottom line: They were *all* in.

Paul had great confidence in the Lord who grew their hearts in this way. With that in mind, he encouraged them. He was *sure of this, that he who began a good work in them will bring it to completion*. Therefore, just as God *started* working in them when they

believed, he would *continue* working in them until their final judgment *at the day of Jesus Christ*. While this certainly reminds us of God’s faithfulness to secure our eternal salvation (see Eternally Yours), it also carries great encouragement here and now.

God knows our weaknesses. He knows we will flounder, spiritually. However, God never quits on us. God’s love is active and continually works in our lives to help us grow. In light of God’s faithfulness toward us, we can apply this verse in at least two major ways.

Coach, *first* you can apply this passage in your relationship to your supporters. Some of you are blessed to have many in your corner. Others are blessed to have a few, despite the opposition. Regardless of the number, how often do you see and appreciate their faithfulness to you and your work? How often do you encourage them? How often do you tell them what you see in them? Perhaps even more to the point of this passage, how often do you thank *God* for your supporters and pray for them?

“ **HOW OFTEN DO YOU THANK GOD FOR YOUR SUPPORTERS?**

In today’s Application question, we’ve given you an opportunity to make a list of those supporters you would like to thank. That list may include a spouse, parents, staff, a model coach, a principal, or perhaps a particular school board member. Take just a few minutes to send them a text, email, or even a handwritten note (a rare, but increasingly valued gesture). As you do, be sure to thank the Lord who gave them to you and experience his joy.

Second, you can apply this passage in your relationship to your athletes. Certainly most athletes will flounder in their faithfulness to you—some more than others. Through their unfaithfulness to *you* or to *teammates*, follow God’s model in consistent faithfulness to *them*. As you do, you’ll give them a glimpse of what God is like.



THE SOURCE OF ENTITLEMENT IS ARROGANCE.

THE SYMPTOM OF ENTITLEMENT IS RESENTMENT.

THE ENEMY OF ENTITLEMENT IS HUMILITY.

THE ANTIDOTE OF ENTITLEMENT IS GRATITUDE.

ETERNALLY YOURS

Paul expressed this idea very clearly in his earlier letter to the believers in Rome. In one chapter, he began by assuring them there is “*no condemnation for those who are in Christ*” (Ro. 8:1). Then he ended that same chapter assuring them, “*I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Ro. 8:38-39). That covers *everything*, including ourselves. His gift of salvation is secure.



OBSERVATION

1. What does Paul say about feeling this way toward them? (7a)
2. What reasons does he give for feeling this way? (7b)
3. What describes the Philippians's relationship with Paul? (7c)
4. What two specific areas does Paul mention? (7d)

INTERPRETATION

5. In your own words, restate the first phrase of this verse. (7a)
6. In what way(s) might the Philippians have partnered with Paul or shown their loyalty? (7c)
7. How might the church have partnered with him in these two areas? (7d)

APPLICATION

8. Outside of your family, who has shown you the most loyalty under a range of circumstances? In what ways have they shown it?

PHILIPPIANS 1:7

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.



While imprisoned in Rome for two years, the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to encourage and thank the church he planted in Philippi. He emphasized his own servanthood to Christ and told how fondly he remembered them in gratitude and prayer. In today's passage, Paul expressed more than gushy sentimentality. He grounded his emotions in God's truth and values that he preached and lived.

Based on a *secular* perspective, our modern culture believes that our world came about by sheer chance. Therefore, all truth is ultimately subjective. People talk of "my truth" or "your truth" as though truth was a tradable free agent, easily exchanged if another seemed more desirable.

Once this "narrative" is engaged, our emotions can filter and interpret all words, events, or other information affecting it. Only after sifting through this emotional grid do some determine what to hold as "truth." This foolish approach is dangerous for any individual or culture that practices it. Even more dangerous, in today's culture, "truth" is discarded by many people. For them, only the end result really matters. However, until recently, all of Western culture adopted an entirely different approach to truth and emotions.

Based on a *Christian* worldview, we recognize that God has established absolute truth. That truth never changes because of my perspective or emotions. In contrast, this approach compels and requires us to alter our feelings based on the truth, not the other way around.

Once we have sifted through the objective facts, we discover "truth." This wise approach is safe for any individual or culture that practices it. Only when we recognize this distinction in considering "truth," can we make any sense of what Paul writes in today's verse.

By declaring, "*It is right*," Paul acknowledged their deep commitment and the resulting moral obligation *he* has to hold them in a positive light.¹¹ By saying, "*for me*," Paul expressed his sense of duty *to feel this way about* every-

one in that church. That Greek word (*phronein*, pronounced “fro-nayn”) often translated “feel” (ESV, NIV, NASB) or “think” (KJV, NKJV) is better understood as a “mindset” or “perspective” rather than an emotion or opinion.¹² It’s an important distinction, because having a godly perspective plays a *big* role in this letter.

This idea of “perspective” provides the key to understanding Paul’s primary appeal throughout *Philippians*. He urges a godly perspective for harmony (twice in 2:2 and again in 4:2), to follow Christ’s example (2:5), for perspective on the future (3:15, twice), and sadly describes those who do otherwise (3:19). Paul’s call for a godly perspective also shows up twice in reference to the Philippian’s concern for himself (4:10).¹³ Next, Paul gave three reasons for his perspective.

First, Paul’s sense of moral obligation came *because* he could honestly say, “**I hold you in my heart.**” That Greek word for heart (*kardia*) is the root word behind our term, “cardiac” referring to one’s *physical* heart. Today, we also use “heart” to express an *emotional* connection. However, neither definition conveys Paul’s use in this verse. To the Greek mind, “heart” includes the whole personality with its mind, feeling, and will...*especially* the will. Paul didn’t merely hold the Philippians dear. He held them as part of himself, his mind, and his will.¹⁴

Second, the apostle had this intimate connection, as he explained, “**For you are all partakers with me of grace.**” His perspective came from their faithfulness to a shared mission. That faithfulness did not waiver based on circumstances. It would have been tempting and easy to distance themselves *in his imprisonment*. Interestingly, this refers to *any* form of

“ HOW COMMITTED AND LOYAL ARE YOU TO YOUR ATHLETES?

imposed confinement, not necessarily bound in chains.¹⁵ Given that understanding, it may be applied to *your* own limitations and *your* supporters, partnering in *your* ministry. Further, their partnership extended to his *defense and confirmation of the gospel*. Again, it would have been tempting and easy to distance themselves, but they didn’t. Again, they stuck with him. Considering this level of loyalty under fire, how could you *not* love this booster club? Paul will give his third reason in the next passage.

Coach, do you have anyone in your life that has committed this level of loyalty to you no matter what your circumstances or how much their loyalty to you might cost them? Is it a friend, a spouse, a student, or staff member? If you are blessed by their personal, unwavering support, you should have a sense of moral obligation to prioritize them in your life and in your prayers.

This verse also challenges us in a different way. How committed and loyal are you to your athletes? Many of them likely find their commitment to the team indistinguishable from their commitment to you. They work hard for you, sacrifice for you, sweat for you, and push themselves beyond what they ever thought possible because you believe in them and they don’t want to let you down. How do you show them the place they have in your heart?

Finally, spiritually, this directly challenges us to examine how deeply we express our loyalty to the Lord and to those who carry out his work. That

group of people goes beyond vocational ministries. It might mean partnering with a friend, a spouse, or, most obviously, a church or ministry that spreads God’s word and work. Who do you partner with in God’s work?

“ OH, THE COMFORT, THE INEXPRESSIBLE COMFORT OF FEELING SAFE WITH A PERSON; HAVING NEITHER TO WEIGH THOUGHTS NOR MEASURE WORDS, BUT TO POUR THEM ALL OUT, JUST AS THEY ARE, CHAFF AND GRAIN TOGETHER, KNOWING THAT A FAITHFUL HAND WILL TAKE AND SIFT THEM, KEEP WHAT IS WORTH KEEPING, AND THEN, WITH A BREATH OF KINDNESS, BLOW THE REST AWAY.

-GEORGE ELIOT



OBSERVATION

1. Who does Paul cite as a witness to his heart? (8)
2. What is Paul's first stated prayer request? (9a)
3. 3. What does he pray to accompany that request?(9b)
4. Why does he pray for this? ("so that...") (10)
5. What is his ultimate end goal? ("to the...") (11)

INTERPRETATION

6. Why do you think Paul had developed and executed such a strategic prayer?

APPLICATION

7. Have you ever prayed this strategically to prepare yourself or another for spiritual or personal success? If so tell us about it. If not, why not?
8. What specific short-term goals will prepare you for the Day of judgement for believers when Christ judges your life?

PHILIPPIANS 1:8-11

⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

PRAYER REQUESTS

PRIMARY APPLICATION - RECORD ON PAGE 100

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Why do we so often *not* see people, including ourselves, as God does?



In opening his letter, Paul told the Philippians of his commitment to pray for them. Yesterday, he gave two reasons for this choice. *First*, he held them very fondly in his heart. *Second*, they served as ministry partners. Today, we'll look at his *third* reason. His affection came from the Lord.

Years before Paul converted to Christ, he graduated from the Harvard law school of his day. So it shouldn't surprise us that Paul illustrated his affection with a courtroom scene as naturally as you would illustrate yours with a sporting event.

With a courtroom in mind, he called the Lord to give testimony.

Paul asserts that *God is his witness* claiming, “*I yearn for you all.*” Yet, his feelings exceed *human* love. His depth of love comes *with the affection of Christ Jesus*. Out of Christ’s love, he prays for the ongoing spiritual growth of this entire congregation.

And it is this prayer which Paul describes. In contrast, admittedly, so often when I tell someone, “I’ll pray for you,” I don’t get very specific. I often find myself praying, “God bless them and their family.” Not Paul. The apostle told them precisely what he was praying (later, he’ll participate in God’s answer to that prayer). He prays *that their godly love may abound more and more*. This literally means keep on abounding with a picture of building layer upon layer.¹⁶

He desires a mutual care and concern without boundaries or limitations. Imagine if everyone on your team and staff kept exceeding their most recent “personal best” in showing love to one another. Imagine what it would do for team unity. Imagine how it would motivate individual sacrifice for the team’s best.

Paul didn’t pray that their love would come with gushing sentimentality but *with knowledge*, a blend of information and experience *and all discernment*, the ability to make morally wise decisions.¹⁷

Next, Paul gave two reasons for this request. He desired knowledge and discernment for them *so that they may approve what is excellent*. However, this prayer isn’t about a good judgment call. Paul desired *this* love with *this* ability to reach the *ultimate* goal. Like a good coach, he wanted the Philippians prepared for their biggest challenge—

to approve excellence and so *be pure and blameless*.

Most people of all stripes, religious and non-religious, despite their varying standards, like to be seen as good. However, Paul’s *godly* perspective knew the real test isn’t what *others* see, but what *God* sees. The real test for any believer is to be prepared *for the day of Christ*. This isn’t the Judgment Day, determining one’s destiny of Heaven or Hell. Rather, this “day” refers to the Judgment Seat of Christ, or Bema Seat. In 1 Corinthians 4:5-6, Paul warns that the Lord himself “*will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God* (see Reward!).

“ **THE REAL TEST ISN’T WHAT OTHERS SEE, BUT WHAT GOD SEES**

Anything this serious should not be stated in ethereal or abstract language. It needs to be measurable for us to be prepared. So Paul gave them a very specific goal to pursue—to be *filled with the fruit of righteousness*. This fruit could refer to character (Galatians 5:22-23), conduct (Matthew 7:20), or to converts, as he explains later in this very letter (Philippians 4:17). Perhaps he had all three categories in mind.

Yes, Paul called them to some pretty high standards. They may have even felt inadequate as these words were publicly spoken. However, Paul knew they could never succeed by exercising their own will, self-discipline, or self-denial. The kind of righteousness *that* Paul described here *comes through Jesus Christ* in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Further, only when our righteous works come through Jesus Christ can

we achieve the ultimate goal of knowing that such works will be done *to the glory and praise of God*. That can only occur with pure hearts acting out of godly love. *That* high a goal requires *this* kind of communication with God.

Coach, just as your athletes can fake people out in a game with a head move, you can fake people out in life with words or deeds. With enough effort, people will believe all kinds of things about who we are and why we do what we do. This passage reminds us of our limitations. We can’t, and won’t, ever fake God out. He sees our hearts.

That truth can and should bring *concern* that he sees any degree of selfish intent behind our good works. However, this very same truth can and should bring *comfort* that he sees, just as clearly, our flubs done with the purest of intentions. Your athletes need you to exercise this godly insight in order to bring them both concern for others and comfort in difficult times. That need and ability definitely calls for much prayer.

REWARD!

This often-overlooked Final Exam for believers is at the heart of Jesus’ parable of the faithful servants (Lk. 19:12-27) and Paul’s motivation for Timothy to persevere and purify in preparation (2 Tim. 2:1-13, 4:1). To Timothy, Paul specifically mentions the “crown of righteousness” prepared for all believers whose godly life makes them long for Christ’s appearing (2 Tim. 4:8).

The four other crowns (rewards) mentioned in Scripture include 1) the “crown of life” for persevering under trials (Rev. 2:10), 2) the incorruptible crown” for demonstrating self-denial and perseverance (1 Cor. 9:25), 3) the “crown of glory” for shepherding the flock (1 Pt. 5:2-4), and 4) the “crown of rejoicing” for regularly sharing Christ with others (1 Thess. 2:19; Phil. 4:1).



BIG PICTURE

The formal introductions have concluded. As important as those thoughts and perspectives were, Paul is eager to get to the main reason for his letter to this church he loved so much. He wanted them to keep focused on their primary mission: to advance the spread of the gospel. He did not want the gospel to be hindered by unnecessary concerns about his situation.

Therefore, to push back against these obstacles, Paul explains how God empowered that mission through the very things that appear to be hindering it. He models great leadership by pointing out how God can advance the gospel of salvation through our growing boldness, proclaiming Christ, keeping an eternal perspective, as well as through serving and suffering with others.

OBSERVATION

1. How did Paul assess the results of his imprisonment? (12)
2. ID 2 pieces of evidence for his assessment? (13)
3. How did Paul's imprisonment affect other believers? (14)

INTERPRETATION

4. *Why* might Paul's imprisonment have grown another's boldness? (14)
5. How have you seen one person's attitude—good or bad—affect an entire team?

APPLICATION

6. ID some athletes to encourage whose perspective and attitude bring a positive influence.
7. ID one or two areas where a change in your own per-spective and attitude would create a more positive influence.

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-14

¹² I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

In 1979, Coach Clifton Herring of Laney High School moved the sophomore, Michael Jordan, from his varsity basketball team down to JV. This setback initially crushed the young athlete's spirit. Jordan recalls, "I was demoralized and didn't want to play any more sports." Wisely, his mother said, "If you really want it, you work hard over the summer."

Rather than seeing it as a setback, young Michael took mom's advice. He chose to react to this adversity not by "giving up," but by putting forth extra effort toward self-improvement. Throughout those hot North Carolina summer months, the basketball never left his hands. It didn't hurt that he also grew from 5'-10" to 6'-3."

When he returned to Laney High the next Fall, he didn't just make the team. The Athletic Director of the county contacted the University of North Carolina and told them, "We've got a guy down here who, I think, might have a chance." Roy Williams, UNC Assistant Coach from 1978-1988 recalls, "After spending five days at the university's basketball camp, we thought he was the best player in America."¹



Likewise, Paul could have seen his four-year imprisonment as a setback. Rather, he chose to see it as an opportunity which God provided. It motivated him to reach his goals and take the gospel to the highest levels of the Roman Empire. Beginning on Day 1, he preached the gospel to anyone and everyone...especially those in positions of power and influence.

Because both men—Michael Jordan and the Apostle Paul—

made conscious positive choices, they saw their temporary, negative circumstances result in gain rather than loss. That mindset allowed them to make the most of their circumstances and reach their goals, rather than drown in self-pity.

Paul continued following the customary Roman style of personal letter-writing. When people wrote letters informing recipients of their circumstances, they transitioned from their initial greeting to the letter's crucial information with the statement, "I want you to know that..."² Thus, Paul began informing the Philippian church of his circumstances.

Regarding his captivity, the apostle boldly told those in Philippi, "***I want you to know, brothers*** (this original word includes sisters as well), ***that what has happened to me, has really served to advance the gospel.***" Their partnership began for this purpose (1:7) and it continues, just in a different form. It wasn't enough for Paul to merely believe that God would see him through these times. He wanted to encourage his ministry partners, the church. Such an unusual statement demands an explanation,³ so Paul broke the big news.

He wanted *them* to know that the gospel had ***become known throughout the whole imperial guard.*** Assuming that he wrote this letter from Rome (as most scholars do), he referred to the Praetorian Guard, the emperor's own elite troops, stationed in Rome. These men rotated on a 4-hour shift, giving Paul eventual access to all of them.⁴

Like the unbelievers around you, these hardened men probably began viewing Paul very skeptically, perhaps even harshly. However, over time, they witnessed his tenacity, sacrifice, concern, and commitment to his cause, all qualities these guards admired. Perhaps they overheard his words and tone as he debated and instructed his varied guests.

“ SHARE YOUR FAITH AND LIVE FOR CHRIST

Eventually, they became interested, perhaps even enthusiastic.

However, the bold proclamation of the gospel went beyond the Praetorian Guard. It eventually spread ***to all the rest.*** This likely includes numerous groups who had contact with Paul in Rome: 1) Members of the Jewish community, 2) At least one Gentile (Philemon 10), 3) Many Christian coworkers, 4) upper levels of the Roman Empire as referenced by Paul at the end of his letter where he passes along greetings from the saints within Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22). This seemingly insignificant comment would have carried great weight to this church residing in a Roman colony with very strong ties to the Empire's capital.

Paul's attitude left no doubt: his ***imprisonment is for Christ.*** In fact, during this same jail time, Paul wrote to the Ephesians, calling himself, "*a prisoner of Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 3:1). From his perspective, Rome didn't hold him captive, God did. As a result of his boldness, he inspired others.

So, because of Paul's godly attitude and mindset, ***most of the brothers,*** had ***become confident in the Lord by his imprisonment.*** Paul's perspective led to his courage and his courage became more contagious than the Coronavirus. These fellow believers, inspired by Paul's example, became ***much more bold,*** literally, "daring"⁵ to meet the challenge. They had become fearless ***to speak the word without fear.*** Opportunity became outreach.

Coach, you know how your attitude can affect the life of your staff, team, and school. If you live in fear and discouragement due to your circumstances or record, it can become infectious, even crushing. However, if you see your set-

back as a God-given opportunity, it can inspire all those around you.

The same is true in your spiritual life. Your growing courage will not only advance the gospel. It will also inspire others more timid than you. Because of you, they will stand up and speak boldly with the confidence of one protected by a great and mighty God.

Whether we like it or not, we no longer live in a country that automatically honors those of great faith. In some circles, speaking of faith can even jeopardize a career. See this challenge as an opportunity. Pray that God would give you an ever-increasing boldness to share your faith and live for Christ.

TRUE COACHING STORY

My all-time top assistant never called a play, attended a staff meeting, or coached in a practice. However, she was loyal, encouraging, and always kept things in perspective. My wife kept it real. She excelled in both pregame and postgame. Her pregame pep talk was my favorite. It always consisted of a big hug and kiss followed by the words, "I believe in you" and "You are the greatest". What a way to start the game!

The postgame was equally important to me. Win or lose, she always positioned herself on the field outside the team huddle. That way, as soon as we broke after the team prayer, she was the first person I'd see. With a big hug and kiss, she repeated the words from the pregame: "I believe in you and you are the greatest." For over forty years she served as my top assistant.



OBSERVATION

1. ID the traits of the two motives of those who preached Christ. (15-17)

Good	Bad
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2. How did Paul respond to each and why? (18)
3. What goal did Paul have that enabled him to respond as he did? (18)

INTERPRETATION

4. In your own words, what issues might prevent a person from practicing Paul's perspective? (15-17)
5. What made Paul value Christ being preached over the motives of the preachers? (18)

APPLICATION

6. Distinguish between denying reality and keeping a positive perspective?
7. Who can you encourage with this perspective?

PHILIPPIANS 1:15-18

¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

CO

Paul comforted his friends in Philippi by seeing his life's positive side. He explained how God continued to advance the gospel into the Roman Empire. Through his imprisonment, Paul had reached both the guards and Caesar's household with the saving work of Jesus Christ. However, Paul's situation wasn't the Philippians' only concern...and Paul knew it.

In Paul's absence, gospel-hustlers had come out of the woodwork, filling the vacuum left behind by his incarceration. The apostle knew all about them, their motives, and their activity. Yet, as with his own circumstances, he could also see how God used even their evil intent to accomplish his work. With great mental discipline, he addressed the Philippians directly. By the way, we all need friends with Paul's mental toughness to help us see what our emotions conceal!

Mindful of these "prophets for a profit," Paul acknowledged and identified key contrasts between them and *godly* evangelists. On one hand, **some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry**. Like some today, these imposters spoke of Christ only for their own gain or goals. Instead of partnering with believers to advance the cause of Christ, they competed with one another for prominence and power. **But**, thankfully, **others** preached Christ from a polar opposite mindset, **from good will**. They sought to glorify God, not themselves.

Paul continued, noting that **the latter** (those of good will) **do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel**. As teammates, they continued the ministry, loyally sacrificing toward the same goal. They trusted fully. They lived righteously. They gave generously.

However, *the former* (those with evil intent) **proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition**. On the outside, they appear to be doing the same thing. Although in the same *game*, they play for opposing *teams*. Rather than loyally sacrificing toward the same goal as Paul, these enemies of the gospel do **not** preach **sincerely, but** do so **thinking** they will **afflict Paul in his imprisonment**.

The terms in the chart below describing the two mindsets are relational in nature. Each person having such an attitude—positive or negative—directed their attitude toward someone. In this case, they directed it toward Paul, not Christ.⁶

Paul didn't sugar-coat his opposition. He dealt in reality. The question for him wasn't, "Who are they?" or "What do they want?" Paul knew those answers. Therefore, he asked the inevitable question in his reader's minds: "**What then?**" That is, how should we think, feel, or act in *response*? His answer demonstrates why God chose him for this mission.

Paul provided his readers with one appropriate response. **Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth,**

Christ is proclaimed. Paul's goal was getting the gospel known and accepted, not purifying everyone's motive. Although good motives *should* accompany the good news, the power of salvation is not based in *our motives*, but in *God's news*.

This point became amusingly clear by a friend at seminary. When I met Kevin, he already loved the Lord and had committed his life to telling others about Christ and training thousands more. However, he wasn't always this committed to the Lord.

Before he personally trusted Christ, Kevin became very interested in a young, Christian girl. To spend time with her, he participated with her in various Christian activities, including evangelism. By his own admission, his efforts were 100% selfishly motivated. To "get the girl," he endured evangelism training and spoke to total strangers about the Lord. Some even put *their* faith in Christ as a result. *He* didn't believe, but *they* did.

You see, those who listened to Kevin and believed didn't need to hear the truth from a *believer* in order to trust in Christ. They only needed to hear

“ **WHEN LIFE SENDS YOU LEMONS, WATCH FOR GOD'S LEMONADE STAND**

the good news. My friend smiled as he reflected on how the Holy Spirit used the Word to move their hearts toward belief.

Because he chose to focus on the work of his sovereign God, Paul could boldly say, "**In that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice!**" Can we? Is the joy we find in the advancement of God's work strong enough to overcome difficult circumstances or difficult people? To the extent that it is, our joy remains firm, even when we face bad circumstances and sinful motives.⁷

Coach, the longer you've been at it, the more times you've probably seen your team advance because of some crazy reason—an accidental interception, a fluke that changed the score, or a surprise that landed you a great player. Some of the unforeseen advances may have even come from negative circumstances—a firing, an injury, or unwarranted criticism. A *godly* attitude and mindset doesn't mean that you pretend everything is fine. Rather, it accepts the negative for what it is, but sees how God can use it for his glory.

When life sends you lemons, watch for God's lemonade stand. He'll dare you to see it and serve it to others. The mere expectation will mold your godly attitude and see the work that God performs or the opportunities he provides. That attitude will advance the gospel and encourage the people around you—especially those who care about you.

OPPOSITE GROUPS IN PAUL'S LIFE

FRIENDS

- PREACH CHRIST •
- MOTIVATED BY GOOD WILL •
- IN LOVE •
- KNOW AND SUPPORT PAUL •
- LIVE TO DEFEND THE GOSPEL •
- IN TRUTH •

ENEMIES

- PREACH CHRIST
- MOTIVATED BY ENVY AND RIVALRY
- FROM SELFISHNESS AND INSINCERITY
- SUPPOSEDLY ATTACK PAUL
- LIVE TO STIR UP TROUBLE DURING PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT
- IN LIES



OBSERVATION

1. What did Paul know and count on? (19)
2. What did Paul expect? (20)
3. Fill in the columns re: Paul's view of his uncertain future. (21-23)
Live Die
4. What tipped the scales for his preference? (24)

INTERPRETATION

5. How much does it seem like his friends' prayers affected God's help? (19)

APPLICATION

6. How might an eternal perspective change your attitude toward your coaching responsibilities and priorities?
7. What long-term and/or eternal goals have replaced your own short-term goals?

PHILIPPIANS 1:19-26

¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.



Paul knew the sinful motives of some who preached while he remained captive in Rome. However, he told the Philippians of his joy, because God still used them to redeem lives in response to the good news of Christ. Next, he related another source of joy.

The imprisoned apostle could still rejoice *for* he could *know that through their prayers and the help of the Spirit of Christ this will turn out for his deliverance*. Paul implies that the Spirit's presence will be supplied through their prayers.⁸ Therefore, his confidence and inner security rests in *both* human interaction *and* divine support.

On the *human* side, Paul appreciated this ever-loyal congregation. He valued their regular prayer, and their steadfast partnership in ministry. They were teammates for life as God intended. Beginning with Adam and Eve, he made people to depend on one another, Christians included. It's why Scripture describes healthy Christians as members of a strong family, not isolated individuals. After all, even the Lone Ranger had Tonto.

On the *divine* side, Paul would not depend on his own dwindling resources, but on the generous resources of God, provided by the Holy Spirit. That word, "help" is translated from a Greek word which originally meant "supplier." However, over time, its meaning changed. Whenever a Greek city planned to put on a special festival, somebody had to pay for the singers and dancers. This required a lavish donation, and so this word came to mean "to provide generously and lavishly."⁹ That's how God provides for us as we do his work.

Due to both human and divine intervention, Paul maintained his *eager expectation and hope that he will not be at all ashamed*. His adversaries wanted him discouraged and defeated, *but* he remained confident *that* he would live *with full courage now as always*. His goal was not comfort, pleasant guards, or even release from prison. His stated and steadfast goal was that *Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death*. Next, he expanded on this profound perspective.

Paul explained that, with God's glory as his top priority, his personal circumstances did not determine his joy. He left his fate to the Lord, *for to Paul to live is Christ, and to die is gain*. How can this be? Paul saw this uncertain future as a win-win scenario.

First, he laid out the benefits of living in his physical body, *"If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me*. He knew that souls needed to hear the life-giving message of the gospel. The longer he lived, the more people he could reach. *Yet*, he wondered, *"Which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two."* That leads us to the other scenario.

Second, he laid out the benefits of leaving his physical body behind. Paul stated that his *desire is to depart and be with Christ*. He wanted to leave this life and begin the next one, *for that is far better* than the best life on Earth. As C.S. Lewis said, "There are far, far better things ahead than any we leave behind."

Yet, after penning the thought, he reversed his priorities from self to servant. *But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account*. As a ministry partner, Paul wanted to be of service *to* them and *with* them

as long as possible. Somehow he was *convinced of this*. He stated with certainty, *"I know that I will remain and continue with you all*. If you have ever coached a team with this mindset, you know the feeling Paul struggled to put into words. Paul models the selfless service which he later commanded (Philippians 2:4).

“ **ADVANCE THE GOSPEL**

Paul reinforced the bond he had with his friends in Philippi by putting aside any concerns about where he wanted to be. He reassured them that he would continue in the flesh *for their progress and joy in the faith*. However, even this blessing made possible a greater purpose. He told his friends that his ultimate goal was *so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again*." Paul focused on Christ. Therefore, whether he lived or died, he could sincerely rejoice.

Coach, this passage should give you great encouragement. On the one hand, there's absolutely nothing wrong

with celebrating with your team over victories, unity, and displays of mutual loyalty. They *ought* to be pursued and celebrated. However, in the midst of those victories and celebrations, don't forget the deeper reason you became a coach. Very likely, God moved in your heart to make an eternal difference in the lives of others. He called you to represent him on your staff and in your school. He gifted you to be a blessing to those around you, but there's more. He branded you as his child so no one will doubt who gets the glory in your life.

When you're just starting out as a coach, it's easy to focus on what's right in front of you—strength, strategy, technique—you know the drill. However, as you get older, you wonder about your legacy more often than before. You wonder what kind of lasting impact you've made on your athletes and their families. You wonder about those you've coached with over the years and how they will remember you. If led by God's Word, the Holy Spirit and prayer, this reflection can refocus your priorities, bring you joy, and advance the gospel.

TRUE COACHING STORY

I took the head football job at my hometown high school after being away for almost 30 years. What used to be one of the premier small-school football programs in the state had now become the program that everyone wanted for homecoming. With all my success and experience, I knew that I could restore them to prominence.

However, instead of prominence, I experienced something that I had never seen before. We went 0-10. Oh, how humbling! I realized this challenge was so much bigger than me. That summer, God revealed to me again the very reason I coached. It was not about winning games, but about winning lives. We spent all summer with a new approach to the game. We went from 0-10, to being in the playoffs. Pretty much the same team, but a brand new approach.



OBSERVATION

1. What traits did Paul link to a life “worthy of the gospel”? (27-28a)
2. What would such a life communicate to others? (28)
3. What, beyond faith, should also be expected of those who follow Christ? (29)
4. Why might a believer experience suffering? (30)

INTERPRETATION

5. In your own words, what does it mean to live a life worthy of the gospel? (27a)
6. Summarize Paul’s goals for their community. (27b)
7. How might you suffer together if you advanced the gospel together? (29-30)

APPLICATION

8. What policies, procedures, or attitudes should you continue because of their unifying effect? What changes should you begin?

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

PRAYER REQUESTS

PRIMARY APPLICATION - RECORD ON PAGE 100

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Why do we so often not see people, including ourselves, as God does?



Paul already encouraged his readers by seeing his imprisonment as an opportunity to advance the gospel. He also rejoiced that God has used even the actions of those intending to harm him to draw people to salvation. Paul now pivots from looking at *others* to looking at *ourselves*. In doing so, he considers how our lives impact the unity that advances the gospel.

Like a good coach, Paul focused their attention on just one main goal and communicated it in the simplest way. By begin-

ning with the word “*only*,” he prioritized this goal above all others. If they get this one right, every other objective can be accomplished by default. Anything *this* important means we better get it right. So, let’s look at this command, one piece at a time.

First, by saying “*let*,” the apostle recognized that obedience blends our choice with God’s empowerment. God neither *forces* us to obey nor *expects* us to obey without his strength.

Second, the phrase, “*manner of life*,” translates one Greek verb (*politeu*), which literally means “conduct yourself as citizens.”¹⁰ Paul strategically used this rare word because the citizens of Philippi prized their status as a Roman colony. As such, the Empire recognized all its residents as citizens of Rome itself, with all of its privileges *and responsibilities*.

Third, “*be worthy*” comes from a Greek word meaning “bring the scales into balance.” When buying produce at the market, Romans placed it on a scale, counter-balanced with weights. The produce *should* balance the scale with the measuring weights. Similarly, God calls believers to a life that “balances the scales” with what God has placed on the other side.

Fourth, that counter balance is *the gospel of Christ*. This refers to more than just the good news of salvation. It includes the recognition that faith in Christ includes its own citizenship in *heaven* with all of *its* privileges and responsibilities (Philippians 3:20), including their responsibility to pursue unity. This important command carried expectations and accountability. Paul told them to live this way “*so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you*.” He wanted to hear their reputation regarding two key responsibilities.

Their first responsibility was *standing firm in one spirit*. This mindset reflects the unflinching courage like soldiers who, by strength of will, never abandon their post no matter how severely the battle rages.¹¹ This unity would be accomplished *with one mind*, an idea which he will make vividly clear in the next chapter.

Their second responsibility was *striving side by side*. With this rare Greek word, Paul shifts imagery from the battlefield to the playing field. It pictures athletes working as a team, playing the game not as several individuals but together as one

person with one mind, for one mutual goal.¹²

Not just for any goal, but *for the faith of the gospel*. They should fight with courage, *not frightened in anything by their opponents*. If citizens of heaven unify like this, they will accomplish what Christ prayed for on the eve of his crucifixion, “*that [all who believe in me] may be one so that the world may believe that you have sent me*” (John 17:21). Paul reminded his readers of this powerful witness of unity and its impact to honor Christ.

“ DUTY CALLS

This unity among believers is *a clear sign to them* that don’t believe. It signals not only of *their destruction but* also of the believer’s *salvation, and that* salvation comes *from God*. Why would our unity have this profound effect? Because it goes against the natural, sinful drive to elevate ourselves over others. Only an act of God could produce this unity. When people see it, they take notice and listen to the message of the gospel. That’s one responsibility of a believer as a citizen of heaven. Next Paul explains another one.

For, along with your citizenship, *it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him*. Sadly, *far* too many Christians stop there. Like leaving the womb and coming into this world is just the first step of one’s earthly life, so is that day a person puts their faith in Christ. That’s not the *end* of our relationship with God. It is only the beginning.

Jesus *does* call people to believe, *but also suffer for his sake*. We frequently talk about believing, but we seldom bring up the responsibility and duty to pay the price. God never intended for this price to be paid by only a few. If Paul were alive today and came into your study, he would tell you the same thing he told the Philippians 2,000 years ago: *Be engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had*

and now hear that I still have. Nothing has changed. Duty calls.

Coach, you know the power of unity on a team. When ego and pride yield to selflessness and humility, a mediocre team can do amazing things. You may relate to the imagery of the soldier needing to remain at his battle post because you find yourself in a fight against hostile forces. If so, stand firm. However, remember the other part...fight alongside someone else, not alone.

Take a moment to assess where you, your staff, and your team regularly practice unity. Then take a moment to assess where self-centeredness may have crept in. What policies, procedures, or attitudes can and should be continued because of their unifying effect. What changes in those same areas should be made to increase unity?

||
LOVE IS ALWAYS READY TO DENY ITSELF, TO GIVE, SACRIFICE. PERFECT LOVE IS PERFECT SELF-FORGETFULNESS. HENCE WHERE THERE IS LOVE IN A HOME, UNSELFISHNESS IS THE LAW. EACH FORGETS SELF AND LIVES FOR OTHERS.

-J.R. MILLER



BIG PICTURE

So far in this letter, Paul has encouraged the Philippians by explaining that he had joy in his life because he chose to put Christ first. God used that choice to advance the gospel during Paul's imprisonment. Also, by putting Christ first, Paul could put aside any personal hatred of the false preachers. Rather, he rejoiced that they proclaimed Christ even though their motives were wrong.

This Week, we will see that Paul wanted the Philippians not only to be united against a common foe, but also humbly united in heart and mind with one another.¹ Paul's focus on humility began with the Ultimate Model—Christ himself. Next, he described what Christ-like humility looks like in the lives of everyday Christians...like you and me. Without humility, we cannot have unity. However, with humility, unity is inevitable.

OBSERVATION

1. What spiritual "vital signs" indicate unity with Christ? What degree of each is needed to "count"? (1)
2. What further signs would bring additional joy to Paul? (2)
3. What did Paul say about self-centeredness? (3)

INTERPRETATION

4. What relational mindset does humility bring? (3-4)
5. Why might Paul have "lowered the bar" in ID'ing the areas they had in common?
6. In your own words, what principles can you learn from this passage about how a leader can foster unity among those they lead?

APPLICATION

7. On your team, how do you...
Cultivate unity?

Elevate leaders?

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4

¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

It's a headline I've often seen around Easter, "Hundreds Retrace Path of Christ." Curious, I kept reading: "Hundreds of Christian pilgrims wept, prayed and sang hymns along the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem's Old City in a Good Friday procession that retraced Christ's path to his crucifixion. About a dozen devotees carried heavy wooden crosses to symbolize Christ's walk of agony."

It all seemed rather routine until, "...a minor scuffle broke out when Roman Catholic and Protestant groups crossed paths, each group selfishly demanding right of way."² How sad! These two groups went to great lengths and expense to commemorate the greatest act of sacrificial humility in world history. What did the world see? "*Each demanding their own way.*"

Apparently, it never occurred to either group that the *best* tribute to Jesus Christ would have been humbly stepping aside for the other group. It's why, in his Great Commission, Christ didn't focus on merely *converting* unbelievers. Jesus told his disciples to make disciples. Far more than converting them, it meant, "...*teaching them to observe* (practice) *all that he commanded*" (Matthew 28:19-20). In other words, they should help others become more like Christ. Two things have remained unchanged since then: his great commission and our difficulty in practicing it.



Knowing we need Christ’s help to truly become his disciples, Paul moved from his personal mindset to the Ultimate example, Jesus Christ himself. In today’s passage, we’ll see why we need the example of Christ’s humility. His humility began as his mindset, led to his model, and resulted in his majesty. In the same way, *we* must develop his mindset (Philippians 2:1-4). That will allow *us* to model it for others (Philippians 2:14-15, 19-22). Such a life results in our celebrating before his throne (Philippians 2:16).

So, people need to not only *believe* the gospel, but *suffer* for it. However, Paul didn’t require perfection. In fact, he affirmed his friends in Philippi even if they possessed only traces of spiritual life. He set the stage with four spiritual vital signs, all beginning with “*if*,” better translated “*since*.”³ He presented the vital signs as measured by the most minimum standard of “*any*.” Let’s look at them.

“ **HOW DO YOU ELEVATE LEADERS**

The first spiritual vital sign is *encouragement in Christ*. Here, Paul referred to the *comfort* that believers have from being united together *in Christ*.⁴ Second, Paul also affirmed their *comfort from love*, likely referring to their love for him. Third, he mentioned their *participation in the Spirit*, which he experienced from them emotionally, socially, and financially as mentioned in chapter one. This can mean either “the fellowship we have *with one another* that comes *because* of the Holy Spirit” or “the fellowship we have *with the Holy Spirit* himself.” In reality,

both are true and worth pointing out as common ground. Fourth, Paul recognized their *affection and sympathy*. As professional communicators, coaches can learn from the example Paul sets in these verses.

Notice, Paul didn’t rebuke the Philippian church for not fully developing these traits. Instead, he encouraged the believers by gently reminding them of the things they already had in common. These statements make a strong emotional appeal as Paul gently exhorted the Philippian’s growth. The combined effect of his content coupled with his tone is quite powerful. The church already had a strong bond and common experience of grace. Knowing that, Paul built on it rather than risk damaging their relationship.⁵

Paul had already said he rejoiced in numerous things to such an extent that joy characterized his life. However, after his readers looked in the mirror for any hint of these four vital signs, Paul challenged them, “complete my joy.” They could put the finishing touches on his joyful life by living with the *same mind, same love, full accord, and one mind*. In short, be unified.

To clarify his message, Paul contrasted this new mindset and attitude from that which hinders unity. They (and *we*) must *do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit*. That would be putting our own interests first, resulting in *disunity*. *But*, rather, *in humility count others more significant than yourselves*. C.S. Lewis paraphrased and clarified this verse when he wrote, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself. It’s thinking of yourself less.” *That* attitude and practice brings unity. However, pride and selfishness will damage, or even destroy, unity.

Then *Paul* rephrased it for maximum

comprehension and application. He told them, “*Let each of you look not only to his own interests, elevating our rights and our authority, but also to the interests of others.*” Again, this doesn’t call for a choice between watching out for ourselves vs. others. Rather, God calls us to consciously consider others as we make our choices. This mindset allows us to treat others in a way that communicates, “I am your servant, but you are not my master.”

Coach, we noticed the progression from mindset, to model, to majesty. Now also notice Paul’s tone in this vital area. When leading his flock toward unity, he didn’t issue a cold command with apostolic authority. Rather, he affirmed their goodness, warmly appealing to their heart. Real change must come from within.

How do *you* cultivate unity on *your* team? How do you affirm your athlete’s goodness and leverage it toward motivating personal sacrifices for one another? How do you elevate leaders on your team? This passage carries some major implications for all these questions.

“ **FOR THE STRENGTH OF THE PACK IS THE WOLF, AND THE STRENGTH OF THE WOLF IS THE PACK**

-RUDYARD KIPLING



OBSERVATION

1. In what specific ways did Jesus set an example of humility for us? (6-8)
2. In what specific ways did the Father honor Jesus' humility? (9)

INTERPRETATION

3. In your own words, what do these three phrases mean?
"equality w/ God" (6)

"a thing to be grasped" (6)

"emptied himself" (7)
4. What do these two phrases look like for a coach?
"not grasping" (6)

"emptying self" (7)

APPLICATION

5. As you grow in and model humility, how can you value and motivate an athlete to improve both their physical performance as well as their character?

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.



In yesterday's passage, Paul explained the relational behaviors that increase unity. He didn't just advise them. He instructed them on how to behave in order to achieve unity.

However, Paul didn't want mere external conformity. Like Christ, he desired every believer to experience a transformed life, beginning on the inside and working its way out into ever-changing godly behavior. This heart transplant begins by humbly submitting our will to God-given authority. This results in obedience which God honors. Believers can agree that all this *sounds* good, but is it realistic?

Like some of your drills, these actions are *much* easier to *understand* than to *achieve*. Something so dramatically different from our natural tendency needs a visual, hands-on example. Paul didn't elevate a *close* example to display. He chose the *Perfect Model*.

Paul challenged them, "***Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.***" As we change our thinking from *self-centered* to *God-centered*, we also change our response to the Lord's commands. We no longer run from the hardship of sacrifice, we embrace its honor. We obey, not because we fear God's consequences, but because we love him. The ultimate example is found in Christ.

Next, Paul masterfully presents the cause and effect of how a humble heart allows us to submit in obedience to the Lord, even to the point of suffering. This hardship for the cause of Christ unites believers as God intended. Indeed, some scholars believe the entire letter elaborates on these few verses describing the mindset behind Jesus' mission. ⁶ This understanding of the average Christian life which Paul referred to came from what most believe to be a familiar hymn in honor of Christ. ⁷ It makes clear that if we truly

want to follow Christ as he intended, we need an attitude adjustment.

Prior to Jesus' physical birth 2,000 years ago, **he was in the form of God**. As the second Person in the Trinity, he existed as God in every way. He existed without beginning. He exercised unlimited creative power. Angels worshipped him. The elements obeyed him. As basic Christian doctrine teaches, he was fully God (John 1:1-3).

However, as God, Jesus **did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped** or held onto. Specifically, he did not regard his equality with God as something to be used for his own advantage.⁸ During his incarnate state, he surrendered his right to fully manifest himself visibly as the God of all splendor and glory.⁹ He didn't see or use his authority and power as a means to serve himself, but as a means to serve others.

But, to fulfill his mission, he **emptied himself** of all *self-serving* options, but not of his deity. He did this **by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men**. He willingly shed his "God" privileges, with all its heavenly glory, in order to assume a new "human" role, with no status at all. Jesus lived his human life as the outward expression of the inward nature of God.¹⁰ Adopting Jesus' mindset, frees us to treat others in a way that communicates, "I am your servant, but you are not my Master."

This passage, perhaps more than any other, teaches the truth that Jesus came to Earth as both fully God *and* fully Man. As fully God, he possessed all the attributes, traits, and power we know to be true of God. As fully Man, he possessed all the temptations and limitations we know to be true of humans.

And being found in human form, since conception, **he humbled himself**. We have a very limited understanding of the glories of heaven. Therefore, it is impossible for us to fully understand the magnitude of this step Jesus took by **by becoming** a man. As if that were not enough, Jesus became **obedient to the point of death, even** submitting himself to **death on a cross**. Crucifixion, death on a cross, is the cruelest form of capital punishment a government ever used. The dramatic distance Jesus traveled from the "form of God" to "the death of the cross" dramatically reveals the servant mindset each believer should have.¹¹ Was his suffering worth it? Absolutely!

“ WHO DO YOU SERVE?

Therefore, because of Jesus' ultimate act of humility, **God has highly exalted him** to the ultimate position of honor **and bestowed on him the name that is above every name**, above every ruler—emperor, king, president, you name it. Why would the Father lift up the Lord Jesus Christ? **So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father**. During his thirty-three years on Earth, it seems Christ rarely displayed his power. When he did, he always served others, not himself. Likewise, we should exercise humility by obeying God and serving others.

Coach, you may not see yourself as Jesus. However, your authority, status, and power bring many similarities. For example, the way you treat others

carries a huge amount of weight, both for that person *and* those watching. Who do *you* serve with what God has entrusted to you? To what extent would you say your service becomes painful sacrifice?

You select, train, and empower athletes. What criteria do you use for this task? How can you value and motivate an athlete to improve both their physical performance *and* their character? How can you create a team culture where serving one another is honored by everyone within the program?

||
WHOEVER WOULD BE GREAT AMONG YOU MUST BE YOUR SERVANT, AND WHOEVER WOULD BE FIRST AMONG YOU MUST BE SLAVE OF ALL. FOR EVEN THE SON OF MAN CAME NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY.

-JESUS (MARK 10:43B-45)



OBSERVATION

1. What did Paul tell his readers to “work out” and why? (12-13)
2. What attitudes and actions should accompany our obedience? Why? (14-18)
3. Why did Paul want to send Timothy to the Philippians? (19-22)

INTERPRETATION

4. In your own words, how is God a part of our growth? (13)
5. What does “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” mean?
6. Why do you think Paul would address both our behavior and our attitude? (14-16)
7. How would you summarize the benefit of Paul sending Timothy? (19-22)

APPLICATION

8. Do you have anyone on your team that, like Timothy, models the kind of behavior/attitude that you desire? If so, how do you benefit from their example? If not, how might you develop someone like him?

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-24

¹²Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.



Yesterday, Paul presented Christ as humility’s gold standard. For the remainder of this Week, we’ll study the application of Jesus’ mindset to his followers. “**Therefore**” links Christ’s work (putting other’s needs above his own) with the work he expects of us.

Paul’s **beloved** Philippians should obey **as** they **have always obeyed**. However, writing from prison, he called them to do it, **not** as they did **in his presence, but much more in his absence**. That’s like you hearing your athletes pushed themselves when you were gone. The apostle longed for that as well.

Paul connected obedience to a **work out**. Sound familiar? However, in **this** context, the phrase refers to our salvation and comes **with fear and trembling**. Initially, this may seem to imply that a person must earn salvation through hard work. It does **not**. Indeed, Paul meant exactly the opposite

This verse doesn’t say we should work **for** our salvation with fear and trembling. It says we should work **out** our salvation. If we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ, **he** has already done the saving work, paying the price for our sin

when he died on the cross.

Those who believe in *him* and *his* obedient work, should obediently work in *response* to Christ's example. Salvation is his gift to all those who put their faith in his work alone. (To understand more about this gift, see page 105).

We should expect to work *as a result* of our salvation **for it is God who works in us, both to will** (God gives the *desire*) **and to work** (God gives the strength) **for his good pleasure**. Personal salvation brings with it responsibilities related to Christian obedience. Every believer has a responsibility to let their relationship with Christ transform their relationships with others.¹² As God sees us transform, he is pleased that his will is done. What do our transformed relationships look like?

“ OBEDIENCE INCLUDES BOTH WHAT WE DO AND HOW WE DO IT

Do all things without grumbling or disputing. Obedience includes both *what* we do and *how* we do it. A godly attitude displays the joy mentioned earlier and furthers the unity God desires. Next, as a good coach, Paul keeps their incentive front and center. Believers should obey, not to ensure their salvation, but so **that they may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation.** This “generation” refers to the unsaved people **among whom we shine as lights in the world.** Rather than mimic the world's darkness with self-centered attitudes, we illuminate the world with

our humility and obedience to Christ.

We can avoid drifting from Christ-like obedience to worldly selfishness by **holding fast to the word of life**, the Scriptures. Again, Paul motivated the Philippians to do the right thing, urging them to stay vigilant **so that in the day of Christ he may be proud that he did not run in vain or labor in vain.** This pride isn't sin. It's more like the satisfaction of winning State after working so hard during the many months before that victory. Nobody wants to feel like they worked for nothing.

To emphasize the point further, Paul speculated on the future possibility of his own execution. Visualizing his point, he suggested that he could **even be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of their faith** (see Drink Up!). However, even under that circumstance, Paul said he would be **glad and rejoice.** Seeking unity, Paul suggested that the Philippians, **likewise**, should **be glad and rejoice with him.** Not only did Paul present Christ's perfect model of putting others first, he also presented them with an example of someone they personally knew.

Paul expressed **hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to them soon.** Through his protégé and much-loved son in the faith, Paul expected to **be cheered by news of** their continued growth. Why Timothy? Because, out of all believers, Paul knew **no one else like him.** He was the best living example of someone **genuinely concerned for** other people's **welfare.** Proving the point, Paul contrasts Timothy with others.

They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But not Timothy. The Philippians knew that he had **proven worth.** In a heartfelt endorse-

ment, Paul esteemed how **as a son with a father he has served with him in the gospel.** Timothy modeled the very humility Paul desired in this church. The apostle held hope **to send him** (Timothy) **just as soon as** Paul saw **how it would go with** his long-awaited trial. Always optimistic, Paul had **trust in the Lord that shortly** he would **come also.**

Coach, as you already know, it doesn't require a lot of humility for an athlete to accept the privilege of joining your team. However, once they've made the cut, it *does* require humility to obey you and your instruction. Saying, “Yes, sir!” says something, but not nearly as much as *doing* it with the right attitude.

The same is true in our relationship with God. The Lord graciously invites us to join his team and have the privilege of wearing the uniform “he” paid for as a gift. However, with that gift and privilege, comes a level of expected work. Our work for Christ doesn't put us or keep us on his team, but it brings the Lord joy when we humbly obey him.

DRINK UP!

Both Jews and Greeks ceremonially poured out wine in connection with certain sacrifices (Num. 15:10 and Homer's Illiad, 11:775). In much the same way, Paul viewed his own life to be used by God as God saw fit.¹³



OBSERVATION

1. How did Paul initially describe Epaphroditus? (25)
2. Describe this servant's physical and emotional situation. (26-27)
3. Why did Paul send this man back to the church? (28)
4. How should he be received and why? (29-30)

INTERPRETATION

5. What does each description of Epaphroditus communicate? (25)
6. What can we believe about Epaphroditus based on Paul's entire description of him? (26-30)

APPLICATION

7. ID a specific character quality you see in a fellow coach that their athletes will likely remember about them? Why that one?

PHILIPPIANS 2:25-30

²⁵ I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

PRAYER REQUESTS

PRIMARY APPLICATION - RECORD ON PAGE 100

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Why is humility so critical to our personal growth and corporate unity?



After Paul gave the Philippians instructions for developing their unity, he gave them the ultimate example of humility, the sacrificial obedience of Christ. Then Paul reinforced this attitude by spotlighting Timothy. In today's passage, Paul drove home this essential character trait of humility by giving them yet another example. This one, although quite unfamiliar to us, had a special place in their hearts.

The apostle *thought it necessary to send* them *Epaphroditus*. We don't read much about this team member in Scripture. In fact, he's only mentioned in this letter (here and in 4:18-19). However, the way Paul describes him says *plenty* about the kind of man he was. As a believer, Paul could refer to this man as "*my brother*," but their relationship went far beyond that starting line. Epaphroditus also served along-

side Paul as a *fellow worker*. He may have helped in some of the local evangelism, discipleship, and pastoral care.

Finally, Paul considered him a *fellow soldier*, indicating his fighting spiritual battles alongside the veteran apostle. We don't know exactly how, when or where he fought, but when Paul calls someone a "fellow soldier," that's saying something. Paul often viewed his gospel ministry as a military campaign (2 Corinthians 10:4) in which he and his colleagues waged spiritual warfare (1 Corinthians 9:7; 2 Corinthians 10:3).¹⁴ Apart from foreign battlefields, Epaphroditus also served the Philippian church.

Paul continued, describing Epaphroditus as *your messenger and minister to my need*. Apparently, he served as the Philippian's representative, sent to Rome to care for Paul. While we don't know exactly how much time had passed since his departure from Philippi, Epaphroditus had *been longing for them all*. He had also *been distressed because the* Philippians *heard that he was ill*. How did they know? We're not told. However, *if* Epaphroditus travelled west from Philippi to Rome on the Egnatian Way when he became ill, then *perhaps* he was able to send a message back via someone travelling in the opposite direction.¹⁵ No matter how they found out, this clearly shows that the Philippian church had grown in their love and care. Paul appreciated these traits and wanted to see them grow even more.

Paul reported that *indeed he was ill, near to death*. Interestingly, Paul never indicates that he had the ability to heal his friend or that he tried to do so.¹⁶ It looked as though Epaphroditus would die. *But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on Paul also, lest he should have sorrow upon sorrow*. God's grace saved Epaphroditus' life

and spared Paul grief that would have accompanied the loss of someone so dear.

Knowing how special this man was to this church, Paul was even *more eager to send him* back in good health. His return would allow the Philippians to *rejoice at seeing him again, and* would allow Paul to *be less anxious*, better understood as "less sorrowful."¹⁷ Further, Paul also wanted to address any question about this man's reputation. Therefore he used his position to commend Epaphroditus and remove *any possibility* that his unexpected return would be misunderstood as a failure in his duty of any kind. That's leadership!

“ **THE POWER OF OUR PERSONAL EXAMPLE CHANGES LIVES**

So Paul asked the Philippians to *receive him in the Lord with all joy*. Then the apostle added something that reinforced his major themes of humble service and putting the interest of others before our own. Paul urged this church to *honor such men* and not only this one. Why? Because *he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in their service to Paul*. This "lacking" in service simply means the church sent Epaphroditus to care in ways which the entire church could not. Beyond bringing Paul funds, he would personally meet Paul's needs while he was housebound in Rome. As a "fellow soldier," he nearly gave his life to fulfill his mission.

We always want to be like those we esteem. By esteeming Epaphroditus (and all like him), Paul set their self-expec-

tations high, motivating them to be like the apostle's humble soldier. Certainly Jesus provides our ultimate model of humble servanthood. However, don't miss the fact that, as great as Jesus' example is, Paul called attention to two men whom the Philippian church actually knew face-to-face. Timothy and Epaphroditus don't rank as Bible All-Stars, but remind us that the power of our personal example changes lives. That should motivate *all* of us.

Coach, the people around you—faculty, athletes, parents—may hold Jesus in great regard. They may even want to be like him. However, to reach that goal, God desires that *you* represent Christ to *your* community. He wants *you* to model godly humility, sacrifice, obedience, and service. He wants *your* life to stand out so much that they will ask you why and how you live, act, and speak as you do. When they do, you will point to *your* model, Christ.

Someday, perhaps years from now, your athletes will be talking about how they want to live their life, perhaps even living it for the Lord. When they struggle to describe the kind of attitude they desire, they'll point to you. They'll say, "Do you remember the way Coach lived? Do you remember how he treated us and spoke to us? Do you remember how his example brought us all together as one team and not just a bunch of self-centered athletes? *That's* what *I* want to be like." *That's* when they'll remember the way you humbly appreciated every compliment and pointed to Christ. *That's* when they will see him for themselves.



BIG PICTURE

Paul began this letter by reviewing his own situation and perspective. Although under house arrest, he maintained a heavenly perspective. As a servant of Jesus Christ, he humbly obeyed God’s will, accepted his circumstances, and rejoiced in advancing the gospel. Next, the apostle pointed to the humble obedience of Christ as the ultimate example of how God uses that quality to further his work.

This Week, and for the remainder of his letter, Paul changes his tone from upbeat and encouraging to more direct, challenging, and authoritative. He issues dire warnings, specific commands, and stark contrasts. He doesn’t change his focus on unity. However, he talks about it less with his comforting arm around your shoulder and more with his pointed finger in your face.

OBSERVATION

1. What one main command did Paul emphasize to start this chapter? (1)
2. What 3 warnings did he give? (2)
3. What 3 traits ID true believers? (3)
4. ID some of the things that Paul could have boasted about. (5-6)

INTERPRETATION

5. In what way might Paul’s one command relate to his triple warning? (1-2)
6. In what way might Paul’s one command relate to his “flesh list”? (1, 4-6)
7. How do you think the contrasting influence of joy and pride impact unity?

APPLICATION

8. What specific steps/changes can improve unity on your team by increasing genuine unifying joy and/or minimizing divisive boasting?

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-6

¹ Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. ² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Certain halftime talks are legendary. From Hollywood portrayals like Gordon Bombay in *D2: The Mighty Ducks* or Coach Devine in *Rudy* to real life examples of ever-outraged Bobby Knight or iconic Knute Rockne, halftime talks can flip a game. Occasionally, inspiration requires a change in tone.

In 2001, upset by his University of Miami teammates' lack of emotion about losing to FSU at halftime, Ed Reed used his own emotion to set an example. His brief but impassioned plea inspired the Hurricanes to outscore the Seminoles 28-8 in the 2nd half and win the game.

Roughly 2,000 years ago, Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi began with joy in his heart and pep in his step with God-centered optimism. However, at “halftime,” Paul’s tone changes dramatically. Overshadowing his earlier optimism, you sense a seriousness and urgency missing from the first half.



Paul began his “second half” with “*finally*.” That *sounds* like we’re almost done. However, that clearly isn’t the case as the imprisoned pastor addressed his *brothers*, telling them to *rejoice in the Lord*. Paul didn’t just encourage but commanded them to rejoice. His authoritative command compels us to realize that a joyful life isn’t dependent on our circumstances, our personality, or our feelings. Instead, it is a *choice*.

Is Paul being redundant and repetitive? Yes, because *to write the same things to believers is no trouble to him and it is also safe*. Admittedly, it seems odd to command rejoicing in order to preserve safety. However, the correlation between dissatisfaction and disobedience began in the Garden of Eden and still infests your locker rooms and benches. Disgruntled people become vulnerable and, perhaps, dangerous.

Therefore, speaking of the legalists, Paul warns, **“Look out!”** Guard against *the dogs...the evildoers, and those who mutilate the flesh*. In contrast, *we (Christians) are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh* (receiving salvation by our own righteousness), *though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also*. Paul says, in effect, “If being good was good enough, I wouldn’t need God’s grace.” Paul “bragged,” **“If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.** He then backed it up.

First, he stated his *pedigree*. He was *circumcised on the eighth day*. That meant little to Gentiles, but everything to Jews. Since Abraham (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3), circumcision physically identified God’s covenant community. Paul’s parents, even living among Gentiles in Tarsus (Acts 21:39), made sure they circumcised him.

Further, Paul was *of the people of Israel*, God’s only covenant nation. However, Paul one-upped that honor by being *of the tribe of Benjamin*, the most-favored of the twelve tribes (see You’re the Favorite!)

Finally, Paul was *a Hebrew of Hebrews*, raised with strict Hebrew training. These measures of righteousness all came from his parents.

Second, Paul stated his *performance*. He lived in accordance *to the law*, as *a Pharisee*, sometimes called *“a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees”* (Acts 23:6). His father, no doubt, trained him from

“DISGRUNTLED PEOPLE BECOME VULNERABLE AND, PERHAPS, DANGEROUS

age four in religious instruction and tent-making. At six, Paul learned under the local Rabbis for strict, disciplined study. When he reached his mid-teens, Paul attended school in Jerusalem, tutored by Gamaliel (a leading scholar of that day) until he reached thirty.¹

Paul’s *zeal* for “righteousness” filled his head and heart. When he heard of a rebel Jewish sect (now called “Christianity”), he became a *persecutor of the church*. Regarding personal *righteousness under the law*, he was *blameless*. Everything in his life conformed to the external standards of the Law. As MC Hammer once put it, “Can’t touch this.”

Hearing these words, both Jews and Gentiles would have thought, “Paul’s is the picture of righteousness! Indeed, he even sounds a bit cocky, but he only touts his deeds to make one point: *none* of his own so-called “righteousness” matters to God.

None of us can reach God’s standard of righteousness. Only *Christ* can and did. By listing his pedigree and performance, Paul identified with the self-righteous who measure themselves this way. Nobody stands before God as either too righteous to need Christ or too unrighteous to be rejected by him. All ground is level at the cross.

Coach, as we mentioned earlier, disgruntled people become vulnerable and, perhaps, dangerous. This is as true on a team as it is in a family, school, church, or nation. To maintain unity, we must maintain perspective on both the people and circumstances which God ordained to be in our lives. As leaders, we also need to vigilantly guard the unity God has blessed us with and fight for it against all foes, inside or out.

That wisdom naturally raises the question, “How do we fight against a person’s divisiveness, while helping them grow?” *First*, we fight against the Great Divider, Satan, who constantly tempts us toward dissatisfaction with all that God has given to us. *Second*, we remember Who provides for and protects us more than any other. *Third*, we must remember to love them and pray for them.

TRUE COACHING STORY

In a three-year span, we were fortunate to be state runner-up and then state champions for two years in a row. Our community became spoiled and had acquired very high expectations. As a coaching staff, we knew tough times were coming.

The year after the last state championship, our team went 5-5 and did not make the playoffs. There was an immediate cry in the community to fire the head coach. The very same coaches that had three state championship appearances in a row now heard our own version of, “What have you done for me lately?”

YOU’RE THE FAVORITE

After the loss of Joseph, Benjamin became Jacob’s youngest, most-favored son (from his favorite wife, Rachel), the only son born in the Promised Land (Gen. 35:16-18).² Hundreds of years later, the tribe of Benjamin birthed Israel’s first king (1 Sam. 9:1-2) and was one of only two tribes loyal to David’s House when the nation divided (1 Ki. 12:21). Its land hosts both the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple (Judges 1:21).



OBSERVATION

1. How did Paul view his former “gains” of righteousness? (7-8)
2. What did Paul desire to gain now that he had a relationship with Christ? (8b-9)
3. ID Paul’s new life goals. (10-11)

INTERPRETATION

4. Why would Paul use a coarse word like “rubbish” to describe his accomplishments? (8)
5. In your own words, explain what Paul meant by...
“righteousness of my own” (9a):

“righteousness of God” (9b):

“know him” (10a)

“power of his resurrection” (10b)

“attain the resurrection from the dead” (11)

APPLICATION

6. Describe your own spiritual progress. How has God changed your perspective on how to measure it?

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-11

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.



You might call today’s Scripture “The Shredder.” Coaches crave a great W/L record. After all, it’s a shortcut toward respect. Like coaches, many religious people have “shortcuts,” measuring spiritual “records” by externals. These externals might include church attendance, some form of service, funding God’s work, or keeping a list of do’s and don’t’s. In this way, modern Christians aren’t much different than ancient Jews.

Paul’s pedigree and performance would’ve humbled any Jew. However, rather than brag, he took his glowing record and shredded it with delight. Yesterday, we looked at his impressive credentials. Today, we’ll learn why he trashed them.

Paul knew others lauded his record, *but whatever gain he had* from the world in attaining them, he *counted as loss for the sake of Christ*. Paul didn’t mean that his Jewish upbringing, the law, and “everything” else were evil. He meant that his *attitude* toward them was evil.³ The apostle learned what we must all learn in order to join God’s family and be changed by Jesus Christ: Only Christ’s righteousness can save us. No amount of goodness on our part can achieve or even contribute anything to our salvation.

That’s why, like Paul, we must *count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. Any good we dedicate—character, skills, money, passion—contributes nothing to our salvation. In fact, they can very often get in the way of knowing the Lord if they become a source of pride. Therefore, for Christ’s sake, Paul *suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish*. That last word “rubbish,” could just as easily say “trash” or “garbage.” However, the translators of our English Bibles chose to be rather delicate with this far more graphic word. You see, the Greek word Paul used here is skubala, which literally means “feces” or “excrement” (see Oh, Crap).

Why would Paul value his good works so harshly? In Jewish

culture, communicators often used extremes or hyperbole to emphasize a point. Many examples abound in Scripture (see Polarizing Truth). Paul knew that *in order to gain Christ and be found in him*, he had to humbly trust in Christ, fully depending on Christ for salvation, *not* his own achievements.

He gladly surrendered *having a righteousness of his own that comes from the law* for a relationship with the Almighty God *which comes through faith in Christ*. Indeed, only *the righteousness from God that depends on faith* can save us from sin. Such faith pleases the Lord and establishes new life-long goals. Paul breaks his new life goals into three main parts. Let's look at them.

First, Paul joyfully lived so *that he may know* [Christ]. This means more than just knowledge about Christ. It means knowing him personally through experience.⁴ *Second*, Paul also wanted to know the *power of his resurrection*. Paul elaborates on this in *Ephesians*, explaining that God has now made this power available to every Christian (Ephesians 1:19-20). *Third*, that he *may share his sufferings*. Paul had interest in *becoming like* [Christ] *in his death*. Paul wasn't suicidal. He simply knew that following Christ in the Roman Empire directly confronted Caesar's power. Therefore, it would result in suffering and possibly death.

These hardships did not turn Paul off from serving his precious Lord. He craved these experiences because each one drew him closer to Christ and expressed the apostle's delight in his Savior. He sought *any means possible to attain the resurrection from the dead*. Paul knew he would be resurrected, but *didn't* know what experiences would precede it.⁵ Further, Paul didn't fear death because he knew, as he mentioned earlier, that he would be raised by Christ into a new, perfect body that would never die.

Coach, you already know about the

OH, CRAP!

The Greek word, *"skubala,"* translated as "rubbish" doesn't simply mean "trash." More accurately, it would be translated "fecal matter" or, in everyday language, "crap."⁶ In this context, Paul graphically devalued what the flesh produces in gaining acceptance from God. He wanted to shock his readers to contrast his utterly worthless work compared to *Christ's* glorious work.

benefit of using measurable standards in order to evaluate progress. In sports, we use time, weight, distance, points scored, percentages and other external, objective evidence for evaluation. But how do you evaluate your spiritual progress? How do you know if you've grown from one year to the next? Today's passage provides at least three questions to ask yourself.

First, "Do I know the Lord better, not *about* him, but *him*?" Or to put it another way, "Has my personal experience and walk with Christ drawn me closer to knowing him?" *Second*, "Do I rely on his power to love others, serve others, and become more like Christ?" *Third*, "Am I more willing than before to joyfully suffer for Christ?" To put it another way, "Without looking for hardship, would I embrace it to draw closer to Christ?" To understand more about starting a relationship with Jesus Christ, please turn to page 105 in this playbook.

“ **HOW DO YOU EVALUATE YOUR SPIRITUAL PROGRESS?**

POLARIZING TRUTH

Using hyperbole, Jesus said such things as 1) "Gouge out your eye" and cut off your hand (Mt. 5:29-30). 2) Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Mt. 6:3). 3) "...say to this mountain, 'Go throw yourself into the sea'" (Mt. 21:21). It's not surprising that most examples of Jesus' hyperbole can be found in Matthew. It was written to a Jewish audience and features the most Rabbinical type of teaching.

TRUE COACHING STORY

We have this problem kid who has been diagnosed as bipolar and well, that's just for starters. He's a real test for all of on the coaching staff and team, but he's a good athlete. Our staff all understands, but he's still very difficult.

Last night he was really screwing up and when he came out of the game I was in his face! He then proceeded to "bump" me to the side and walk by. Everything in me wanted to throw him on the ground and choke him! I was almost out of control.

Thank goodness that, by God's grace, I have matured in wisdom! I chose to let the offensive behavior go at a personal level. However, as a coach, I responded by benching him for a while. Later in the game, the kid proved to be very important to the success of the team. That's when I realized what God had done and thanked him for the self-control to not lose it earlier. If I had lost my self-control, it would have definitely affected the kids, and I would have lost any testimony I had developed over the years and this season in particular.

Funny thing, the next day I had many emails. Ironically, some supported me for not losing my cool. Others were very mad that I let the kid come back in later in the game for a few minutes!



OBSERVATION

1. What has Paul not achieved? What does he pursue and why? (12)
2. What does Paul do about his past? His future? (13)
3. Who else should think this way? (15)

INTERPRETATION

4. ID benefits in handling one's past and future as Paul did? (13)
5. Why should pursuing one's spiritual life like Paul indicate maturity? (15)

APPLICATION

6. Examine your own spiritual life. ID the areas (if any) where you...
 Actively pursue:

 Stopped growing:

 Slipped back:

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-16

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.



Today's passage opens the door to Paul's heart, perhaps more than any other Bible passage. Like a coach driving home a point, Paul focused on the burning passion that drove him every day. You can't help but feel the intensity in his words and tone.

In case Paul gave the impression that he had it all together, spiritually, he quickly clarified that this was *not* true. He didn't claim to *have already obtained* the level of spiritual maturity he sought after, nor did he believe he was *already perfect*. Paul knew very well he had a long way to go on his spiritual journey. In fact, continuing that journey drove his intense commitment.

Paul had not "arrived" *but* he did *press on*. Here, Paul borrowed language from the world of war and athletics in order to emphasize his strenuous advance to fulfill his calling.⁷ What did he pursue? *To make it his own, because Christ Jesus has made Paul his own.* In this context, "it" probably refers to the 3-fold goal which he had just mentioned in yesterday's passage. That is, to know Christ, know the power of his resurrection, and share his sufferings becoming like him. Perhaps Paul envisioned his earlier command to be "worthy" (Philippians 1:27). It pictures the same, endless reciprocal pursuit toward "balancing the scales" with Christ's work on one side and his life on the other.

Repeating his earlier confession, Paul assured his Philippian *brothers* in Christ that he did *not consider* to "*have made it my own.*" He knew he wasn't perfect. In fact, Paul was likely his own toughest critic. Like you and I, he knew the extent of his sin better than anyone. Even in a life that probably appeared so pure on the outside, he knew his thoughts, motives, and struggles better than anyone.

But, because of his own spiritual shortcomings, he reduced all his considerable efforts to *one thing*. Before he identified that goal, he explained to us how he pursued it. That one goal is pursued by keeping two perspectives—two strategies—one on the past and one on the future.

Paul's first strategy was *forgetting what lies behind*. He chose to disregard both his sin (that Christ has already pardoned) and his spiritual accomplishments (that Christ has already provided). Either distraction could hinder his ongoing spiritual growth.

Paul's second strategy was *straining forward to what lies ahead*. Like a runner headed toward the finish line, we must keep the end in mind. We must remember why we suffer and sacrifice, never losing sight of the goal.

Using that "game plan," Paul would *press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*. Achieving that goal doesn't just happen. You don't just drift into it or hope it gets accomplished. Achieving that goal takes strenuous mental, emotional, and spiritual discipline. That kind of delayed gratification requires and elevates personal maturity.

You've probably heard it said, "It takes money to make money." Well, the same can be said about maturity. Like a staircase, a believer must reach one level of maturity to lead to the next. Paul realized that not all those who heard his words were ready to receive them. He recognized this application was for *"those of us who are mature."* That one qualifier, maturity, probably challenged some to continue their growth. At the same time, it likely challenged some others to actually become more mature.

“ IF WE DON'T MOVE FORWARD, SPIRITUAL GRAVITY PULLS US BACKWARD

What should the mature do? Paul told them to *think this way*. That is, share this same forward-thinking goal with other mature believers. Here, just as he showed in the very beginning of this letter, Paul knew that the heart of the matter was a matter of the heart. The

Christian life isn't about the externals, doing this or not doing that. It's about the internals, our commitment to let our life express our desire to please the Lord.

God knows and speaks to those who live their life "all in" for Christ. Likewise, God knows those who do not. *If in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.* Once he graciously shows us what ought to change, we have a choice. We can humbly submit to him or we can proudly keep that area of our life under our own authority. That choice, more than any external measurement, indicates our true level of righteousness, because true righteousness perseveres toward maturity.

For those not ready to press on with Paul's intensity, the apostle urged, *"Only let us hold true to what we have attained."* In other words, "If you're not moving forward, be sure you're not moving backward." In reality, he knew that if we don't move forward, spiritual gravity pulls us back-

ward. There is no neutral.

Coach, it's easy to see the improvement of an athlete when they first start out. They learn techniques and develop skills so dramatically that they become quite obvious to even the most casual observer. The less motivated athletes may plateau because they become content with their development. The most motivated athletes enjoy their growth and never stop learning even the most minor enhancements and improvements you can offer. Their humble and teachable spirit motivates you to keep giving them your best.

We can experience the same choice at a spiritual level. Those who come to Christ usually grow and change so dramatically that everyone takes notice and gives positive feedback and encouragement. Over time, however some become complacent about their growth, even resistant. Others, like the motivated athlete, realize God intended our growth to continue until our last breath on Earth.

TRUE COACHING STORY

One of my talented athletes continued to make poor choices. His drug use and abuse caused him to miss practices, yet he expected to play. He could not see how his decisions jeopardized his future. I tried to help in every way I could. I had taken him to FCA camp, met with his parents (he was adopted), met with his position coach, and even our head football coach. However, he never changed. Eventually, we reached our final straw with this young man. We had him sign a contract to not miss practices or games. then he missed another practice.

Having exhausted all options, painful as it was, we had to dismiss him from the team. He didn't believe me when I told him. His parents were upset at us. As a coaching staff, we were torn as well. He was a senior and we were in game 7 of a 10-game season. He had definite potential, and football could have been his way out of his current life. However, despite the pain, we had to stand firm together in delivering this consequence for his actions.

Coaches know that one player isn't more important than the entire team. Our reluctant, but necessary, choice proved that true. After his dismissal, our team closed rank and players realized that they would be held accountable for their actions, not only on the field, but off the field as well.

I've never wanted to remove a player from a team but, at some point, it's the best thing to do. Hopefully, that young man learned a valuable lesson. I know I did.



OBSERVATION

1. What did Paul invite his brothers to do? (17)
2. How did Paul ID and react to those who do not live by his example? (18)
3. What 4 things are true of them? (19)
4. What things are true of those who do follow Paul's example? (20)
5. ID Paul's relational terms toward those who share his heart for God (4:1)

INTERPRETATION

6. ID the primary focus of those who...
...reject Paul's example. (19d)

...follow his example? (20a)
7. In your own words, what did Paul feel toward those who shared his focus and heart for God? (4:1)

APPLICATION

8. As a coach, in what ways do you focus on...
the "long game," with patience?

the "short game," with impatience?

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:1

¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

4¹ Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

PRAYER REQUESTS

PRIMARY APPLICATION - RECORD ON PAGE 100

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How can you express and enjoy unity with those who share your values, while **not** showing favoritism?



Paul clearly contrasted true righteousness with false righteousness. For example, true righteousness guards its freedom. It doesn't impose legalism. True righteousness delights in Christ's work for us. It doesn't glorify our work for him. True

righteousness perseveres toward maturity. It doesn't become distracted by past sins or accomplishments. Today, we will see how true righteousness longs for eternity. It doesn't focus on satisfying temporary pleasures.

Coaches know the power of repetition. The more important something is, the more you repeat it. Your athletes may get tired of hearing it, but you repeat it because they don't always remember. You also repeat it because you need to say the exact same thing in as many ways as possible to make sure they understand. That's precisely what Paul does in this passage. He repeats his message, but in a slightly different way because it's vitally important that the Philippians (and we) get the message.

they wouldn't be *nearly* so dangerous. Everyone would know that they had heard Paul's message, but either never believed it or rejected it. If Jewish, they would have continued trying to keep the Law. If Gentile, they would have continued following other gods. However, as enemies of the cross of Christ, they likely appear to be Christians, but elevate works to some degree. They reject the finished work of Christ as the one and only means to eternal life. They see human works as an additional requirement for salvation. Paul then taught four truths about these spiritual enemies.

to be like his glorious body. That doesn't depend on us. That's a work he does *by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.* With such a truly awesome future awaiting believers, there's only one conclusion. Paul pleads with all the emotions of a loving father to his vulnerable children.

Therefore, in light of the contrast between these two futures, he urges, *"My brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved."* When you love someone, you can't help but want the very best for them. Paul loved his Philippian friends with all his heart. He craved their unity and their joy. However, he knew that for them to experience those blessings, they needed to humbly submit to the lordship of Christ. Next Week, he'll give very specific practical "how-to" advice on achieving that goal.

Coach, short-term thinking permeates our entire culture. We're impatient with our microwave ovens, our 401K earnings, and our Internet connections. More personally, we're impatient with others and, if we're honest, with ourselves. To ease those frustrations, let this Week remind you to keep focused on the *long game*.

Remember, Paul wrote these words about his own progress about 25 years after his personal encounter with Christ, launching his spiritual journey. Like physical growth and strength, spiritual growth and strength takes time. Nobody is saying, "ease up" or "slack off." We're just encouraging you to be realistic and, yes, patient.

Allow God to let that mindset filter into your coaching as well. Taking our cue from Paul, let's repeat what you and your staff already know. As you and your team stay focused on the "long game," the important things will rise above the petty, and often annoying, less important things. Further, your team will give each other the space to experience the unity you all desire.

“ KEEP FOCUSED ON THE LONG GAME

In repeating his message Paul, once again, calls them *"brothers,"* an endearing generic term which includes the sisters as well. Drawing them close, Paul introduced yet another intensely emotional appeal for their spiritual well-being.

He invited them to *join in imitating* him and travel the same spiritual road. To do that, they'll need to *keep their eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.* Paul didn't set himself up above others. He wrote "us," not "me" indicating he also had Timothy and Epaphroditus in mind. If you've ever invited your athletes to, likewise, follow your example, you know it brings *major* accountability.

The circumstances prompting this invitation broke the apostle's heart. *Many of whom Paul often told* them about previously, *and now tell* them about, have not continued down the right path. They aren't openly hostile to Christians, so he doesn't call them "enemies of Christ." However, *with tears,* he reports that they *walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.* Is this a difference without a distinction? No.

If they had become enemies of Christ,

First, their end is destruction. They have not fully trusted in Christ to pay for their sin. Therefore, they will not experience the resurrection which Paul just discussed. Rather than death bringing gain, it will bring only loss and torment.

Second, their god is their belly. It would be a mistake to picture only eating habits. Although their diet might indicate their spiritual condition, this identifies a deeper problem. They worship at the altar of instant gratification. They can't restrain from feeding a range of physical pleasures and desires. *Third, they glory in their shame.* Their world is so distorted that they openly boast about the very things that *any* decent person would hide. Why do these people live this way? *Fourth* they have their *minds set on earthly things* as first mentioned in chapter 1. For that mindset, we must remember where we live.

From the perspective of eternity, this world is nothing more than a bad night at a cheap motel, *but our citizenship is in heaven.* We need to keep our mind focused on heaven because *from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.* Rather than indulge the temporary pleasures of our brief mortal existence, *Christ will transform our lowly body*



BIG PICTURE

For three entire chapters, Paul has written about his own circumstances, his perspective on suffering, and how God has used it to advance the gospel. He has pointed out Christ's model of humility as well as the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus. In our last passage, he offered an impassioned plea for the Philippians to have a mature believer's desire for genuine, growing righteousness. However, he has not identified any specific problem within

their church...until now.

In his final chapter, Paul becomes very specific about how believers can and should develop unity by showing mutual support in various forms. He begins by urging two women to work out their differences with the help of other believers in the church. Next, the apostle offers some practical advice of how such support can and should grow in all our hearts, reach into our pockets, and ultimately unite God's family.

OBSERVATION

1. Who did Paul mention by name? To do what? (2)
2. Who else did Paul address and why? (3)
3. List the commands Paul gives in these verses (4-6)
4. What did Paul promise as a result? (7)

INTERPRETATION

5. Why do you think Paul addressed their disagreement in a publicly-read letter? (2)
6. Why might Paul want to involve these others in the problem? (3)
7. How might these commands relate to this promise? (4-7)

APPLICATION

8. What conflicts do you need to address in your life or in the lives of people you know?

What is your next step?

PHILIPPIANS 4:2-7

² I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Few aspects of war carry the grief of our soldiers dying from our own military actions. *We expect* hostility from our foes, but not from our own side. This became Pat Tillman's story. After the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, he turned down an NFL contract with the Arizona Cardinals to join the military. While in Afghanistan with the 75th Ranger Regiment, he was killed on April 22, 2004. Within hours, officers knew his death resulted from friendly-fire. However, for five weeks they violated regulations, telling the truth to neither Tillman's family nor the public.

Later, details emerged. Tillman could see the men shooting at him when he was killed. His uniform was burned after his death. "Higher ups" ignored medical examinations and ordered his comrades' silence. Just one day after approving a medal citation, claiming Tillman died from "devastating enemy fire," a high-ranking general tried to warn President George W. Bush of the story's questionable veracity. Eventually, the truth became public knowledge.¹

Sadly, many Christians also fall victim to friendly-fire. Like Tillman, the truth of their battle and its casualties may remain hidden or, only later, become public. Perhaps you have experienced or witnessed friendly-fire and felt its pain.

Paul attempted a cease-fire before friendly-fire casualties occurred. Since the conflict was well-known, Paul didn't hesitate calling them out by name in his publicly-read letter. Can some of your athletes relate?



The apostle wrote to *entreat Euodia and her rival, Syntyche*, about their conflict. Paul didn't expect them to *agree* on the *issue* dividing them. However, he *did* expect them to agree *in the Lord*. That is, they should pursue peace based on their common ground (Philippians 2:1-4). That eternal mindset (Philippians 3:17-21) should count for more than any difference of opinion.

Personal conflicts involving strong emotions often require a third party for positive resolution. Perhaps that's why Paul wrote, "*Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women.*" We don't know the identity of this unnamed but trusted friend. However, Paul asked for their assistance in reconciling these feuding believers.

These women *have labored* (literally, "contended" or "fought," see Philippians 1:27) *side by side with Paul in the gospel together*. They also served *with Clement and the rest of the apostle's fellow workers*. They have solid relationships with others *whose names are in the book of life*. We sometimes question the salvation of those who divide believers in Christ. However, *Paul* shut down such futile speculation.

Instead, he reminded these women and everyone in the church, "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*" Although we associate "joy" with our emotions, Paul didn't offer a touchy-feely solution to contention in the ranks. Instead, he urged them

to exercise their *reasonableness*. This Greek word (*epieikes*), often translated "gentleness," is difficult to express in just one word.

The word often depicts an expression of kindness rather than an expected act of retaliation.² The "gentle" person doesn't insist on their rights. Rather, they exercise courtesy and respect for the integrity of others. Such fairness and magnanimity should develop and *be known to everyone*. Jesus lived it (2 Corinthians 10:1) and requires it of Christian leaders (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 3:2).³

Next, Paul practiced what he preached earlier. He focused on the "long game." He reminded his friends, "*The Lord is at hand.*" In other words, "You wouldn't want the Lord, who pleaded with the Father for unity, to return for his people in the middle of your squabble, do you?" Although "family" conflicts can cause much grief, other issues can also take their toll.

“ PRAYERFUL PEOPLE ARE PEACEFUL PEOPLE

Therefore, Paul issued a challenging boundary for every believer: *Do not be anxious about anything*. Worry and joy cannot live together, nor can anxious people unify others. We all become anxious from time to time, so how do we remove worry from our minds? What will fill its place? After all, nature abhors a vacuum. Anticipating that problem, the apostle continued.

But, rather than worry about *everything, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving* (an attitude of gratitude chokes out worry), *let your requests be made known to God*. Some

skeptical listeners to this letter may have thought, "Prayer is nice, but what good will it do?" To that, Paul promises the one thing worrisome people crave most.

As they turn everything over to God, they will experience *peace*. Unlike the world's peace, this peace 1) is *of God*, 2) *surpasses all understanding* and, 3) *will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*. That word "guard" is a military term, implying that God's peace stands on duty against worry. For these reasons, prayerful people are peaceful people.⁴

Coach, it would be asking a lot for you to be passionate about your team and your mutual success, yet never have any "issues" arise between you and other coaches, athletes, school leadership, or parents. Thankfully, the Lord isn't commanding, or even asking for any such thing. He *knows* we will have conflict and that some of the toughest conflicts will be with those we love most.

God *does* want us to handle our conflicts, and the anxiety they cause, in his wisdom, grace, and power. He wants us to 1) take it to the Lord in prayer, 2) focus on the things we have in common, and 3) involve a trusted 3rd party if needed. Taking just these three steps will put God's guard on our heart and mind. So, what steps do *you* need to take to experience God's peace?



OBSERVATION

1. What things ("Whatever is...") should Christians think on? (8)
2. What 4 things ("What you have...") should these Christians practice? (9)

INTERPRETATION

3. In your own words, define the key terms in verse 8.
4. In your own words, define the 4 key terms in verse 9.

APPLICATION

5. What strained relationship in your life (to any degree) could benefit from these thoughts and actions?

PHILIPPIANS 4:8-9

⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

CO

Yesterday, Paul addressed the conflict between two women and our problem which we commonly call "worry." Both conflicts wage war against God and his peace. Then we learned three steps to achieve that kind of peace.

Finally, in today's passage, Paul exhorts his *brothers* in Christ to prepare their hearts and minds for the peace only God can provide. He lists eight different categories of thought that should permeate our minds (v. 8) and then four criteria for imitating others (v. 9). He doesn't suggest a particular truth or application for either set of lists. Instead, by repeatedly using the word "*whatever*" or "*any*," he frees believers to personalize their own application. When your thoughts fit these very broad, godly categories, you are free. However, this freedom comes with responsibility. We must understand these categories to wisely apply them in our lives.

First, whatever is true – "True" comes from the Greek word (*alth*, pronounced, "ah-lay-thay"), meaning honest and reliable.¹ As used here, in the ethical sense, it means "truthfulness" or "dependability."² Without the filter of absolute truth, the other categories listed become meaningless.

Second, whatever is honorable – "Honorable" (*semna*, "sem-nah") is primarily used by Paul in the Pastoral Epistles with the idea of "worthy of respect," "honor," "noble." While this category *could* relate to things, it's primarily used of faithful church leaders, or other people deserving of respect.³

Third, whatever is just – This word, "just" (*dikaiosyn*, "di-kai-sin-nay"), implies giving to both God and people the just treatment worthy of them.⁸ This extends beyond the human understanding of what is "right" or "just," and includes God and his relationship with his people.⁹

Fourth, whatever is pure – The word (*hagna*, "hag-nah") originated referring to sacred objects of the Temple. Howev-

er, it applies to whatever isn't tainted in some way.¹⁰ We can apply this principle to both morals and/or motives.

Fifth, whatever is lovely – This word, *prospheil* (“pros-fil-a”), speaks of what people consider “lovable.”¹¹ In this context, that which promotes peace rather than conflict.¹² It refers to those things that are so gracious, they draw others to them.¹³

Sixth, whatever is commendable – This word, *euphma* (“eu-fee-ma”) relates to what is positive and constructive rather than negative and destructive.¹⁴ It's the root of our word, “euphemism.” Practically, it's the difference between saying something harsh like, “NO! You're doing that wrong!” vs. something encouraging like, “You're doing well. Just change this one thing.”

This concludes Paul's list of six specific things. However, he had not finished yet. By shifting from “*whatever*” to “*any*,” he added two more and brought the total to *eight* categories.

Seventh, the phrase “*any excellence*” translates the most comprehensive Greek term (*aret*) for moral excellence.¹⁵

Eighth, Paul ends with the final category of *any praise*. Although this word (*ep-ainos*) usually refers to the approval of others, its use here shifts from a general moral judgment to conduct in keeping with God's righteousness.¹⁶

So, we've been given all these different, important categories. Now, what do we do? We **think about these things**. This word “think” (*logizesthe*) connects to our English word “logic.” Thus, this word means far more than simple thought. It involves accounting for these things and following their course to their logical outcome.¹⁷

Paul told them to think not so much about “high thoughts” but the logical outcomes of the “praise” and “excellence” categories. That is, Euodia and Syntyche should consider the good things from their past friendship and service together as long as it conformed to Christ. More generally, we should evaluate what this present world offers from a godly perspective, and enjoy the best of it. His point is very practical: although we live as citizens of heaven, we shouldn't discard *everything* about the world in which we live.¹⁸

In conclusion, Paul shifted his application from what his friends in Philippi should *think* to how they should live. He boldly gave them four experiential standards. **What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me**. If they could recall Paul validating a certain activity (behavior or speech) in all four areas, they should also **practice these things**. Think about it. That's a pretty gutsy standard because, with it, Paul became *highly* accountable.

Earlier, Paul promised his friends that if they put his exhortations into action, they would experience the peace of God. Now, he promised that if they put *these* exhortations into action, “**The God of peace will be with you.**” Isn't that the most important thing in our life?

Coach, your head probably feels like it's about to explode with all you've got to know and do. You may be thinking, “I can't put that much more in my head or I'll lose what I've already got!” Good news. This list isn't so much about adding new items, but how we should weigh what's already there. As we said from the beginning of this study, it's about a *mindset* more than anything else.

Is there an athlete or coworker in your life that used to be a close partner but

is now more of a hostile adversary? If you need a heart transplant, put these eight categories into practice. Remember these things from your past together. Then picture a Christian you know and greatly respect and consider how *they* would handle the situation? Taking these steps might just turn things around. At the very least, you will experience both the peace of God *and* the God of peace as never before.

TRUE COACHING STORY

After a poor performance on a Friday night in west Texas, the long bus ride home to Oklahoma became even longer. I demanded all the lights turned off and everybody to stay quiet. Given how I felt at the moment, the last thing I needed was a discipline problem. However, even that simple request seemed to have been disregarded.

About one hour into the trip home, I looked into the bus driver's mirror and saw a light on near the back of the bus. I went to the back to deliver a stern message, "Didn't I say that the lights should be out?" Then I looked down and saw two Bibles open. One of my players said, "Please, sit down, Coach. We have something we want to share with you."

That night, on a long bus ride home in west Texas, my players shared the Gospel with me. I shed tears every time I tell others the story of how I came to know Christ. God bless those players. They changed my life forever.



OBSERVATION

1. What did Paul learn about handling various circumstances? (11-13)
2. What did the Philippians do for Paul? (14-16, 18)
3. Why did Paul rejoice at their action? (17)
4. Who would meet their material needs? (19)

INTERPRETATION

5. What is meant by, "I can do all things through him..."? (13)
6. What did Paul mean by saying, "I seek the fruit that increases to your credit"? (17) (See Study Notes)

7. What does this principle look like in action?

APPLICATION

8. How do you/can you consciously act on this principle?



**THE POCKETBOOK
IS ALWAYS
THE LAST THING
GOD SANCTIFIES**

-MARTIN LUTHER

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-20

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.



People don't like being asked for money...especially from churches. Yet, the four gospels record Jesus talking about money more than *any* other topic, including heaven or hell. Like it or not, our money reveals much about our heart.

Today, Paul follows Jesus' example. In this final chapter, he addresses the touchy topic of money. Whether you happen to be the asker or giver, these verses will challenge, and may-be change, your perspective.

Yet again, Paul *rejoiced in the Lord greatly*. Perhaps after a brief lull in communication, *now at length they have revived* their *concern* for him. The apostle had brought the gospel to Philippi, even enduring a beating and imprisonment for his efforts. However, through his commitment to them and to Christ, he planted a church, trained them through his ministry partners, and saw their faith grow.

The Philippians *were indeed concerned for* Paul, *but* they *had no opportunity* to express it. With Paul always moving and in the absence of phones, texts, emails, or wire services,

these friends couldn't easily show their appreciation and financial support. **Not that** Paul was *speaking of being in need*.

Unlike some organizational leaders today, Paul didn't manipulate their checkbooks to bump up his lifestyle, **for** he had *learned in whatever situation* he was in *to be content*. In his fifties, with many miraculous experiences and painful trials under his belt, the adaptable evangelist could honestly say, **"I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need."** Pause to consider *this* context, because Paul's *next* statement has been twisted to the point of absurdity...and your athletes are among the most vulnerable.

In this context Paul said, **"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."** Despite much misquoting to the contrary, this doesn't mean that a vertically-challenged, sophomore could become your high jump star if they only had faith. This expresses our ability to endure any circumstance God calls us to *with contentment* (see No Can Do!). *The Living Bible* conveys it better, "I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power."

In this context of material need, Paul gratefully acknowledged their faithfulness, **"It was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again."** Then Paul, again, clarified his intent.

Paul did **not** write to *seek the gift, but* he sought *the fruit that increases to*

their *credit*. That is, he wanted them to invest in his work and receive God's eternal dividend (fruit) in return. He knew that he had already *received full payment, and more*. Further, he was *well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts* the Philippians *sent* which came as *a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God*. However, Paul knew the biggest hindrance to generosity is the fear that our own needs might go unmet.

Confidently, he eased their concern. Because of their faithfulness to God in supporting his work, Paul told them, **"My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."** As it's been said, "You can't outgive God."

“ GOD WANTS YOU TO INVEST IN ETERNITY

As we said earlier, money is a very touchy topic. It would be easy for those of us without a great deal of discretionary income to dismiss our responsibility before God to provide money for his work. We could assume that God doesn't need our trivial donation. That's true. *God* doesn't need us to give him anything to his work. However, *we* need to give to his work. *We need* to encourage others with financial support. *We need* to have their fruit put to our "credit." *We need* to invest our funds in a way that brings honor **to our God and Father**, so that he would receive *glory forever and ever. Amen*.

Coach, you invest your time, energy, and passion into hundreds of lives, hoping to get a good return on that investment. Chances are, to varying

degrees, you have already received a portion of that return on your investment. If you haven't received it yet, you will. It's part of the incredible reward of investing in young people. There's a lot of time for compounding interest to accrue to your account.

However, God desires for you to experience a different kind of investment and dividend. Indeed, God wants you to invest in eternity. Specifically, he wants you to partner with those who invest their time and effort in eternal things. We often think of those in the field as the ones whom God will reward. Be encouraged! This passage makes clear that their support partners share in that eternal dividend and God doesn't want you to miss out.

NO CAN DO!

This context provides the key to understanding this verse. First, the passage discussed material and physical needs. Having endured unpredictable and varying situations, Paul knew a stability enabling him to rise above them. This context requires our application to consider economic or material conditions, not expanding it to physical performance.

Second, Paul expressed his dependence on the power of the Lord. He knew that where the Lord led him, God would provide power. God's will must guide and limit our application of this verse. Many who misapply this verse step out of God's will attempting deeds God never desires or empowers.¹⁹



OBSERVATION

1. What did Paul ask his readers to do and then do to them? (21)
2. What specific group did Paul mention? (22)
3. What final blessing did Paul offer? (23)

INTERPRETATION

4. Why might Paul have singled out the one identified group sending greetings? (22)

APPLICATION

5. What relationship might you be able to create with your influence and initiative to further God's work?

PHILIPPIANS 4:21-23

²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me greet you. ²² All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. ²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

PRAYER REQUESTS

PRIMARY APPLICATION - RECORD ON PAGE 100

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How have you seen tension between two people healed with the help of another?



Paul opened his letter with warm and personal greetings to all those in Philippi. Now, in his closing words, Paul again reflects Roman culture, ending with warm, personal wishes for the good health of his recipients and a farewell. Although the apostle followed the general pattern, he doesn't write the *usual* 'farewell' or 'good luck' found in pagan letters or even Christian ones.²⁰

Instead, he sent personal greetings from his close associates and other Christians as well as from himself (21–22) and then concluded the letter with a benediction (23). Paul filled these greetings and benedictions with Christian content and consistently reflected his relationship with the readers. In this simple and brief farewell, Paul packed in and repeated key relational words like “saints” (22), “brothers” (21), “grace” (23), and “the Lord Jesus Christ” (23).²¹

Before Paul sends well wishes from those in Rome, he expressed a general desire for those receiving this letter to ***greet every saint in Christ Jesus***. Certainly, some acquaintances of his would not be able to hear his words read in public, so he posed an umbrella request that his greeting be passed on.

Given the mutual warmth and close partnership between Paul and the Philippian church, the lack of personal names and greetings is conspicuous by its absence. Perhaps he left them out to stress unity in two different ways. One, by *not* singling out any one individual, he alleviated the perception of anyone being more important or favored. Two, he taught that each and every believer is important in a unified church. Finally, Paul sent greetings to those in Philippi from three distinct groups of people in Rome.

“ STRESS THE URGENCY OF UNITY

First, Paul included ***the brothers who are with him***. We cannot identify this group with absolute certainty, but they are probably his fellow partners in ministry. Undoubtedly, that would include Timothy. However, it would also extend to all those evangelists preaching the gospel out of “good will,” “love,” and knowing God had appointed Paul (Philippians 1:15-16).²²

The beautiful thing is that no matter who these brothers were or how long they had known Christ, they were part of God's family. As brothers in Christ, they now experienced a bond of unity beyond borders or earthly citizenship. That bond motivated those in Rome to ***greet*** those in Philippi.

Second, ***all the saints*** in Rome ***greet***

them. This is better translated as “every saint” or, even more literally, “Give my greeting to each member of God's people in Christ Jesus.”²³ The difference distinguishes between “all” treating them as one *group* vs. “every” treating them as equal *individuals*. While this wordplay may seem picky, it reflects Paul's conscious efforts to avoid any hint of favoritism. In a church troubled by disunity, the apostle would not take sides.²⁴

This group in Rome includes every convert, young and old. Some may have been part of the coalition of Jewish leaders that first visited the apostle when he arrived in Rome (Week 1). You may remember their mixed reaction to Paul's presentation of the gospel from the Old Testament.

Third, and certainly the most intriguing of all, Paul noted ***especially those of Caesar's household***. This expression is used in the literature to refer to those from the highest officials in the Roman government to the lowest servants in the emperor's service. Since we have no evidence of Nero's immediate family members converting to Christianity, nor any direct evidence of high public officials attached to the Praetorian (although Philippians 1:13 opens the possibility), we have only one conclusion. Most likely Paul is referring to Roman soldiers stationed in the barracks, or slaves or freedmen handling the emperor's domestic affairs, or both.²⁵ This shows Paul impacted people for Christ right where God had placed him.

Perhaps because of Philippi's importance as a colony and financial center, some employees had regular business contacts with the Christians at Philippi.²⁶ Some of these saints might certainly include the guards that he mentioned in the very first chapter of this book (1:12-14).

Paul had given them great cause for encouragement, but also a great challenge for unity. He knew that they needed to humbly realize they couldn't achieve that unity in their own power. It could only happen if ***the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ would be with their spirit***. Confident of their need and God's desire, the apostle provided an appropriate “bookend” blessing to his letter (see Philippians 1:2).²⁷

Coach, that wraps up our study of *Philippians*. In this little letter, Paul has stressed the urgency of unity. Unlike many cultural or political calls for unity today, this *biblical* call for unity rests on the solid foundation of God's truth. Fundamentally, it rests on the example of sacrifice and humility of Jesus Christ. Be like Christ. Can you imagine a *bigger* challenge than that!

In this final passage, we see the value of linking believers together. Various groups pursuing the same goals must support each other. We can become so wrapped up in our little corner of the world, that we forget our “brothers” striving for the same win. Good leadership reminds them that we're all on the same team and communicates in a way that unites them as one.

While we will never match Christ's perfection, we must continually seek his power to follow his example. To help us meet that challenge, this playbook will continue to explore some of Paul's other prison letters. They will teach us about Christ and how we might imitate him in order to achieve the unity we all desire.



BIG PICTURE

During the first half of this study, Paul wrote a letter to the Philippian church while a prisoner in Rome. He urged them toward unity through the paths of humility and concern for others. He gave the church several examples to follow including himself, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. However, the Perfect Model he gave, which we must also follow, was Christ himself. Jesus humbly submitted himself to the Father, even suffering an agonizing death.

This letter to the church in Colossae is different. Paul's relationship with them wasn't nearly as close as with the Philippians. Paul addressed the divisive doctrinal issues in the church and urged them toward unity through the path of submitting themselves to Christ and to God's truth. Like spokes on a wheel, as believers move closer to God's truth, they will inevitably grow closer to one another.

OBSERVATION

1. Who sent this letter? How did they describe themselves? (1)
2. Who are this letter's recipients? Where are they? (2a)
3. What wishes are sent to them? (2b)

INTERPRETATION

4. Why do you think Paul described himself in this way and not "a servant" as with the Philippians? (1)
5. What is implied by the description of the recipients? (2)

APPLICATION

6. Paul could have used the same self-description as he did with the Philippians, but he chose otherwise. How do you determine which one of your "hats" to wear when you need to communicate something?

COLOSSIANS 1:1-2

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

A few years ago, I had an unanticipated conversation about spiritual things with two young men. That spontaneous talk led us to a multi-week discussion about our faith in God. In the process, I found their sincerity both winsome and intriguing. Clearly, they had received training in their faith and how to share it. On the surface, their faith resembled biblical Christianity in many ways. However, that glossy cover hid many differences.

Their faith *added* to Scripture and *altered* Scripture so significantly that it no longer communicated God's truth. We used the same *words*—"God," "Jesus," "salvation," "heaven," "Scripture" and more—but each term carried a radically different *meaning*. Like many today, these two young men sincerely believed, explained, and defended false doctrine. They repeatedly tried to make it *seem* like we had shared beliefs that united us in many ways. However, without believing the same *truth*, we simply could not be united.

Bottom line: They didn't believe what the Bible says about who God is. They also didn't believe in the salvation available through Jesus Christ as explained by the Scriptures. Despite our friendly and respectful conversation, they were *not* brothers in Christ. Worse, they preach a different gospel and diligently lead others astray. Such truth-twisting plagues the body of believers today, but its infection began during the earliest days of the Church.



After a Christian evangelist preached in Colossae, converts formed a church. We'll learn more details about their history later today. Shortly after forming, their church fell prey to false teachers. Out of concern for their spiritual lives, someone sent word about their situation to **Paul** in Rome.

Under house arrest in the Empire’s capital, Paul addressed the specific cause of disunity within this church. Unlike the Philippians, the Colossians were not split over two *people*, but over two *teachings*. Paul taught the truth about Christ, his nature, and majesty. False teachers poisoned people with heresies about Christ’s authority and power. In love, Paul’s confrontation sought to remove this doctrinal cancer. Such doctrinal surgery required wearing a different hat.

“ YOU ARE GOD’S MESSENGER TO YOUR SCHOOL

In his greeting to the Philippians, Paul identified himself as a servant. However, in *this* letter, he introduced himself as *an apostle of Christ Jesus*. This title recognizes the Christ-given authority he carried to correct error in the church. Paul never hesitated using this title whenever a strong display of his authority was necessary¹ (see What’s an Apostle?).

Unlike the false teachers’ *self*-appointed authority, Paul had been appointed and commissioned *by the will of God*. As with Christ’s first disciples (Matthew 28:18-20), he led Paul to make disciples, baptize, and teach others (particularly Gentiles) the truths Jesus taught (Acts 9:15). Now in prison, Paul wrote with *Timothy*, his son in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2), who was probably in his thirties at this time. He also saw him as a fellow servant (Philippians 1:1) and, along with those in this church, *our brother*.

Paul addressed this letter to *the saints and faithful brothers*. He warned them their family relationship hinges on their being *in Christ*. The church *at Colossae* began when Epaphras (one of their own, Colossians 4:12), spread the good news in his hometown, just 100 miles east of Ephesus, the second largest city in the Roman Empire (Colossians 1:7; 2:1; 4:12).

It would make sense that after Paul planted the church in Ephesus, they became instrumental in planting this one in Colossae. If so, that would make *Colossians* Paul’s only letter to a “grand-child” church—the offspring of a church Paul actually planted. Some of you know the unique and abundant affection such a child can arouse.

Paul wished the Colossians *grace* in their lives *and peace*. In a church combating division, they needed the kind of peace that can only come *from God our Father* through his son, Jesus. Paul knew that God’s peace could never be known by those who do not believe the truth.

Coach, to do your job right and well, you must have authority. Some of your authority comes from the school board, principal, and parents of your athletes as well as your expertise and experience. However, you also carry *moral* authority coming from God and the way you live your life and conduct your relationships.

Most importantly, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you possess the authority and responsibility to speak truth into the lives of others. You are God’s messenger to your school community. Live it out in his power!

WHAT’S AN APOSTLE?

Paul met the requirements of “apostle” 1) Know Christ personally. Although not one of The Twelve, Paul met Christ on the road to Damascus. 2) Witness to the resurrection (Acts 1:21–22). Paul saw the risen Lord (1 Cor. 9:1) and, therefore, witness to the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:7–8). 3) Receive divine revelation with no human intermediary (Gal. 1:15–17). 4) Possess special, God-given miraculous powers to authenticate the claim (2 Cor. 12:12 and Heb. 2:3–4).²

His apostleship equaled the other apostles and was received by the churches. His letter to the Colossians carried weight because of his apostleship and its responsibilities.³

TRUE COACHING STORY

A kid’s grandmother called me and said, “Coach, I ain’t going to let Jimmy play in this week’s game. I gave him a cell phone and told him ‘no talking’ to any friends at night. I caught him one too many times now, sneakin’ around on me.”

I said, “Listen. Let’s you, me, and Jimmy get together and talk about this. His teammates are counting on him to play. We met, and I said, “If this happens again, then Jimmy will not play in the next game.” The grand mom was fine with that.

Next week she called and said, “Caught him again, Coach.” I said, “Fine, rules are rules and I’ll replace him this week.” Well guess what. The night before the next game the grandmother called and said, “Coach, I’ve changed my mind. Jimmy can play.” I then had to explain that rules are rules and we had to stick to them. We coaches have to parent parent’s sometime!



OBSERVATION

1. What 2 things did Paul do regularly? (3)
2. What 2 things did the Colossians have and why? (4-5)
3. What is happening since they heard the gospel? (6)
4. Who brought them the gospel? (7a) How is he described? (7b)

INTERPRETATION

5. What does Paul's prayer say about him? (3-4)
6. What does the Colossians response to God say about them? (6)
7. In your own words describe Epaphras. (7-8)

APPLICATION

8. What leadership principles stood out to you in this passage? How can you apply them to coaching?

COLOSSIANS 1:3-8

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

CO

Paul wrote to the church in Colossae to confront false teaching with his God-given apostolic authority. False teachers, preying on this flock, had corrupted this church's foundation of truth. Despite the serious reason for writing, the apostle began his letter with warmth and encouragement.

Paul opened, "*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.*" Always thankful? Regularly praying? Wouldn't you love to read that! Wouldn't *your* athletes? That's how Paul and his team (note the "we") saw the people in this church. Did they ever bring extra heartache and require some extra attention? Sure! But that's part of the job God gave these leaders and they thanked him for the privilege.

Perhaps even more telling of their relationship, their gratefulness for this church began *since* they first *heard of this* church's *faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that they have for all the saints*. Paul and his team could not help but love those who love the Lord and his people. This kind of boundless love comes from a supernatural Source based on a supernatural truth. It comes *because of the hope laid up for them in heaven*. That hope—that guaranteed future—rests secure in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Where did that hope come from?

They *heard it before in the word of the truth, the gospel* (literally "the good news"). The good news cannot actually be good if it is not true. The message of the gospel carries a broader meaning than just a "How-to" slogan directing sinners to heaven. It comes as part of a larger truth "package."

The truth of the gospel requires other truths such as 1) The holiness of God who cannot tolerate sin and must punish it, 2) God's loving plan for redeeming us, 3) The sacrificial death of his perfectly sinless Son, which fully paid for our sin, 4) Christ's resurrection which provides life and power over sin, 5) the indwelling Holy Spirit, giving us love for God and others, as well as securing our salvation for eternity (Ephesians 1:13-14; 1 Peter 1:4-5).

“ WHAT WE BELIEVE CHANGES HOW WE BEHAVE

Wherever this gift from God *has come to* believers, not just in Colossae, but *indeed in the whole world, it is bearing fruit and increasing*. God has designed us for this fruitfulness through the power of the Holy Spirit. We can identify, in general terms, at least four forms of biblical fruit—character (Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:5-8), conduct (Philippians 1:11, 22), conversation (Hebrews 13:15), and converts (Philippians 4:17).

Positively, these various forms of spiritual fruit have been apparent *among* the Colossians *since the day they heard* [the gospel]. However, they didn't simply hear and respond. They *understood the grace of God in truth*. Unfortunately, in many ways, we have *misunderstood* the meaning of “the gospel,” not through intentional distortion, but through innocent simplification. We have worked so hard to make it easy to understand and believe that we've lost the full picture of what genuine conversion actually means. This becomes apparent as we notice Paul's progression.

Their love for the Lord and others comes from the hope secured for them in heaven. Their hope then resulted

in “bearing fruit and increasing.” By making these connections, Paul subtly reminds the Colossians that they must *continue* on the fruitful course they have already begun.⁴ He has pointed to that course by validating the truth they originally believed.

This understanding lived *among* them, *since the day* they first *learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant*. He preached the total picture of God's saving work and it changed their lives. That change took hold and grew over time. Now, that life and growth has been jeopardized by false teaching. The truth needs to be clarified, emphasized, strengthened, and revitalized (see Heresy!).

As a good team leader, Paul didn't blame the messenger for the discouraging message about the doctrinal divisions and vulnerabilities in Colossae. Indeed, the apostle quickly affirmed Epaphras, referring to him as *a faithful minister of Christ on their behalf*. He also affirmed his pastoral heart as one who *has made known to us your love in the Spirit*. Epaphras was a good man bringing bad news.

Coach, when leaders get frustrated, it's easy to make mistakes. For example, you can berate the person in front of you rather than handling the issue. Paul never berated the Colossians for straying. He teaches them the truth and urges them to follow it. What other leadership principles do you see modeled in this one passage that you can apply to coaching?

For various reasons, you might stay away from God when you realize you've strayed. Don't! This passage offers an encouraging reminder. What we believe changes how we behave, for good or bad. Because of that, God wants to draw us closer and fill our

minds with his truth. When we know and believe the truth, God will, over time, change our behavior. You can count on it!

HERESY!

The false teaching consisted of several features. 1) It was Jewish, stressing the need for keeping Old Testament laws and ceremonies. 2) It was philosophical, emphasizing special or deeper knowledge. 3) It taught the worship of angels as mediators to God (2:18). 4) It was exclusive, stressing the special privilege and “perfection” of those select few who belonged to the philosophical elite. 5) It was Christ-centered, but with distortions denying the deity of Christ. This heresy explains why Paul wrote one of the greatest Scriptural declarations of Christ's deity (1:15–16; 2:9).⁵

|| THE REMEDY FOR DISCOURAGEMENT IS THE WORD OF GOD. WHEN YOU FEED YOUR HEART AND MIND WITH ITS TRUTH, YOU REGAIN YOUR PERSPECTIVE AND FIND RENEWED STRENGTH.

-WARREN WIERSBE



OBSERVATION

1. How frequently did Paul pray for this church? (9)
2. What did he pray would continue? (9b-11)
3. What did he thank God for? (12-14)

INTERPRETATION

4. Look over Paul's prayer list (vs. 9b-11). What parts of it is active (that the Colossians must do)? What parts of it is passive (that they must allow God to do)?
5. What does the active/passive observation imply about how to pray for others?

APPLICATION

6. In light of this passage, what changes, if any, would you like to make in your prayers for others?

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

CO

As previously mentioned, Colossae was likely a 2nd generation church—an Ephesian plant. Imagine if you influenced one of your favorite athletes into coaching. Imagine the special place their team would have in your heart. How would you feel if you heard they were drifting from the principles and values you and your “son” modeled?

That's the heart behind this letter, except with eternal consequences. Today, we'll pull back the curtain of Paul's prayer closet. I hate to admit it, but sometimes my prayers for God to act in the lives of others are more spontaneous than systematic. I'll pray for the person or situation in the moment, but not follow up and continue praying. Not Paul and his team.

From the day the team *heard* the news from Colossae, they had *not ceased to pray* for them. *They have been asking that* God would act powerfully in their lives. Paul's prayer list is quite humbling. While there's nothing wrong with praying for a friend's job or Aunt Bertha's hip surgery, Paul rarely prayed over such circumstances. Instead, his time before God's throne focused on the most important areas.

Paul's prayer for the Colossians breaks down into two parts. First, items 1-4 addresses the *ongoing* work of God in a believer's life. Second, items 5-8 addresses the *finished* work of Christ for which a believer should be grateful.

1) He prayed they would be *filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding*. What a kickoff! Paul cared *far* more about the circumstances of their *heart* than the ones in their *world*. This dual request

combines the ability of discerning truth *with* making good decisions based on that truth. ⁶ Again, there's nothing wrong with praying over life's troubles, but this model leaves a lot of room for us to grow into praying from God's perspective and asking him to act.

2) As he did for the Philippians, Paul also prayed the Colossians would **walk in a manner worthy of the Lord**. It's that same balance scale (Philippians 1:27) of a believer's life (on one side) continually growing closer to balance what Christ had already done for us (on the other side). Paul lists some believer-side items in 1-4. Pursuing them makes a believer's life **fully pleasing to the Lord**. Next he prayed over the details.

3) Paul prayed the Colossians would continue **bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God**. Here, as with the Philippians, we see the importance of continuing growth. Belief in Christ should never stop at trusting him to pay for our sin. That's just the *start*. God intends for that "birth day" to *begin* the life-long journey. A life dependent on Christ's love, power, and grace never stops maturing.

4) Paul then prayed for their **being strengthened** by God **with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy**. Paul used two different but complementary terms here. The first word, "power" (*dynamis*), refers to "potential force to perform a function." The second word, "might" (*kratos*), refers to "the power to rule or control."⁷ The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. We all need the Lord to make it to the end. Next, Paul switches categories from God's ongoing work in a believer's life to the finished work of Christ.

5) They should never stop **giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified the Colossians to share in the inheritance of the saints in light**. Looking to the future changes our life in the present. Our eternal life starts now, not after we die.

6) We should be grateful that **he has delivered us from the domain of darkness**. We often think of trusting in Christ as going from having no spiritual family to becoming a part of God's family. In reality, we *did* have a family. Whether we like to admit it or not, God's Word tells us we were born under an authority which led to death (Ephesians 2:1-3). Christ rescued us from that certain fate, becoming our new authority.

“ WE MUST DEEPEN OUR PASSION ABOUT THE THINGS THAT MATTER MOST

7) We should also be thankful God didn't just rescue us from death, but **transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son**.

8) We should be grateful that **in Christ we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins**. The more our gratitude grows for what Christ has done, the more we will desire to live a life pleasing to him. It's easy to look over this prayer and separate requests (1-4) from thanks (5-8). However, remember, they come as *one* salvation "package" as we saw yesterday. Like the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the implications of one seemingly simple, limited act (believing the gospel) carries with it a much larger picture with virtually unlimited and life-changing implica-

tions (an ongoing, fruitful Christian life).

Coach, if you have placed your faith in Christ, you've probably dedicated some time to pray for yourself, your family, and your team. Put aside any issues of *when* and *where* you pray, or even how often or how long you pray. For now, take just a moment to think over the primary question this passage raises. *What do you pray for?*

I am personally convicted even as I write the question. However, if we are to grow our own spiritual life and the lives of those the Lord has entrusted to us, we must deepen our passion about the things that matter most—the things one should take to the highest authority with unlimited love and power. What would that prayer sound like in your life?

TRUE COACHING STORY

In our Girls' Basketball program, we have a time for prayer before and after each game. I've always suggested to the players that they might want to pray for no injuries, to play hard, to play fair, and to give thanks for the ability to play, compete, and enjoy the challenges. However, inevitably the girls would pray something like, "Please God, let us win this game" or "Thank you for the win!" I wondered if they would ever "get it."

Accordingly, near the end of our season, I was surprised when one of our players leading our pre-game prayer said, "Father, I pray that our performance tonight will bring glory to Your Name." Maybe. just maybe... they were listening after all.



OBSERVATION

1. Circle the times Paul uses "all" or "everything" to describe the magnitude of Christ's authority. (15-20)
2. List all the things Jesus created and his relationship to them. (16-17).
3. What is said about the person and work of Jesus? (19)

INTERPRETATION

4. What one term describes Jesus' relation to Creation and "from the dead"? (15, 18)

In your own words, what does it mean?
5. What term describes Jesus' relation to the Church, the body? (18) What does that imply?
6. In your own words, what does "reconcile" mean? (20)

APPLICATION

7. What lies are hindering those you coach? What truth do you need to communicate in order to correct the problem?

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

PRAYER REQUESTS

PRIMARY APPLICATION - RECORD ON PAGE 101

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Have you ever seen a lie hurt someone's life? Describe what happened.



Yesterday, we focused on the believer's God-empowered response to Christ's work. Today, we'll spotlight Christ's deity and position. In some ways, its depth and detail resembles the description of Christ in Philippians 2. However, today's passage emphasizes Christ's *positional authority* rather than his *submissive humility*. The Father delegated his own authority to

elevate Christ's. Paul's sacred tribute leaves no doubt about the magnitude of Christ's authority. He is Lord of *all*.

This lengthy tribute is likely an early Church hymn containing two clear themes. ⁸ First, we see Christ's relation to the created world—its origin and purpose. Second, Paul reminds readers

of Jesus redeeming what he created.⁹

False teachers infested the Colossian church and claimed God made the world through a series of creative steps or “emanations” of himself and that Christ was one of these emanations. Paul corrected that lie by teaching that Christ is not a mere emanation from God, but God himself!¹⁰

To begin, Paul acknowledged Christ *is the image of the invisible God*. That word, “image” (Greek, *eikn*, pronounced, *i-con*), can convey two meanings. *First*, it could mean “representation.” This meaning continues in our English word, icon—a *representation* of the real thing. *Second*, it could mean “manifestation,” the actual presentation of a formerly *invisible* reality (here, God) *becoming* visible.¹¹ This best fits Paul’s use in this context and other biblical teaching (see The Real Thing!).

“ THE REAL TEST ISN’T WHAT OTHERS SEE, BUT WHAT GOD SEES

Christ is also *the firstborn of all creation*. The term “firstborn,” applied to *Christ* in this context, refers to “a position with pre-eminence over creation.”¹² The term *originated* from the benefits of chronological birth order. In a patriarchal culture, privileges went to the eldest son who carried the highest position in the family after the Father and, eventually, received the greatest share of the inheritance. Humans can transfer this position from one child to another, as Esau transferred his to Jacob (Genesis 25:29-34). Over time, this birth order definition referred to the privileged *position* normally associated with the oldest son. It’s not all that different than the understandings of “a Hail Mary.”

The next verse, beginning with “*For*” introduces how Christ has this position. He is firstborn because *by him all things were created* (“all” appears *many* more

THE REAL THING!

Paul clearly intended this second meaning here. John 1:14 portrays Christ as actually God in the flesh, [Jesus]... we have heard...seen with our eyes...and touched with our hands. That life was made manifest (1 John 1:1). Hebrews 1:3 describes Jesus as “the exact imprint of [God’s] nature.”

times in this short passage). Christ’s involvement in creation wasn’t limited to only those things we can see *in heaven and on earth*.

It included every created thing both *visible and invisible*. Paul intentionally recognizes Christ’s rule beyond material objects or human authority. Primarily, this letter identifies who has *spiritual* authority over truth and error *whether* human leaders or spiritual *thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities*. Jesus is Lord of *all*.

Christ has authority over *all things*, because those things *were created through him* as the Master Architect. He designed it all. Even more to the purpose of his authority, they were also created *for him*. Everything belongs to him and suits his design and desire. To clarify, Jesus Christ *is before all things and in him all things hold together*. His power literally keeps the universe from becoming chaos.

Next, Paul moves from Christ’s general rule to the Colossian’s congregation, specifically, to their doctrinal division. Christ *is the head of the body, the church*. Just as teams needs a leader, a physical body also needs a leader...the head. Its authority governs all decisions, instructions, and coordination of body parts. Likewise, the Church, the Body of Christ, must be in constant contact with and in submission to its True Head.

The Church consists of those redeemed from death to life. This transformation started with Jesus. *He is the beginning,*

the firstborn from the dead. Earlier, “firstborn” expressed Christ’s authority over Creation. Here, Paul applies it to Christ’s *victory* over Death resulting in his *authority* over Death. Further, because of *his* victory, believers in Christ will *also* experience victory over Death (Romans 6:3-5).

Christ achieved victory over sin and death so *that in everything he might be preeminent* (firstborn). *For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell* (from his incarnation) *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross*. Notice the contrast.

In *Philippians*, peace came via *horizontal* relationships, with one another. In *Colossians*, peace comes through our *vertical* relationship with God through Christ’s work on the cross and our God-empowered response to it. Christ alone allows us to have peace both with God *and* with others. Paul emphasized this truth to counter the false teaching about Christ that had divided the Colossian church. That job resembles your own work, correcting false beliefs that divide your team.

Coach, you know how a lie can and will directly impair a person from the life God intended. For example, if an athlete believes anything other than the truth about themselves, they will act accordingly until that lie is exposed and expelled. Whose job is that? More often than ever before, it has become yours.

Don’t neglect it or put it off. Seeing and believing the truth can change a young person’s entire life. If they believe lies about themselves or a teammate, they will act accordingly, whether they even realize it or not. Your honest feedback gives them the chance to change. As their leader, what lies do *you* need to correct?



BIG PICTURE

Last Week, Paul clearly identified and defined the Person, nature, and work of Christ. This Week, he focuses on what that means to those who place their trust in Christ. He begins by discussing the way the good news brings hope to those who hear it. However, it also changes the lives of believers.

For Paul, communicating the gospel brought out the very best in him. For other believers, the gospel brought clarity to their knowledge and understanding regarding their relationship with God. Finally, for believers, especially after Paul's letter, the true gospel brought stability to their lives.

OBSERVATION

1. ID 3 descriptions of the Colossians past. (21)
2. ID some changes Christ has done and why. (22)
3. ID some benefit that comes as a result of believing the gospel. (23a)
4. Where has this good news been preached? By whom? (23b)

INTERPRETATION

5. How would you explain "reconciliation" to a friend? (22)
6. In your own words, why is reconciliation with God needed and what does it bring? (22)

APPLICATION

7. Who do you know that could benefit from hearing some good news from you? What would you tell them?

COLOSSIANS 1:21-23

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

In 1919, America's pastime became America's scandal. After the Chicago White Sox faced the Cincinnati Reds in the World Series, cheating accusations flew. One White Sox fan allegedly pleaded with his favorite player, Shoeless Joe Jackson, "Say it ain't so, Joe." But it *was* so. Baseball authorities banned eight White Sox players from the game for life for their part in the scandal.

Once exposed in trial, fans lost trust in baseball and many stopped attending games. As bad news filled the sports pages "The Black Sox Scandal" threatened to kill this beloved sport while still in its infancy. Baseball had lost all hope.

However, in December 1919, the Boston Red Sox sold a young man, named George Herman "Babe" Ruth, to the New York Yankees. During the previous season, he had hit a record-setting, 29 homers. Upon arriving in the nation's largest city, he promised to hit 50 in the upcoming season. Instead, he hit 54!

Babe also became a hero off the field. Raised in an orphanage, he had a huge heart for kids. He signed and hid hundreds of baseballs all over the city for children to find. Babe gave fans someone to believe in. As hope filled the fans, the fans filled the ballparks. Soon, the *bad* news from Chicago yielded to the *good* news from New York.

In another, *far* more serious scandal, the bad news of sin plagued mankind for millennia. Beginning with Adam and Eve, all people in every nation have sinned against God (Romans 3:23). Despite Man’s manufactured religions, filled with activities intended to please deities, the world remained hopeless...until Christ.



Last Week, Paul painted a grand, cosmic picture of Christ as God. His authority, granted by the Father, extends over all Creation and reigns supreme over every power that exists, visible and invisible. He reconciled Heaven and Earth by his death on the cross and resurrection to life. Next, Paul brought that majestic imagery into focus and personalized it for his readers.

The two words, “*and you,*” link the previous passage regarding the universal reign of Christ to today’s passage regarding the Colossian church. With that connection, Paul brings the cosmic vision (in 3rd person) down to earth, relating it directly to the Colossian readers.¹

Due to sin, Man became *alienated and hostile* to God. We played for the opposing spiritual team under the ruler of this world (Ephesian 2:1-3). A non-Christian may think they remain spiritually neutral, by not making a faith choice one way or the other. However, intentionally or not, until Christ rescues us, we all fight against God. Because of that rebellion, eternal death became our eternal destiny.

This adversarial relationship led to sin *in our mind*, where it always starts. As a result, people find themselves *doing evil deeds*. Even people the world might consider “good” committed sin, leading to death. Even those who

attempted to follow God lived without hope.

However, Jesus Christ overcame that bad news and hopelessness with the good news and hopefulness of his death and resurrection. *He has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death* on the cross as payment for our sin. The Father sent his Son as a sacrifice for one reason, *in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before* the Father. *Only* Christ can do this for us.

Knowing that false teaching had begun to divide this church and lead them astray, Paul reminded them of the truth about Christ. The grammatical construction of “*If you*” more accurately means, “*Since you.*”² It assumes they will *continue in the faith* by believing the same teaching they first heard from reliable sources. Only by holding to God’s truth could they remain *stable and steadfast*. They had to resist and reject *shifting from the hope of the gospel that* they first *heard* from Epaphras . Paul brought them back to their spiritual roots.

However, the good news which they heard and believed didn’t stop at Colossae. This gospel *has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven*. We can see from the way Paul presented the good news in Athens that God’s work of redemption could bless everyone everywhere. To the philosophers on Mars Hill, he declared, “*God commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness*” (Acts 17:30-31). That sounds pretty intimidating, but that’s why communicating the gospel brings hope. We don’t need to fear God’s judgment. We can look forward to it, knowing that Jesus Christ himself has taken the full punishment for our sin.

It is for this gospel—this good news—that *Paul, became a minister*. His life changed after he encountered Christ on the road to Damascus. After learning what God called him to do, he obeyed fully and zealously (Acts 9). Paul brought the hope of the gospel to countless people, groups, cities, and nations during his decades as an evangelist.

Coach, your work allows your student-athletes to dream big. Chances are, over the course of your career, you will be the one to communicate to your players that a scout wants to watch them play. Some of your athletes will be able to advance primarily because of your investment in them. Your words and your work bring your athletes hope for a life they could never attain on their own.



YOUR WORDS AND YOUR WORK BRING ATHLETES HOPE

How much more hope could you bring through communicating the gospel? Some of your athletes will hear about salvation only because you tell them. Your words about Christ to them bring personal hope for an eternity they could never attain on their own.



OBSERVATION

1. How did Paul respond to his PHYSICAL sufferings? (24)
2. What did a) Paul become, b) how did he describe it, and c) what was his mission? (25-26)
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
3. What would God communicate to the Gentiles? (27)
4. What is the end goal of Paul's mission and how much effort did he put into it? (28-29)

INTERPRETATION

5. What is a "stewardship" and how is it connected to God's calling? (25)
6. Why did Paul work so hard at this task? (28)

APPLICATION

7. In what way is God calling you to coaching viewed as a stewardship?
8. As a coach, in what ways does God's mission for you bring out your best?

COLOSSIANS 1:24-29

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

CO

When you believe something strongly, it brings both energy and sacrifice. Paul strongly believed the gospel. As a result, he suffered to preach it and instill it in the lives of the Church. That commitment literally cost him his life. Yet, Paul suffered and died without regrets. He lived for his mission—spreading the gospel—and he gave it his all. **Now**, even as the Romans kept Paul under house arrest, he could **rejoice in his sufferings**. This word is plural, indicating more than one time or form of hardship. Perhaps Paul dealt with sleep or food deprivation, physical abuse, insufficient medical attention, or other adversities.

Why would Paul endure such pain? He told the Colossians, "**for your sake**." This doesn't imply Paul had taken specific punishment for this one church, but for the Church in general.

Further describing his suffering, Paul endured it **in his flesh**. Certainly, any form of imprisonment includes its share of emotional and mental stress and suffering. However, in some sense, Paul felt his suffering was **filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church**. Paul didn't mean Christ's suffering on the cross was insufficient. Rather, since the Church is Christ's body, he is affected when it is afflicted. ³ When Paul journeyed to Damascus to persecute Christians, the Church learned this firsthand. Before he reached Damascus, Christ appeared to him and strongly identified with the Church asking, "**Why are you persecuting me?**" (Acts 9:4). Ironically, Paul now willingly suffered for the sake of Christ's body.

On that fateful day, Paul *became a minister according to the stewardship from God*. Two key words drive our understanding of what Paul meant by this. The *first* word, “minister” comes from a Greek word (*diakonos*) meaning a particular kind of “servant” without authority.⁴

The *second* word, “stewardship” comes from a Greek word (*oikonomia*) meaning “administration.” This term looks to the Messianic Age of fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. Paul, as the apostle to the Gentiles, served the church by teaching them about many overlooked Old Testament passages. Paul revealed the fulfillment of mysterious prophecies related to his mission of reaching Gentiles.⁵

God had graciously *given to* Paul a clear mission *for* the Church, *to make the word of God fully known*. Even those Jews familiar with Old Testament prophecies saw them as a *mystery hidden for ages and generations*. For example, they could not fathom the idea of God sending a Messiah who would die rather than reign. Neither could they comprehend the idea that God would swing the door of salvation to the Gentiles wide open to the Gentiles.

But now, through Paul’s ministry, God has *revealed* that mystery *to his saints*. Through Paul, *God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery*. The key to understanding this mystery is the radical concept of Christ (the anointed Messiah) living in believers. He is *the hope of glory* and the focus of Paul’s teaching ministry. As a servant of Christ, Paul would *proclaim* Christ through two key ministries toward one goal.

Paul’s *first* ministry was *warning everyone*. Paul knew of two different

future judgments, each with their own criteria and required preparation. For *unbelievers*—both Jew and Gentile—God will judge sin with Death. By definition, an unbelievers’ sin has *not* been washed clean by the blood of Christ. To them, Paul warned of eternal punishment. For *believers*—both Jew and Gentile—God will judge good works with fire. By definition, a believer has chosen the path of Christ. Although a believer’s sin has been washed clean by the blood of Christ, God will judge the stewardship of our life. Whatever survives the fire of testing will be the basis of our eternal reward (1 Corinthians 3:10-15, 2 Timothy 4:6-8).

“ **DISGRUNTLED PEOPLE BECOME VULNERABLE AND, PERHAPS, DANGEROUS**

Paul’s *second* ministry was *teaching everyone*. Since God had revealed the mystery of Gentile inclusion and its implications, Paul could instruct both Jews and Gentiles *with all the wisdom* needed.

These two ministries worked together *so that* one primary goal is reached: *to present everyone mature in Christ*. Paul’s mission and passion to warn and teach in order to bring believers in Christ to maturity directly relates to the Great Commission. Just before his ascension into heaven, Christ commanded his disciples to make disciples. That mission would be accomplished by doing two things—*baptizing* them through conversion and *teaching* them through discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20).

The first part expresses one act of obedience at salvation. The second expresses regular obedience over a

lifetime and requires commitment from both parties. Evangelism and discipleship certainly bring joy, but they also demand hard work as Paul himself acknowledged, *“For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”* What a great understanding and expression of the dual role of human effort and will working with and depending on God’s power and will!

Coach, as with raising children (or coaching them), discipleship requires a greater and broader effort from the trainer than the trainee. Once you make that commitment to bring out the best in another, it usually brings out the best in you. It raises your passion, furthers your knowledge, purifies your character, and refines your skills.

The same occurs spiritually. When you begin to communicate spiritual truths to others, those truths become more deeply rooted in your own life. That’s why we developed our Athlete Study (see the sample on page 111). We tell coaches all the time, “The Athlete Study is primarily for *you*. The benefit to your athletes is icing on the cake.”

“ **SELDOM EVER WAS ANY KNOWLEDGE GIVEN TO KEEP, BUT TO IMPART; THE GRACE OF THIS RICH JEWEL IS LOST IN CONCEALMENT.**

-JOSEPH HALL



OBSERVATION

1. What did Paul want the Colossians to know? Who else? (1)
2. Why did he want them to know it? What results did Paul anticipate from his ministry? (2)

INTERPRETATION

4. Describe the history and nature of the relationship between Paul and those ID'd. (2b-3) (see study notes)
5. ID some similarities between Paul's relationships and Christ's relationships in how they can bring unity between these believers.

APPLICATION

6. What do your athletes need to know about you and one another to help your team's unity and shared values?
7. How can you meet that need?

COLOSSIANS 2:1-3

¹ For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.



We often think of Paul as a dynamic evangelist, bringing the gospel while travelling from city to city across the Roman Empire. While true, it paints an incomplete picture. As seen in both his letter to the Philippians and this letter to the Colossians, he also cared deeply for the spiritual development of individual believers and congregations as a whole.

In yesterday's passage Paul clearly explained his desire to not only have Jews and Gentiles saved by faith in Christ, but also to see them mature. Paul didn't plant the Colossae church or personally meet with these believers as a whole. However, he likely passed through the town and, perhaps, met some believers individually.⁶ You can almost feel his intensity to have believers grow in their walk with Christ. Perhaps because they had never met face to face, the evangelist shared his heart with these vulnerable believers.

After describing the energy he puts forth for the growth of the Church, Paul explains it once more. He plainly tells the Colossians, "***I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you***" That word translated "struggle" comes from the Greek word, *agna*, from which we get our English word, "agony." This indicates the intensity of Paul's prayer battle for their souls.

Paul's battle also extended beyond those in the Colossian church. He felt the same way ***for those at Laodicea***. Just as believers from the church in Ephesus likely brought the gospel to Colossae, those in Colossae likely brought it to Laodicea, just 10 miles northwest. Interestingly, we have no record of *Paul* ever writing to the church at Laodicea. However, about forty years later, the Apostle John sent them a letter (dictated by Christ), exposing their lukewarm faith in Christ (Revelation 3:14-22).

Paul's heart for the church didn't stop at Colossae and Laodicea. He had a passion for leading believers into spiritual growth ***for all who have not seen him face to face***. Despite their different histories, problems, relationships, and needs, Paul desired one thing for them all...continued growth. In this short passage, Paul connects the dots, clarifying the meaning and impact of the gospel beyond the initial step of conversion.

Paul, the committed prayer warrior, interceded for these three groups so *that their hearts may be encouraged*. We use that word so much that we may not realize it literally means “to provide courage.” Since the greatest enemy of faith is fear, believers can never communicate too much encouragement. Certainly the same holds true for coaches desiring to bring out the best in their team. However, they need something in addition to courage.

As Paul similarly prayed for every church, he knew their strongest witness for Christ began with *being knit together in love* by God. Once again, this isn’t a “kumbayah” feeling kind of love. Rather, it takes us back to Christ’s prayer in Gethsemane (John 17) when he asked his Father to make his followers one, united in love. Christ prayed for the kind of love that sacrifices for one another and encourages teammates to *be* and *do* their very best. We’re about to examine what may *seem* like a great mental accomplishment. However, it first requires a commitment to love people, *not* learn precepts. It is primarily spiritual and relational, *not* intellectual or philosophical.

“ **WHAT SPECIFIC VALUES DO YOU WANT YOUR ATHLETES TO KNOW?** ”

Only through this kind of selfless, godly love, can believers in Christ attain what God intended. Confidence and strength of conviction as well as cohesive unity would allow the Colossians to *reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding* (or insight). There is no full knowledge apart from a foundation of moral commitment.⁷

Paul also prayed that believers would comprehend *the knowledge of God’s mystery*. This knowledge isn’t merely intellectual, like someone who says they know football because they have memorized the rulebooks at every level. This knowledge is personal, like someone who

not only knows the rules, but has personal experience playing the game. This distinction becomes extremely important once we realize that the mystery itself *is Christ*. To enjoy a fuller understanding and knowledge of God and his ways, we must both know about Christ *and* know him through personal experience and interaction.

We must begin by establishing a relationship with Jesus Christ as our Savior. Then we must grow in Christ, because only *in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*. Knowledge is the apprehension of truth; wisdom is its application to life. Knowledge is prudent judgment and wisdom is prudent action. Both are essential and found only in a growing relationship with our Savior, Jesus Christ (Romans 11:33; 1 Corinthians 12:8).⁸ If someone rejects the work of Christ, no amount of sterile knowledge will provide God’s treasure map. God alone must show it to you.

Coach, for your team to truly be united, they must know you—they must know your heart. They must listen to you and learn to follow your ways. They need to know where you are going and how they can help get there. The more your athletes connect and unite with you, the more united your entire team will be. The key to their unity is their individual relationship with you. Their occasional rejection of you and your guidance brings you pain. It *ought* to. You feel because you care.

This model raises some logical questions. What specific values do you want your athletes to know, understand, and put into practice? How might you clearly communicate those values to your athletes? Which athletes are most ready to learn and take their game and life to a whole new level?

TRUE COACHING STORY

In one of our pre-season coaches meetings, one of our coaches suggested a motivational idea based on the old saying, “A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.” His idea so excited all of our other coaches, we decided to introduce it to our players. It soon became a team symbol of our strong commitment and unity.

We always ended our pre-season workouts with a retreat. Our players and coaches meet for a catered afternoon meal and participated in various informal recreational activities. Some just chill out and get to know each other better. After two weeks of rigorous preparation, we all enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere. We always ended the retreat with a team meeting led by our coaches.

Our agenda included a statement of team goals. This year we closed with the “Link Ceremony.” The coach who came up with the idea gave the presentation. He explained that the chain represented our team and our season. The links represented our players and coaches. In order to finish strong, we all had to be a strong link in the chain. This symbolized our promise of commitment to each other and to the season. To personalize each player’s commitment even further, we took a chain and stretched it out. A coach used a bolt cutter to cut links for each player as they lined up to get theirs. Then we held them up high as we closed with a team chant. This may have been the most effective motivational program we ever experienced there and we continued the practice for many years.

We would put the links on our key chains and kept them with us. On game days, players would pass each other in the halls and display their link. We had players turn in their link when they broke a team rule or quit the team. We even had players who graduated years before come by to visit and show us they were still carrying their link. It was obvious to us that this symbol of commitment and unity impacted their lives in a large way.



OBSERVATION

1. Why did Paul tell them these truths about what Christ offers? (4a)
2. What kind of "weapon" might others use to lead them astray? (4b)
3. What was Paul's desire and why? (5)

COLOSSIANS 2:4-5

⁴ I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

PRAYER REQUESTS

INTERPRETATION

4. What does "delude" mean? (4)
5. In your own words, ID a "plausible argument" that might lead someone away from Christ? (4)
6. How would you define "good order" and "firmness"? (5)

APPLICATION

7. What are the foundations of your program? How can you protect and strengthen these foundations?

PRIMARY APPLICATION - RECORD ON PAGE 101

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What offensive and defensive truths help your team build unity?



Paul just showed the way from salvation to growth in the Christian life. In essence, he told the Colossians that they could and would find everything worthwhile in Christ. In his own way, Paul echoed the claim of Christ himself when he told his disciples, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).

Christ's life comes from both his work *for* us on the cross

and *in* us through the Holy Spirit. In today's passage, Paul explains *why* he had written so extensively regarding who Christ is, what he has done, and the greatness of the wisdom, knowledge, truth and understanding which can be found in him.

The apostle had good reason to *say this* (2:1-3) and made his reasoning crystal clear. In the face of *false* teaching

concerning the Person and work of Christ, Paul laid out the truth *in order that no one may delude* them. That word “delude” comes from a Greek word meaning “to lead astray by false reasoning.”⁹ These false teachers seemed knowledgeable and reasonable, yet they deceived these vulnerable believers. *How* would they delude these believers?

They would attempt to do it *with plausible arguments*. That phrase comes from one Greek word that literally means “persuasive speech” in a way that uses plausible, but false arguments.¹⁰ Some translate it, “fine-sounding arguments,” “fast talk,” or “a smooth line.”¹¹ These fast-talking false teachers could woo a bear from a feast of honey. You know the type.

Paul felt a very personal love for these relatively new believers. So it should surprise no one that he followed his warning and reasoning with a very personal, heartfelt expression of his concern for their relationship with Christ.

At the very beginning of this study, we recognized that, during this pandemic, many of you have not been able to enjoy the level of face to face contact you would typically have. Well, nobody needs to tell you this has not been a normal year. Many of you could say along with Paul, “*Though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit.*” The specific reason he could not be with them had to do with a jail sentence rather than a virus. However, like you, absence only made his heart grow fonder.

Even while sitting in custody under a Roman guard, Paul maintained his optimism, *rejoicing* at the very thought that someday he would be able *to see* these believers. He longed to be with these believers and hear their stories

of conversion and growth. However, perhaps as much as anything else, he longed to see two things that characterized their faith.

First, he longed to see their *good order*. This phrase borrows a military term depicting the orderly array of a band of disciplined soldiers.¹² Just as trained soldiers work to move as one, he commended these believers for their unified approach to a consistent theology. He hoped to see firsthand that no one had broken ranks.

Second, Paul longed to see *the firmness of their faith in Christ*. That word “firm” stresses their solidarity and compactness as one. In using it, Paul signaled the unyielding nature of their faith and their very strong commitment to Christ.¹³ Additionally, it could also refer to “a solid front” or “a closed phalanx,” like an army’s strong defensive line under assault.¹⁴

“ WHAT STEPS CAN YOU TAKE TO STRENGTHEN YOUR FOUNDATION

Considering their initial conversions and organization of a church, the Colossians had begun well. However, they had only just begun. The combination of terms in this passage and book reveals that 1) the false teaching had not been highly successful to this point and 2) the church needed to recognize and seriously engage in spiritual warfare. Paul wanted to see their faith protected and developing.¹⁵

Let’s be honest. Man’s philosophies are so attractive, they can easily be accepted and followed. Even just *saying* you

accept them may appeal to some. Either way, they give an air of great wisdom, maturity, and intelligence. That appeal often leads Christians—young and old—to be “beguiled” by their “enticing words.” How tragic it is when some of your athletes go off to secular schools (including some “Christian” ones) and fall prey to man-made philosophies that deny Jesus Christ and God’s truth.¹⁶

We must recognize the viciousness of the offensive, spiritual attacks which believers come under. Once we do, we also recognize the need to develop a biblically-sound, strategic defense. Anticipating that need, next Week, we’ll look over the specific attacks of the opposition and Paul’s formidable defensive strategy.

Coach, when you read Paul’s letter, you can see that he thought strategically. He knew where the threats came from and directed offensive and defensive forces accordingly. In this passage, his main concern involved securing and protecting the stability of their spiritual foundation. As you know, it is far better to address an existential threat before it attacks than to attempt rebuilding after the damage has already occurred.

Are there threats to the very foundation of what you have worked so hard to build? These threats could be against the foundation of your team, key relationships, values...anything that provides essential stability. On the other hand, perhaps your foundation in some of these areas is *already* lacking, weak, or damaged. What steps can you take to strengthen your foundation to withstand the onslaught of corruption and compromise that our culture so often promotes?



BIG PICTURE

Paul opened his letter to the Colossians, by explaining the significance and extent of God's salvation by grace through the finished work of Christ. Specifically, he reminded the Colossians that, through their faith, Christ has saved them, setting them free from the penalty of sin. He also reminded them that receiving Christ was not a one-time action, but a lifetime relationship. To that end, Paul shifted from what Christ does at salvation to what he does after salvation.

By faith, Christ has enabled believers to be free not only from

sin's penalty, but from sin's power. However, unlike salvation, freedom from sin's power is part of the ongoing growth of a believer which involves both faith and work. Daily, believers must choose to follow their new, godly desires over their old, sinful desires. Also, they must reject external, man-made standards of righteousness in favor of internal, God-ordained standards. Ultimately, when believers join Christ in heaven, he will deliver them from sin's presence...forever!

OBSERVATION

1. What does the first word refer to? (6) (see previous passage)
2. How did Paul want the Colossian believers to continue? (6-7)
3. What warning did Paul give them? (8)
4. What truths about Christ did Paul emphasize? (9-11)

INTERPRETATION

5. How is a believer's salvation experience similar to their growth? What benefits result from each? (6-7)
6. How might a believer be taken "captive" as described? (8)
7. In your own words, what does Paul mean by "a circumcision without hands"? (11)

APPLICATION

8. What choices do you face that pit Man's wisdom and goals above or against God's?

COLOSSIANS 2:6-11

⁶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

Maturity requires learning who we are and what we can do. Some people believe they can do far *more* than they can. Most believe they can do far *less* than they can. A baby elephant powerfully illustrates this truth.

As soon as the little beast can walk, a metal clasp is attached to one of its ankles. That clasp connects to a chain fastened onto a metal stake driven deep into the ground. Inevitably, the baby elephant struggles to break free, but the chain dominates its will. For two weeks, it will fight with all its might to escape. Then the baby elephant becomes tired, frustrated, and defeated. Now, with a bloody ankle, the baby "knows" it can *never* break free.

In 10 years, that "little" 200 lb. baby grows to over 6,000 pounds, easily able to break the metal chain merely by leaning forward. Yet, unbelievably, a small woven rope around its ankle, tied just tight enough for the elephant to feel some pressure, causes the massive adult beast to continue submitting to the limitations it accepted as a baby. ¹

Incredible as this deception seems, *we* can also be deceived and accept enslaving limitations. However, Jesus himself said, "*You will know the truth and the truth will set you*

free” (John 8:32). Through Paul, God encouraged the Colossian believers to be free!

After receiving Christ as a very young child, I mistakenly thought I carried all the responsibility and strength for *living* the Christian life. I also mistakenly thought that the true work of God in a believer’s life was external rather than *internal*. It has taken years to learn the truth and grow in God’s power and freedom. The Colossian believers also needed to shed these lies and live in truth.



Paul had already set forth the awesome truth that we are saved by grace alone when we receive God’s gift of salvation by faith alone. **Therefore**, Paul explained that just **as** we **received Christ Jesus the Lord** to *begin* our spiritual life, we should *continue* our **walk in him**. For Paul, no gap exists between a Christian’s initial belief and ongoing growth.²

That walk has four key traits all accomplished by God (see It’s All You!). 1) We become **rooted** in our faith at salvation, taking hold of the ground that supports the tree and draws necessary nutrients for its growth and health. 2) We become **built up in him** over time. Literally, it reads, “we are being built up” in him.³ It’s an ongoing process. 3) We become **established in the faith**. Literally, this conveys the idea of “being more and more established.”⁴ This legal term suggests an ongoing fulfillment of a contractual obligation⁵ through the truths they **were taught** about Christ. 4) Reflecting on those truths cause us to be **abounding in thanksgiving** for all God has done and promises to do for those who have trusted in Christ. Next Paul coaches their *defensive* strategy.

The Colossians also needed to take responsibility and work at protecting their spiritual life—personally and corporately—so Paul warned and commanded them, “**See to it that no one** robs your freedom and **takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world**. Rather than debate the details of these counterfeits, Paul slapped a warning label on them, “**not according to Christ**.” The choice could not be clearer. We must choose either the world or the Lord. Every time we choose the world, we surrender a little more of the freedom God has provided in Christ.

For in Christ, we find the power to conquer sin. Since **the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily in** Christ, believers **have been filled** with *his* power. Further, Christ **is the head of all rule and authority**. He not only has made his power accessible to us, but also his position over every other being—physical or spiritual.

“ **WE MUST CHOOSE EITHER THE WORLD OR THE LORD**

As a highly-trained Jew, Paul recognized that **in him** (Christ), believers **were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands**. Beginning with Abraham, God’s community—the Israelites—had been physically identifiable by **putting off the body of the flesh**, cutting the foreskin of the infant male. No longer. Now God’s community of believers would be identified **by the circumcision of Christ**. Rather than cutting off the physical flesh, Christ empowers believers to cut off the *power* of the flesh.

Coach, sometimes you probably feel

like that little red flag in a giant tug-of-war. In your position, the world’s philosophy pulls on one side and the Lord’s teaching pulls on the other. On one hand, you have the school and administration, possibly even other coaches, pulling one way vs. your conscience and the Scriptures, possibly other coaches, pulling the other way. Only you can decide who wins...and you must!

Choose freedom! By choosing against Man’s wisdom and its deceitful promises, you will enjoy God’s life. Your freedom will attract others in bondage. When they ask you about it, share how they can experience his freedom as well.

IT’S ALL YOU!

Paul named all four of these traits in the passive voice. In other words, just like with our salvation, we can’t produce spiritual fruit in our own strength. Rather, just as fruit grows on a tree, we allow God to grow these works in our lives and give him the glory.



OBSERVATION

1. In what two events were believers with Christ? (12)
2. What was a believer's spiritual condition before being saved? (13)
3. What did Jesus do for believers and against the opposition? (13-15)

INTERPRETATION

4. In your own words, explain what happened as a result of Christ's death and resurrection? (13-15)
5. In what ways can you see the difference between someone consciously relying on their own power vs. on God's power?

APPLICATION

6. What evidence would support the idea that you live your life relying...
On God's power?

On your own power?

COLOSSIANS 2:12-15

¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.



Yesterday's passage concluded with the "circumcision of Christ." Today's passage develops that thought further. For nearly two thousand years, Israelites practiced circumcision, visualizing the invisible covenant relationship between God and his national community. Now, false teachers arose with a blend of Judaistic legalism and pagan philosophy, polluting the pure doctrine taught by Paul and Epaphras (see It's a Hybrid).

Under the New Covenant, baptism visualizes the invisible relationship between Christ and his new community, the Church. However, Paul wanted to prevent believers from deception. Using circumcision to represent the Law in general, he pointed out that circumcision removes a fragment of flesh, ⁶ but identification with Christ enables victory over our flesh. However, both circumcision and baptism also carry limitations. Just as cutting one's foreskin had no power to *make* anyone an Israelite, baptism has no power to *make* anyone a Christian.

For believers, going under water symbolizes being **buried with** [Christ]. **Baptism** represents the death of flesh's power over their lives. Likewise, rising from the water symbolizes that believers **were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised** [Christ] **from the dead**. Having identified baptism's dual message—burial and resurrection with Christ—Paul continued, explaining what Christ's death accomplished for believers (see Triple Play).

To appreciate Christ freeing believers from sin, we must first realize our desperate situation. As **unbelievers**, we **were dead in our trespasses and the uncircumcision of our flesh**. No amount of good deeds, including keeping the Law,

could save anyone. Our irreversible fate offered no hope of eternal life. Thankfully, God intervened. Through faith in Christ, **God made** believers **alive together with him**. No sin was too big to forgive nor too small to forget. He has **forgiven us all our trespasses** through the shed blood of Jesus Christ!

Through Christ's finished work on the cross, God solved our sin problem **by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands**. Most people—Christian or not—don't usually see sin in terms of accounting or law. Yet, God frequently uses these terms to describe both sin's problem *and* solution.

“ NO SIN WAS TOO BIG TO FORGIVE NOR TOO SMALL TO FORGET

Since the very first sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), every person has accrued a debt of sin resulting in death (Romans 3:23). After Adam and Eve disobeyed, God provided skins as *temporary* coverings for their sin. Through Christ, God provided for sin's *permanent* removal for those who trust in his work and no other.

This death penalty and the power of sin, **he set aside, nailing it to the cross**. By Christ paying sins' penalty and conquering its power, God **disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him**. Christ's payment for sin and victory over death grants eternal life to all those who believe in him!

TRIPLE PLAY

Each part of God's sanctification comes with a level of God-given freedom (setting us apart) from sin. 1) At salvation, Christ sets us free from the *penalty* of sin. 2) With maturity, Christ sets us free from the *power* of sin. This is the transformation discussed and exhorted in Colossians 2-4. 3) In eternity, Christ will set us free from the *presence* of sin.

Coach, imagine a football player joining the team, unaware of the gear provided for both his performance and protection. He had *access* to a helmet, shoulder pads, and the rest, but never *used* any of them. To say the least, he'd never play up to his potential and would likely get injured. That's the kind of unnecessary roughness God wants *you* to overcome. Do you fight spiritual battles through your own strength, self-discipline,

and will power, or with the equipment God has provided in Christ? To fight sin, God has provided us with the very same power that raised Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:19-20) and the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17). Perhaps you have not yet begun that walk with the Lord. To learn more about God's salvation from sin's penalty and power through a relationship with Christ, please turn to page 105 in this playbook.

IT'S A HYBRID!

What did these false teachers believe? Paul's arguments and other NT writers all point to a hybrid of Jewish legalism and early forms of Greek Gnosticism. Let's look at what each one demanded of its adherents.

False teachers, "Judaizers," imposed Jewish Law on both Jewish and Gentile believers. They welcomed Christ's work on the cross, but also required the Law that Jews had followed for centuries. They didn't recognize that all the Law's ceremonial requirements—sacrifices, diet restrictions, holy days, even Sabbaths—were mere symbols, a shadow of the real thing that was fulfilled in Christ (Col. 2:16-17).

Other false teachers, embryonic Gnostics, considered their philosophies and visions as superior to Paul's teaching and led to a closer walk with God (Col. 2:18). Their mystic philosophy distorted both Christ's full humanity and full deity. Therefore, they couldn't properly recognize Christ as the Head of his Body. As our Head, he nourishes and protects it far beyond whatever special knowledge or power these false teachers could ever provide.

In short, both teachings—Judaizers and early Gnostics—denied the sufficiency of Christ alone to bring salvation. This explains why Paul invested so much of this letter to elevating our understanding of who Christ is and what he has done.⁷ The false teachers in Colossae appear to have been a hybrid of these two heresies, blending them into one. This hybrid theology had begun to infect and divide the Colossian church.



OBSERVATION

1. What does the first word refer to? (16)
2. What is the first thing believers should not do and why? (16-17)
3. What is the 2nd thing believers should not do? ID specific examples. (18)
4. What should believers do instead? (19)

INTERPRETATION

5. What connection does “therefore” have to the previous passage? (16)
6. In your own words, what kinds of modern “standards” (outside of direct biblical teaching) do others impose on believers as a measure of their maturity?

APPLICATION

7. We know that God intended for us to discern and express great freedom in how we worship him. Outside of Scripture, what has influenced either the freedoms or restrictions you practice for yourself and/or others?

COLOSSIANS 2:16-19

¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

CO

After comparing Christ’s perfect work to the inadequate Law, we know only Christ’s work saves and only Christ’s power conquers. Now, apply that truth to the false teachers.

“*Therefore*” links the human poison to its antidote. He warned, “*Let no one pass judgment on you.*” More literally, “Let no man sit as an umpire in your life.” ⁸ How refreshing! Paul wasn’t talking about beneficial accountability, but toxic pride. But what areas of life were judged?

Among others, they judged believers by the Law *in questions of food and drink* (Leviticus 11, 17 and Deuteronomy 14). God himself granted culinary freedom from the Law under the New Covenant (Acts 10:12-16) along with freedom *with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath*. Yet, instead of celebrating a believer’s freedom in Christ, these false teachers tried to impose the Old Testament laws on believers.

God intended for the Law—moral and ceremonial—to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Its morals revealed our need for a Savior. Its ceremonies *illustrated* what Christ fulfilled. In other words, God gave the Law as *a shadow of the things to come*. A cast shadow reveals you exist, but it isn’t you. Likewise, the ceremonies weren’t the actual means of salvation, *but* pictured *the substance* of our faith and worship which *belongs to Christ*. This explains the various portraits of our Savior throughout the Old Testament. Every one we read about *before* Christ finds their actual fulfillment *in* Christ (see Living in the Shadows).

Because Christ has fulfilled the Law, we no longer can be judged by the Law. In Christ, we have already been made righteous for all eternity. Therefore, we must *let no one disqualify* us like a referee or judge would disqualify a competitive runner. These weren’t *God’s* rules, only those of the false teachers.

Paul specifically named five areas of their legalism. 1) They kept **insisting on** various standards and practices by which they would measure the believer’s spiritual life. They badgered believers with false standards and shame for lack of conformity to them. 2) They taught **asceticism**, an extreme form of self-denial. 3) They engaged in the **worship of angels**. God created angels to serve his

will, not to compete for worship. 4) They were constantly **going on in detail about visions**, as though they had superior knowledge. 5) They were **puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind**. In other words, a false teacher was “*inflated without cause by his fleshly mind*” (NASB) as he arrogantly judged others.

life. Do you distinguish between the absolute necessity of biblical directives vs. the freedom and flexibility we have in carrying out those directives? Physical symbols, traditions, and laws do not create spiritual realities. Christ has set us free from relying on symbols like

TRUE COACHING STORY

It was my very first real “Big” Head Football Coaching job in one of the toughest districts in the Central Texas area. I had met with most of the remaining coaches from the old staff about their job and the future of our football program. Most had indicated they were leaving. The last coach from the previous staff I interviewed told me he would like to stay, but if I thought bringing religion to the boys and this community was going to go over, I better keep my bags packed because this community wanted wins not Saints. So, starting a Bible Study with the kids was hard until I hired a Christian Coach.

He took over our FCA huddle group and before we knew it, we had one of the largest FCA groups in our area. We also had several of our Coaches get involved with Coaches Outreach. Studying God’s Word with my coaches was the best thing I ever did. It not only brought unity to our team and staff, but it was such a blessing for our community as well.

The coach who didn’t think studying God’s Word would work in that particular community left.

I often wondered, “What would have happened if I had listened to him and not followed up with bringing God’s Word to our team?” I am so grateful to FCA and Coaches Outreach for being the instrument which draws such a diverse group of young men, coaches, and communities together toward one common goal, that of serving our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We’re also vulnerable to these same five traps. It’s worth asking ourselves some tough questions regarding our pride and desire for control. 1) Do I ever think others should worship as I do, even though the *Bible* does not require it? 2) Do I judge others regarding lifestyle choices and the righteous limits of their house, vehicle, wardrobe budget, or vacation practices? 3) Do I sacrifice for things other than God (even Christian service or family), believing I am better than others. 4) Do I equate my opinions and experiences with the truth and authority of God’s Word, insisting others to agree with me? 5) Do I proudly think I am indispensable to God while indulging in sinful pleasures?

“ CHRIST HAS SET US FREE

These problems—for all believers in Christ’s Body—arise from listening to people **and not holding fast to the Head** of the Body, the Lord Jesus Christ. Only **from** Christ can **the whole body** be **nourished and knit together** as one. As Christ’s life and power flow **through** his Body’s **joints and ligaments**, that Body **grows with a growth that is from God**. Believers don’t need manmade rules or slogans. We need only Christ. In fact, sometimes even good things in his name can distract us from giving attention and trust to Christ himself.

Coach, how free is *your* worship? I don’t mean at church. I mean in your

LIVING IN THE SHADOWS!

Scripture contains many examples of Christ fulfilling Old Testament symbols. God’s moral law revealed man’s unrighteousness and need for salvation (Gal. 3:11, 21-22), but Christ fulfilled it perfectly (Gal. 3:13). God’s ceremonial laws revealed how to respond to sin and maintain a relationship with God, but Christ fulfilled them for us (Ro. 8:3). The Law required celebrating Passover (Ex. 12:14), but Christ fulfilled the Passover, giving its elements new meaning (Lk. 22:19-20). The Law required keeping the Sabbath (Ex. 20:8-11), but Jesus fulfilled it, becoming our Sabbath, allowing believers to rest from spiritual work for salvation (Heb. 4:8-11).

traditions, rituals, and laws. Instead, he frees us to focus on worshipping him with our *heart*. His freedom does not allow believers to do whatever we want. Christ frees us to serve him in the most effective way by surrendering our will to his own.

You may prefer certain styles of music, preaching, or coaching. You may practice certain limits on entertainment or spending. Those choices are between you and God. However, to serve God to the fullest, Paul wrote, “*Though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them*” (1 Corinthians 9:19). Bottom line: Instead of proudly making others conform to my standards to elevate me, I need to humbly conform to whatever is necessary to elevate others and honor God. That is true freedom!



OBSERVATION

1. What do those with Christ die to? (20a)
2. What did the Colossian believers submit to? (20b)
3. ID the specific regulations and their source. (21-22)
4. What is the difference between the value the regulations appear to have vs the value they actually have? (23)

INTERPRETATION

5. How should Christ's death affect our need for extreme self-denial? (20)
6. Why do such rules carry so little power to control the flesh (22-23)

APPLICATION

7. How and where do you draw the line between necessary self-denial vs. extreme self-denial?

COLOSSIANS 2:20-23

²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— ²¹ “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

PRAYER REQUESTS

PRIMARY APPLICATION - RECORD ON PAGE 101

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Why is it so easy to apply extra-biblical standards in matters of personal holiness and growth?



Beginning with the Tower of Babel, people have tried to make their own way to God through various religions. In the process, they always develop various criteria to achieve their goal. Whether they call it “Heaven,” Nirvana,” “Paradise,” or anything else, *it always* involves human works of some kind.

A generation ago, scholars from various religions gathered in England. One question puzzled and frustrated them,

“What makes Christianity different from all other religions?” Later, when C.S. Lewis arrived, he immediately answered that question with one word, “Grace.”

Biblical Christianity alone provides salvation by grace alone through faith alone. That’s how God saves us and that’s how God grows us. Anything else is just another man-made “religion” with more rules. Paul rejects such rules because they

reflect human, not divine, teaching and the rules can't bring spiritual transformation.⁹

In today's passage, Paul rejected *anything* but grace as the only logical way for a believer to live. He begins with an *"If"* that is best understood as "since." Then he restates his fundamental premise, *"with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world."*

The world practices false religion with temporary rules and regulations that enslave us with chains connected to a spike in the ground. However, like the massive elephant from Day 1, although our ties to this world can haunt us, they can't hold us. We were former slaves to sin, but now as Christians, we have the power, indeed the freedom and obligation, to walk away from those chains and live free for eternity by God's grace.

That's why Paul posed his rhetorical question, *"Why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations."* In other words, "If you have been set free by Christ, why do you remain in your prison of works, submitting to the warden of legalism?" You're *free!* To help solidify the extent of their freedom, Paul moves from the general concept to some of the specific shackles of "Do's and Don'ts" that Christ has removed. The Law imposed many restrictions. Nearly all of them could fit into one of three broad categories which the apostle cites without going into much detail.

First, a Jew would immediately associate the large umbrella of *"Do not handle."* Perhaps Paul reflected on Jesus' very similar point when he rebuked the Pharisees' preoccupation with their rules of uncleanness, *"There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him"* (Mark 7:15).

Second, *"Do not taste"* covers basically the same idea as the first phrase, but especially the hundreds of Kosher laws. These laws not only restricted what foods one could consume, but what foods could be served or consumed with what *other* foods. Further, it covered the environment, tools, and preparation of the meals. This likely required abstinence from certain food and drink.

Third, *"Do not touch"* covers coming into physical contact with dead things. It may remind you of the Nazarite vow regarding touching the dead carcass. According to Jewish law, one became impure by touching impure things, particularly a corpse (Numbers 19:11-13). Also, one could become impure through physical contact by touching someone during their menstrual period or someone with a discharge of blood (Leviticus 15), or a leper (implied by the rules of Leviticus 13:45-46). In short, touching human impurity of whatever sort made one impure (Leviticus 5:3).¹⁰

“ YOU HAVE BEEN SET FREE BY CHRIST

Why would false teachers misuse all these *according to human precepts and teachings?* Because when you teach such things as essential for spiritual living and growth, *these have indeed an appearance of wisdom.* That word "appearance" exposes the heart of the legalists. The Gospels record the Pharisees in Jesus' time being absolutely consumed with their externally pious lives. They loved posing for pictures, but hated serving their neighbors. All their posturing was only helpful

in promoting self-made religion. Eventually, it led the infant church toward *asceticism* (extreme self-denial), *and* even caused pain and *severity to the body.* Sadly, not only do these practices bring pain to the practitioner's physical body, but they fail to move them even one step closer to Christ. In fact, these practices actually *hurt* our spiritual growth.

Ironically, legalism provides *no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.* The problem of our drive to satisfy our flesh comes from our heart. Therefore, man-made rules have no power to overcome it. Our flesh can *only* be conquered by a transformed heart. That work begins at salvation and continues throughout a believer's life. As the Holy Spirit reigns in a believer's life, he both exposes sin and empowers victory over sin. That's the ongoing work which Paul will introduce next Week as we open chapter 3.

Coach, while your athletes may not be very religious, they may measure their commitment to their sport by their level of self-denial. Some of this is justified. Athletics *does* require a heavy dose of sacrifice and self-denial to be successful. However, as competitive people, some may take it too far. They may make some foolish and even dangerous choices based on limited human wisdom. That foolishness can bring harm to themselves and possibly others.

Given your position, you have a unique opportunity and privilege to speak truth into their lives. You can open their eyes to pursuing a grace-based life that rejoices in eternal pleasures according to God's wisdom as we will read about in Week 10. Given our world, you may be the only one to model and explain that godly option.



BIG PICTURE

Paul has spent the first half of this letter encouraging the members of the Colossian church—and, by application, all believers—to pursue unity. He taught both the reasons for unity and the forces and perceptions working against it. This week, he addresses the necessary transition from one team (unbeliever) to another (believer). On Team Jesus, some may believe certain players have greater value than others on the team. Therefore, Paul corrected this false per-

ception and its devastating effect on unity. God assigns the same *worth* to all believers, but different *responsibilities*. Some responsibilities, like rejecting sinful desires and practices, apply to all believers. However, other responsibilities apply only to some believers, based on their God-assigned position or role. Every believer must know their position and play their position with God's strength as God designed.

OBSERVATION

1. What are the 2 expected responses to being raised with Christ? Why? (1-3)
2. What should a believer do after realizing the old self has died? (5a, 8a)
3. From God's perspective, what identity categories disappear between believers? (11)

INTERPRETATION

4. In your own words, what is the connection between what God does for a believer and what God commands to a believer? (1, 2, 5, 8-9)
5. How might the effects of our new ID unite believers who might otherwise be divided? (10-11)

APPLICATION

6. How are athletes on your team...
Now similar?

Still different?
7. How should their similarities and differences affect the way you coach?

COLOSSIANS 3:1-11

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

“*Know your position! Play your position!*” How many times have you taught—maybe yelled—those words? All team sports have different positions with different responsibilities. As a coach, you assign those positions to different athletes for different reasons. Once assigned, they must learn what that position requires and how to relate to players in other positions. A well-trained and committed athlete will learn and play their position to the best of their ability. A poorly-trained or reluctant athlete will hurt the team. The same principle is true of the body of Christ. First, one must switch teams.



Paul taught that believers had *been* both *buried* and *raised with Christ*, granting converts his new life through the Holy Spirit. A believer in such a privileged position should *seek the things that are above*. The Greek word behind this phrase (*phrone*, pronounced “fro-neh-o”) implies values,

loves, and thoughts. It could well be translated “delight in things above.”¹

From God’s perspective, we should seek heavenly things *where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God*. This place of supreme power and privilege is second only to the Father. Paul’s point? If you, as believers, are buried, raised, and seated with Christ in heaven (Ephesians 2:6), then you ought to *set your minds* (thoughts following values²) *on things that are above, not on things that are on earth*. Beyond *material* “things,” he’s talking about *character* “things.”

Unlike the false teachers, without reasons for their standards, Paul explained exactly why a believer’s life should be different: *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God*. That new life on a new team includes a radical change of mind, producing the desire for separation from the world.³

However, *when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory*. To prepare, believers exercise *healthy* self-denial, *not* the kind Paul warned about in chapter 2. *This* self-denial *doesn’t* rely on human tradition or human wisdom. *This* self-denial is rooted in God’s truth and accomplished through God’s power.

So, believers must *put to death therefore what is earthly in* our lives. That includes, but isn’t limited to, *sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry*. Paul warned that *on account of these sins, the wrath of God is coming*. God’s wrath awaits those who reject Christ and remain slaves to their sin. This doesn’t give believers a reason for pride. They’re not better than anyone else, just better *off*.

Indeed, *in these* sins believers *too once walked, when they were living in them*. Believers began just like unbelievers, involved in the same sins and, in many cases, to a greater degree. *But*, there *is* one big difference. When a person “changes teams” trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sin, they become righteous in Christ. Then, God gives them new responsibilities within his “team.” Now, believers *must put* their sins *all away*. Christ wants believers to *know* their position: he has already made them righteous before God. Now he wants them to *play* their position: live righteously before people. That means removing *anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from their mouth* and *do not lie to one another*.

God wants believers to see *that* they *have put off the old self with its practices*. However, believers’ lives aren’t parked in “neutral.” Those who are alive in Christ *have put on the new self*. God wants his children to understand their new self-identity. That new creation *is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator*. Once we become a part of God’s family, we should realize that in Christ all our earthly differences—ethnic, spiritual, cultural—have faded away.

Paul showed how our eternal, spiritual position connects to our present need and ability to unify the Body of Christ. In light of Christ’s work, *there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian* (any non-Greek), *Scythian* (a wild, savage nomad⁴), *slave, free. but Christ is all, and in all*. Clearly, all believers need to realize this truth which echoed Paul’s own letter to the church in Galatia many years earlier (Galatians 3:26-28).

A believer’s equality in Christ isn’t increased, diminished, or compromised

by the God-ordained biblical variety in roles from one believer to the next. On your team, you expect *every* athlete to carry out certain responsibilities. However, you expect specific athletes, depending on their position or role, to carry out specific responsibilities unique to them. In all cases, their *worth* remains equal, but their *responsibilities* will differ.

Coach, the difference in your leadership quality can be the difference between playing checkers or chess. Both games are played on the very same board, but in checkers, all the pieces are the *same* color, have the *same* value, and move the *same* way. For that reason, even small children can play it. However, in chess, various pieces have *unique* abilities. To be effective, one must learn those unique qualities—strengths and weaknesses—and play them accordingly. In that sense, each piece has a role, but not the *same* role as every other piece. Even a lowly pawn can defeat the mighty king.

“ PURSUE THE CALL TO PLAY ‘CHESS’ ”

As a leader, you can play “checkers,” treating everyone the same and, perhaps, learning to play better than other checker players. However, *godly* coaches must pursue the call to play “chess.” You honor the Lord by recognizing the differences (whether natural or nurtured) between one athlete and another. As we continue this Week, we’ll see how this principle applies in various situations, within the Christian community, a family, or vocation.



OBSERVATION

1. What are believers commanded to do? (12-14)
2. What one-word command (used 2X) describes what else a believer must do? (15-16)
3. What final broad command is given? (17)

INTERPRETATION

4. Yesterday, we were told to “put to death” and “put away” certain things. How might it be related to today’s command?
5. What difference exists when a command begins with “Let”? (15-16)

APPLICATION

6. No person or group is perfect, but which of these traits are a priority to be developed...
On your team?

In you?

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

¹² Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.



Yesterday, we learned about joining the Body of Christ and playing well. We acknowledged believers had positional responsibilities. Some responsibilities and prohibitions fall on every believer and other responsibilities fall on specific positions. Today, we’ll focus on what *all* believers should be doing.

These church-wide responsibilities come in a six-command “package.” Some of these commands come with specific attitudes or activities while others...not so much. Regardless, all of God’s commands bring radical life change to every believer.

However, even with these positive changes, leaders must be realistic. No matter how mature and unified a relationship—team, marriage, church, family—conflicts will arise. Therefore, the question isn’t *if* we have conflicts, but *how* we resolve them. As we look at these six commands, imagine the unity if each team member lived God’s way. Imagine if you and your team exercised these traits instead of our natural bent toward the opposite, especially when under the emotional stress of competition.

First, in response to yesterday’s “put off” or “put to death,” God tells all believers to **put on then**, certain expected qualities **as God’s chosen ones**, who are **holy and beloved**. Like personal equipment, believers ought to have **compassionate hearts**, one that shows pity and tenderness toward the suffering; ⁵ **kindness**, a combination of goodness and grace; ⁶ **humility**, not self-absorbed, was a trait not honored by the pagan world; ⁷ **meekness**, a grace whereby we are enabled by the Spirit of God to moderate our passions, ⁸ **and patience**

a state of emotional calm in the face of provocation or misfortune and without complaining or irritation.”⁹

Instead of arguing, we ought to be **bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, we ought to be forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven us.** That’s how we **also must forgive.** When might this response be needed? What if a player’s mistake, willful or not, causes the team to suffer a major loss? Would your team carry that pressure together or hold it against the “offender” as punishment?

The key to this command’s starting point is focusing on the individual who felt wronged and *their* response, rather than the one who *caused* the problem. Resolving group division begins with oneself rather than others.¹⁰

Second, above all these, put on love. Godly love, and all that flows from it, **binds everything together in perfect harmony.** Together, these first two commands resemble Paul’s advice to the divided Corinthians. He *assumed* there would always be conflict. The key to unity is loving our offender (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Third, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. This passive command marks the only time Paul spoke of receiving peace as an activity of Christ alone.¹¹ That doesn’t mean believers aren’t involved. God commands us to *let* his peace rule (literally, “to umpire”). That’s a choice. We can submit to him and receive his peace or we can rebel and reject it. However, experiencing his peace among the *community* of believers brings the kind of relationship **to which we were called in one body.** Believers’ unity brings God glory.

Fourth, be thankful. Although brief, one can’t overstate the importance

and benefits of an attitude of gratitude in the pursuit of unity. Consistently exercising this one trait can radically improve the atmosphere around a person or group.

Fifth, let the word of Christ (probably, the words *about* Christ, who he was and what he did¹²) **dwell in you richly.** In this case, Paul expanded on God’s command for the whole community, not primarily to individuals. Therefore, its application must be carried out communally. God’s word must be our foundation for **teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.** Then, *beyond* instruction, it must be the very centerpiece of the believing community’s worship. Those who have put their trust in Christ should be **singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.** However, it should not be done as part of a cold ritual or thoughtless act. Rather, believers should sing with **thankfulness in their hearts to God** for who he is and all he has done.

“ **GOD CAN USE YOU TO BRING NEEDED CHANGE**

Sixth, God covered all that might have been “missed” in the previous five commands. He introduced his final command by saying, **“Whatever you do, in word or deed.”** With these two short phrases, God issued a sweeping statement that left absolutely no corner of our life outside of his rule, influence, and blessing. Through Paul, he commanded all believers to **do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.** That eliminates *any* “wiggle room” for categories of excuse or delay.

Coach, this list carries some pretty

high expectations and great potential results. The world teaches us to see ourselves as the victim, then force others to change their ways. In most cases, this only builds resentment. Not surprisingly, the Lord’s way is the exact opposite. He calls upon believers to show *grace* to the offenders. So, what about those potential results?

Which of the traits in today’s passage do you or your team need most? For example, what difference would it make if your team exuded a spirit of humility or forgiveness rather than pride or resentment? How might it affect your efforts toward team unity? Further, how might learning to live this way teach your young men and women how to keep a marriage, family, and perhaps a nation, together? God can use you to bring needed change. Next, we’ll see how some of that change occurs within specific positions.

“ **THE ONLY EXERCISE SOME PEOPLE GET IS JUMPING AT CONCLUSIONS, RUNNING DOWN THEIR FRIENDS, SIDESTEPPING RESPONSIBILITY, AND PUSHING THEIR LUCK.**

- ANONYMOUS



OBSERVATION

- ID 4 groups, God's command to each, and his "comment." (18-21)

Group	Command	Comment
#1		
#2		
#3		
#4		

INTERPRETATION

- Since God says everyone is equal in Christ, why should any believer submit to any other believer?
- Why might God have added his particular comment to each respective group?

Command to Group	Possible Reason
#1	
#2	
#3	
#4	
- Why do you think God commanded the one submitting before the one exercising authority?

APPLICATION

- We both submit to and exercise authority, depending on the relationship. Based on God's Word, how can you grow in the way you...

Submit to authority?
Exercise authority?

COLOSSIANS 3:18-21

18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

CO

Yesterday, we studied a list of positive character and behavioral traits. Because of a believer's position in Christ, every believer is responsible to grow certain virtues into their life. These traits for believers are repeated in nearly every New Testament letter. Today, we'll look at specific commands and expectations for four different roles or positions within our earthly family. Interestingly, this section of the letter reads like a similar section in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (see It's Twins!).

For each role or position, God focuses on one unique command in terms of authority and responsibility. The Lord follows that one command with a very brief description regarding how to practice it. These particular positions and responsibilities are not based on, nor do they result in, any individual's greater or lesser worth in God's sight. Confusing or ignoring this distinction distorts the truth and encour-

II

TRAIN UP YOUR CHILD WITH ALL TENDERNESS, AFFECTION, AND PATIENCE. DO NOT SPOIL HIM, BUT YOU SHOULD LET HIM SEE THAT YOU LOVE HIM. KINDNESS, GENTLENESS, LONG-SUFFERING, FORBEARANCE, PATIENCE, AND SYMPATHY ARE THE CORDS BY WHICH A CHILD MAY BE LED MOST EASILY. ENTER INTO CHILDISH TROUBLES AND TAKE PART IN CHILDISH JOYS. THEY WILL FIND THE WAY TO HIS HEART.

ages rebellion. Let's look at each of the four commands in greater detail. In both relationships (marriage and parenting), God first addresses the one submitting before the one in authority, perhaps because it *seems* harder to obey (see You're Up First).

First, wives, submit to your husbands. In Paul's culture, this command (based on *choice*) radically liberated women. Many men treated wives as their property and saw themselves as far superior.¹³ However, in *our* culture, this command may sound radically oppressive. It makes many men *and* women cringe—Christian or not. So, given these two extremes, we must ask, "What is biblical submission?" To better understand this command and its inherent moral boundaries we must know what *is fitting in the Lord* (see Submit?).

Second, husbands, love your wives. This "love" (Gk., *agape*, "selfless devotion") is modeled by Christ's self-sacrificing death (Ephesians 5:25-32). It sets God's expectations of a Christian husband quite high. In contrast to skeptical expectations regarding one with such authority, husbands must *not be harsh with* their wife.

Third, children, obey your parents in everything. Learning obedience

IT'S TWINS!

Since Colossae and Ephesus are very close to each other, almost certainly, Paul's partner, Tychicus, carried both letters at the same time. Other passages within these two letters also reflect a 1st Century version of copy and paste. To name just a few, both letters... 1) Begin with a prayer for the church (Col. 1:9-14/Eph. 1:15-22); 2) Establish a solid theological foundation upon which the rest of the letter builds (Col. 1:15-23/Eph. 1:3-14); 3) Include God's call for Paul to preach the gospel (Col. 1:23-29/Eph. 3:1-9); 4) Describe our sinful plight and God's salvation in great detail (Col. 2:13-15/Eph. 2:1-10); 5) Use the language of "put to death" the old self and "put on" the new self (Col. 3:5, 12/Eph. 4:22-24); 6) Follow these basic commands with extensive lists of character and behavioral traits (Col. 3:12-17/Eph. 4:25-32).

“ KIDS WHO DISOBEY PARENTS BECOME ADULTS WHO DISOBEY GOD

is virtually all we know about Jesus' first 30 years (Luke 2:51). This one command is so important because the way kids learn to relate to earthly authority guides their relationship with God, understand who he is, and how he can bless them. Kids who disobey parents become adults who disobey God. That's why, when children learn to obey, *this pleases the Lord*.

Fourth, fathers, do not provoke your children. God-given authority to lead comes with boundaries. This means that fathers must lead wisely *lest* their children *become discouraged*. If your instructional style routinely results in exasperation rather than encouragement and confidence, it is likely ungodly. Wise coaches know the "parenting" difference. For a list of 10 foolish habits, scan the QR code.

Coach, do you both lead and follow as God commands? Which commands (and accompanying limitations and attitudes) have you seen God develop in your life? Who do you know and can thank for modeling one or more of these traits? Of all these commands, which one(s) do you need to work on in your own life?

How do your athletes see those who are in authority and responsibility? Do they seek leadership in order to lord it over others or to serve others? Are your athletes motivated to excellence by your eyes (people-pleasing) or their heart (integrity)? Your personal model and your team standards could provide a picture of God they have never seen before. It could be the biggest blessing they receive for being part of your "family."



YOU'RE UP FIRST

We're not told why Paul addressed the "submitting" party first in all cases, but it seems wise. The one submitting must respond in a godly manner regardless of their authority's intent, wisdom, worthiness, or ability. Nationally, citizens must submit to all office-holders in authority (Ro. 13:1-7), a standard written and required even under the most hostile leaders. Similarly, Christian wives must submit to their husband, a standard to follow even when married to non-Christian men (1 Pet. 3:1-6).

SUBMIT?

What is biblical submission? 1) It is voluntary, accomplished by God's grace, not compulsion, fear, or force.¹⁴ No husband should try to "make" their wife submit. 2) It emphasizes one's will to submit, just as Christ himself submits to the Father's authority, while fully equal (1 Cor. 15:27-28). 3) It recognizes God-given authority. Thus, submission to her husband's authority should flow out of her submission to God and her choice to respond accordingly.¹⁵ 4) God highly esteems a wife's dignity. Wise husbands talk, pray, and discuss life decisions with their wife before exercising authority and responsibility. 5) It includes God-given moral boundaries on her submission.¹⁶



OBSERVATION

- 1. ID the 1st group and God's 1-word command to them. (22)
- 2. What did God expect? (22-24)
Should not (22b):

Should (22c-23):

Motivation (24-25):
- 3. What did God expect of them? (4:1)
Should:

Motivation:

INTERPRETATION

- 4. Do you think these commands endorse/promote the institution of slavery? Why or why not?
- 5. Why might God have added his particular comments to...
Bondservants?

Masters?

APPLICATION

- 6. When might a coach be tempted to exceed needed boundaries of discipline to the point of becoming verbally, emotionally, or physically abusive?
- 7. How should fellow coaches respond and/or intervene?

COLOSSIANS 3:22-25 AND 4:1

22 Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

4:1

1 Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

PRAYER REQUESTS

PRIMARY APPLICATION - RECORD ON PAGE 101

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What are the most difficult lessons you have learned experientially regarding positions of submission and authority?



We've covered the general, God-given, positional responsibilities of all believers (Days 1 and 2) and the specific God-given, positional, family responsibilities related to wives, husbands, and

children (Day 3). Today, we'll wrap up the specific, God-given, positional household responsibilities pertaining to bondservants and their masters. As before, the first command in the relation-

ship instructs the one submitting.

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters. This command does *not* endorse slavery (see That's All?). It merely recognizes the godly response of one bound by it. We must recognize that this Roman form of slavery was very different from the American slave experience. We detail this historical issue in the Week 12, Day 3 supplement, "Why Not Freedom." Although distinct from a current *employee* in a free society, the principles described can easily be applied to those workers.

Workers should *not* perform their job **by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers**, being only diligent when seen. **But**, believers should work **with sincerity of heart** in response to **fearing the Lord**. Believers must work to please the One who sees everything, not *for* salvation, but *because* of it.

This letter wisely restrains from giving specific instructions about various jobs a bondservant might perform. Instead, through Paul, the Lord gives an infinitely broad command applicable to **whatever** the bondservant might **do**. No matter what the circumstances—easy or hard, well-treated or not, good conditions and supervision or not—a believer ought to **work heartily**, giving it everything they've got. Where does a believer find such motivation and positive attitude?

A believer works **as for the Lord**. How hard would *you* work if the Lord was your boss? That's how hard God commands believers to work regardless of who supervises your work or writes the check. In this way, our work is **not for men**. Believers in Christ do their work, **knowing that** their "pay" comes **from the Lord**. Our earthly compensation may not always reflect our faithfulness and diligence on the job. However, that payment, though reasonable, isn't our final assessment or return for our labor.

If you trust in Christ and faithfully serve him through your work, **you will receive the inheritance** from the Lord **as your reward**. That reward far exceeds any tem-

porary gain the world may offer.

Every time you see or hear your boss coming your way, just remember, **you are serving the Lord Christ**. From a biblical perspective, God is your boss.

Have you been wronged at work? Have you been demoted, or even fired, as a result? Are you *currently* enduring unfair treatment? You have every right to be upset and even angry. However, remember one thing. **The wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality**. It will likely not happen as soon as we would like, but God's justice shall prevail. This truth becomes even more relevant when you consider the context of Christian bondservants and the many abuses it produces. Complicating matters, some of those bondservants worked under Christians whom Paul addressed next.

“GOD IS YOUR BOSS

Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly. Roman law granted a bondservant owner the full right to execute his bondservant at will. Further, if a bondservant murdered a head of household, *all* bondservants in that household would be executed.¹⁸ The stark contrast between this culture and God's command is staggering and revolutionary. What could possibly motivate a believing master to surrender so much of his ego, power, and authority in order to follow this command? Accountability to God.

From the bondservant's perspective, it could easily appear that their human masters answer to no one and can easily dismiss any Christian standards, commands, or expectations. Not true. The master who follows Christ has motivation to obey this command, **knowing that** he **also** has **a Master in heaven**. Just as *bondservants* must give account to their masters, *masters* must also give an account to their Master. However, *their* Master knows what was done in secret as well as in pub-

lic. Further, the Lord also knows the intent of their heart.

Coach, your athletes might occasionally consider you a "slave master." Maybe you've even *felt* like one from time to time. Of course, that's an exaggeration, but you do wield quite a bit of authority. Although you can't physically assault an athlete, you can discipline them with considerable pain through physical exercise. If a coach's anger gets out of control, such discipline may become excessive. More likely than not, you and your athletes have a pretty good idea of where those lines are and when, if ever, they get crossed.

In *principle*, your role as a coach resembles a master. You direct, oversee, and discipline those under your authority. This passage serves as a reminder to everyone in leadership, coaches included. We will all be evaluated by our Master. We will all be called by God to give an account for the way we treated those whom God has placed under our authority.

THAT'S ALL?

Reading this passage through the lens of the 21st century can easily leave us disappointed with Paul's counsel. We naturally ask, "Why didn't he call for action beyond better treatment of bondservants? Why wouldn't he call for the total abolition of slavery?" God knew the Roman Empire wasn't ready for that message. Therefore, to preach it within these circumstances would have been seen as a rebellion against the Empire, hindering the message of the gospel. The deeper matters of slavery had to come from the heart anyway, and Paul spoke directly toward that end.¹⁹ As degrading as the ungodly practice of slavery has always been, Paul had no authority to change the laws within the Empire. He did, however, have the authority to address the hearts of those within it.



BIG PICTURE

Throughout Paul's letters, to the local churches in Philippi and Colossae, we have seen how God desires to unify his Church. Last Week, we saw how God has designed various relationships in different spheres of our life—family, work, and with believers—to promote unity.

This Week, Paul will model how our unity and closeness to God strengthens other relationships in our life. We'll begin with how to relate to non-believers and then to other believers, from very close friends to large groups. Paul's example and desire, applied in the 1st Century, still provide a practical and relevant path for us to follow today in the 21st century.

OBSERVATION

1. What is the 1st command and how should it be obeyed? (2)
2. What is the 2nd command? ID the various parts to it. (3-4)
3. What is the 3rd command? How should it be obeyed? (5)
4. What is the 4th command? How and why should it be obeyed? (6)

INTERPRETATION

5. Why do you think Paul added all these details and "how-to's" to the otherwise simple commands? (2-4)
6. How might our time management and "speech" be relevant with "outsiders"? (5-6)

APPLICATION

7. What opportunities has God given to you to share the gospel with others? What wise changes might need to be made in your...
Time management? -

Speech? -

COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. ⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

For years, movies on TV dutifully scrolled legally-required credits, as in a theater. However, everything changed by the late 80's with the near universal use of the remote control. Viewers no longer endured the lengthy scroll. They just grabbed their "clicker."

By the early 90's, NBC discovered about 30% of viewers switched channels during the credits. Since networks sell "eyeballs" to advertisers, this costly problem required an urgent solution. In 1994, NBC introduced the "tease and squeeze" where they compressed credits to 1/3 of the screen, as the other 2/3 showed promos. Soon, other networks followed. Today, compressed credits, shoved to the bottom of the screen, move so swiftly they are virtually illegible.

Some Bible students regard parts of Scripture like those scrolling credits. These under-appreciated parts include genealogies (Genesis 5:3-32; 10:1-32), family lists (Joshua 12-21), and ending remarks of New Testament letters, like most of this Week's passage. Believers feel obliged to *accept* them (they *are* Scripture, after all), but don't care to actually *read* them. If God's Word was a movie, those passages would be compressed and accelerated.

In Days 2-4 of this Week, we're going to enlarge those "credits" and slow them down to appreciate why God included them in his "movie." As Paul closed his letter to the Colossian church, he shared his heart's desire and gave direction

on how the lost can be won over by believers. For now, let's read his closing words just before "The End."



Paul urged his Colossian brothers and sisters to **continue steadfastly in prayer**. Their intercession should be **watchful in it**, as a guard for their well-being, as well as offered **with thanksgiving**. Their prayers would likely involve protecting themselves from the corruption of false teachers and gratitude for the Lord's work in their life and for those who proclaim him in truth.

At the same time, he urged them to **pray also for** those with Paul, his coworkers in evangelism. Specifically, he asked **that God may open to us a door for the word**. How does God open doors? He arranges circumstances through his providence or softens hearts through his Spirit (1 Corinthians 16:9, and 2 Corinthians 2:12). To whom does God speak? Usually and most clearly to those investing in the Word, walking an obedient path, and listening to the Holy Spirit.

As Paul mentioned earlier in the letter, God had anointed him **to declare the mystery of Christ**. Indeed, the apostle maintained such a high commitment to the Lord, that **on account of** it, he ended up **in prison**. He doesn't say this to evoke pity for his circumstances. He simply gave his readers a backdrop for his prayer request. Regarding the gospel, he asked, "...**that I may make it clear**." When speaking to those blinded by spiritual scales on their eyes, Paul knew that this **is how** he **ought to speak**. However, he also knew that his boldness and clarity needed more than blunt truth.

Since God has called all believers to spread the gospel, Paul continued to guide them regarding their rela-

tionships and communication with non-believers. Those who know Christ should **walk in wisdom toward outsiders**. While God can provide needed wisdom in many areas regarding non-believers, Paul had in mind one specific area—**making the best use of the time** God has given each of us to carry out his great commission. In short, Paul pled and prayed for a sense of urgency. However, our sense of urgency should not turn people off to our message.

“ **HAS GOD OPENED DOORS FOR YOU TO SHARE THE GOSPEL?**

With that in mind, Paul directed the Colossians to **let** their **speech always be gracious**. This strongly resembles the godly balance he taught the Ephesian church. A believer's life should be characterized by **speaking the truth in love** (Ephesians 4:15). That sounds like words **seasoned with salt**. Clearly, this is **not** "salty" language. Quite the opposite. We add salt to food to make it more desirable to consume. How much more should we prepare the message of salvation before we present it?

Why should Christians be this sensitive? **So that we may know how we ought to answer each person**. The last two words of that exhortation stand out. We should present God's message of salvation with thoughtfulness toward the individual hearing it. The gospel accounts along with the book of Acts provide great instruction in this area. If you examine all the times an unbeliever heard God's message of salvation, no two times are identical. They presented **never-changing** truth

in an ever-changing form in order to reach that specific individual's heart (see Do You Share?).

Coach, God gives you many opportunities to present the gospel to a great variety of people. Are you known as a person who speaks to others, especially non-believers, with wisdom and grace? Right now, has God opened doors for you to share the gospel? Are you making wise use of the time God has given you to carry out the Great Commission with anyone in particular?

As you think and pray about those God has allowed you to reach, how can you season your message of God's truth with salt? What do they need to know about the Lord that would be especially "salty" to them? Pray for God's wisdom as you carry out his work.

DO YOU SHARE?

Do you want to share your faith, but have concerns about how to start the conversation, offending someone, or being unable to answer a question? Be encouraged! A presentation has been especially designed to help you. It's very personal and versatile...and you don't have to answer any tough questions. To learn more, just click on the QR code.





OBSERVATION

1. Who does Paul mention first? *Generally*, why did Paul send him to Colossae? (7a)
2. Describe his character. (7b)
3. *Specifically*, why did Paul send him to Colossae? (8)

COLOSSIANS 4:7-9

⁷ Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, ⁹ and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

CO

4. Who came with Tychicus? How is he described? (9a)
5. Why did Paul send him? (9b)

Yesterday, we read Paul's closing remarks regarding vigilance in prayer and personal gratitude. The apostle also specifically asked for prayer as he continued to spread the good news of salvation. Just as Paul conducted evangelism globally, he encouraged and advised his friends how they could be more effective personally. When we pray for one another, it also builds our desire to know how God is working in each other's lives. That's the heart behind the next 3 Days of "credits" in this letter.

INTERPRETATION

6. Why is communication of this kind so important? (7-9)

Paul's first two "credits" identify key people whom Paul sent to Colossae with this letter. For those who enjoy these personal notes at the end of Paul's letters, *Tychicus* (pronounced, "tick-a-cuss") may be familiar. He not only carried Paul's mail to numerous places, but they became so close, Paul could say, "**He will tell you all about my activities.**"

APPLICATION

7. In your life, do you have a "Tychicus"? How has God used their loyalty and skill to lighten your load?

This marks the first of three times in this short passage where Paul elevates and models one vital function to build unity—keeping other believers informed about what God is doing in our lives.

8. Are you like Tychicus? Why or why not?
9. No person or group is perfect, but which of these traits are a priority to be developed...
On your team?

Given the close proximity of Colossae to Ephesus, it made sense for Paul to send Tychicus (who came from Asia Minor, Acts 20:4) with several letters in one trip (Colossians 4:7). As Paul echoed to the Ephesian church (Ephesians 6:21), Tychicus **is a beloved brother** in Christ, **a faithful minister**, and a **fellow servant in the Lord**. Paul **sent him to Colossae for this very same purpose** as with Ephesus and elsewhere...**that** the Colossian church **may know how** Paul and his team **are, and that he** (Tychicus) **may encourage their hearts**. As we learned earlier in this study, *biblical* encouragement does more than just make people *feel* better. It provides courage in circumstances that might otherwise bring *discouragement*—the *loss* of courage—or fear.

In you?

By reading the "credits" in a handful of Scripture references, it seems Tychicus became Paul's "Tonto," always capably do-

ing as asked. He began serving Paul by accompanying him with the large sum of money raised in churches across Asia Minor to help ease the famine impacting the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). That experience launched Tychicus as one of Paul’s most trusted co-workers. Tychicus faithfully delivered letters through rough terrain on dangerous routes, but he also possessed strong pastoral skills. So strong, in fact, Paul dispatched him to Crete (Titus 3:12) to shepherd rough characters within its crude culture (Titus 1:12-13). He also sent him to pastor in Ephesus (2 Timothy 4:12), a very large and hostile community (1 Corinthians 15:32). Faithful Tychicus stuck with Paul until Rome executed the apostle about ten years after writing this letter.

Certainly, Tychicus had great skills and difficult assignments. Perhaps this truth is most evident as Tychicus travelled to Colossae with Paul’s correspondence, because he also brought **with him, Onesimus**, a runaway, Christian slave (Philemon 10). Apparently, the slave managed to leave his master’s household in Colossae and make his way to Rome. There he found Paul, who knew this believer as a **faithful and beloved brother** and **one of** them. Whether he came from the church or was returning to it as a new Christian isn’t clear. However, Onesimus obviously belonged in the church fellowship at the time of Paul’s writing. ¹ The apostle knew he had to return Onesimus back to his Christian master. He assigned Tychicus to serve as Onesimus’ protector since a runaway slave could be arrested anywhere by slave catchers everywhere, on the lookout for such slaves. ²

Although *we* don’t have all the details behind this story, both Tychicus and Onesimus told the Colossians **everything that had taken place** in Rome. Interestingly, *we do* have something

the church at Colossae may *not* have had...Paul’s actual, personal letter to Onesimus’ master, Philemon. Although one of the shortest books in our Bible, *Philemon* has a powerful message and practical example of restoring and unifying others, even under the most emotionally-charged situations. Further, *Philemon* paints a beautiful picture of how Christ united us to the Father. We’ll pick up this story next Week, as we study his letter in detail.

“ **HOPEFULLY YOU HAVE ANOTHER BELIEVER WHO KNOWS WHAT YOU’RE GOING THROUGH**

Coach, you likely either appreciate or long for a “Tychicus.” They’re worth their weight in gold. These highly capable gems never compete with you or anyone else for the limelight as they lighten your load. You might find a Tychicus among your athletes, parents, fellow coaches, administrators, or your spouse. Anyone *can* serve as a Tychicus, but it requires humility. For that reason alone, they are rare.

Far more likely, you know an Onesimus. They usually *add* weight to your load. Yet, somehow, they trust you enough to come to you when they experience a broken relationship with someone you know. Now you’re in the middle of it all. Should you choose a side? Should you avoid the minefield altogether? Before deciding, consider that God has given you an opportunity to bring healing to the person who came to you and restoration between the two parties. Yes, getting involved *can* get messy. You might even get beaten up like “Tonto.” Further, such a God-given opportunity certainly calls

for God-given wisdom. Yet, by trusting in the Lord to guide you and use you, he may also open a door to restoring these parties not only to each other, but to himself.

Whether you have a Tychicus or Onesimus in your life, hopefully you have another believer who knows what you’re going through and supports you. You pray for one another in a way only possible because you let each other into the details of your lives. That tight bond changes our relationships in just the way Christ desires.

“ **LEADERS MUST BE CLOSE ENOUGH TO RELATE TO OTHERS, BUT FAR ENOUGH AHEAD TO MOTIVATE THEM.**

-JOHN MAXWELL



OBSERVATION

1. ID 3 believers whom Paul names w/ a brief description. (10-11)
#1 –

#2 –

#3 –
2. ID 1 other person and Paul's description of him. (12-13)

INTERPRETATION

3. Why might Paul have publicly recognized these 3 believers? (10-11)
4. Why might Paul have publicly recognized and elaborated on the last man? (12-13)

APPLICATION

5. How can you support other coaches, both on your staff and off?

COLOSSIANS 4:10-13

¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹ and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.



Yesterday, we learned about faithful Tychicus and the runaway slave, Onesimus, close friends of Paul who stayed with him in Rome. During his Roman imprisonment, Paul also enjoyed several other close friends, some of whom may surprise you.

Paul mentions *Aristarchus*, referring to him as “*my fellow prisoner*.” He could easily have called him a “war buddy.” As a result of Paul’s preaching, Aristarchus endured the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:29), where he was singled out as a leading Christian. He also travelled with Paul (Acts 20:4) and was with him during the terrible storm on his way to Rome (Acts 27:2). ³ Likely, Paul shared living quarters and expenses with Aristarchus while under Roman “house arrest.” As one of Paul’s special team members, the apostle specifically mentions that he “*greet*s you” in the Colossian church.

Next, we see God’s hand at work to bring his unity despite a very difficult relational history. Paul sent greetings from *Mark, the cousin of Barnabas* (a highly respected leader in the early church, Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-30). To appreciate the power of God to heal and bring unity to a divided relationship, we must understand the history between Mark and Paul. What God did to unite their hearts, he can do for you. However, we need to be ready to forgive the failures of others, especially those that painfully wounded us.

About a decade earlier, Paul and Barnabas served as missionary partners on a 2-year journey (Acts 13-14). During that journey, Mark deserted them in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13). When Paul and Barnabas began making plans to return

to Asia Minor, Barnabas expressed his desire to, again, take young Mark along. Paul vehemently objected. Their disagreement over Mark became so heated that Paul and Barnabas parted ways. In response, Paul recruited Silas for his second missionary journey and Barnabas took Mark under his wing as he continued evangelistic work elsewhere (Acts 15:36-40).

We can speculate on various changes that may have occurred over that 10-year period, but the issues which caused division were overcome by a change in Mark and mutual forgiveness. In a separate letter, Paul wrote the Colossians *concerning* Mark, including *instructions*. Specifically, *if he comes to you, welcome him*. Later, during Paul's final imprisonment, he directed his protégé, Timothy, "*Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry*" (2 Timothy 4:11). In wrestling, they'd call that a "full reversal." Praise God!

Then Paul sent greetings from *Jesus* (a familiar Jewish name, Luke 3:29; Matthew 27:16-17; Acts 13:6) *who is called Justus*. He, like Aristarchus and Mark, was one of *the only men of the circumcision*, Christ-believing Jews, *among Paul's fellow workers for the kingdom of God* with him when he wrote this letter. All these men had *been a comfort to* the faithful prisoner.

Finally, Paul again mentions a name familiar from his strong support in the earlier part of this letter (1:7). *Epaphras*, as you might recall, helped plant the Colossae church and teach them the truth. Paul again reminds the Colossians that Epaphras is "*one of you*," a fellow resident of Colossae. More importantly, he is a citizen of heaven and *a servant of Christ Jesus*. After these words, Paul continued raising this pastor even higher in the sight of the people he shepherds.

After Paul *greeted* the Colossians on behalf of Epaphras, he reminds them of his dedication to them. Having spent time interceding together, Paul could confidently report that their pastor was *always struggling on their behalf in his prayers*. "Struggling" uses the same Greek word which describes the work of athletes in a contest.⁵ What did he pray for? The same, basic thing Paul consistently prayed for in all of his prison letters...*that they may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God*. However, his diligence didn't end on his knees.

“ **HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT FELLOW COACHES?**

The apostle Paul could *bear him witness that he has worked hard*, literally to the point of pain or distress *for those in Colossae and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis*. Like most pastors, this man worked hard for those he shepherded. That's quite an assessment coming from Paul himself, a man known of legendary intensity and diligence.

Consider how these believers—some strangers to one another—showed their support. Aristarchus served time with Paul. Mark *forgave* Paul, who once rejected him so vigorously that it divided strong friends and ministry partners. Paul *forgave* Mark, recognized his maturity, and *facilitated acceptance* in his new crowd. Justus *comforted* Paul, likely risking his life in the process. Epaphras *multiplied* Paul's earlier work.

Coach, how can you support fellow coaches? Certainly, one way is your commitment to this study. Through Coaches Outreach, you learn, read, and pray together. It gives you the

opportunity to listen to what God is doing in one another's lives and strengthen each other as God leads. However, there's another way to help other coaches.

You already know how this study has benefitted you and your fellow coaches throughout this semester. However, you also probably know *other* coaches who face the same struggles you do, but *without* this support. If you didn't contact your friends at the start of this semester, take a moment to look over the first page inside the front cover to tell them about this ministry—the Bible study, the Reach, and our Marriage Retreats. When you go to your next clinic, pass it on, even to coaches you *don't* know. They also need and would appreciate this kind of support just as much as you do.

“ **DON'T EVER THINK, NO MATTER HOW OLD YOU ARE, THAT YOU DON'T NEED TO BE COACHED.**

-PEYTON MANNING



OBSERVATION

1. What two men sent greetings? (14)
2. What 3 greetings did Paul send? (15)
3. What 3 instructions did he give? (16-17)
4. What were Paul's last 3 bullet points? (18)

COLOSSIANS 4:14-18

¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶ And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord." ¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

INTERPRETATION

5. What may this verse imply about the churches in Colossae and Laodicea? (15)
6. Why might Paul have encouraged passing on letters between churches? (16)
7. Why might Paul have communicated with Archippus in this way? (17)

PRAYER REQUESTS

APPLICATION

8. How might you apply this lesson to foster greater support within your team and/or staff?

PRIMARY APPLICATION - RECORD ON PAGE 101

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Who can be found in the "credits" of your life and how can you recognize them?



We have now finished our second of Paul's prison letters in this study. The first letter, *Philippians*, pursued unity through deepening our relationships with one another. This letter, *Co-*

lossians, has pursued unity though submitting to Christ's rule in our lives. Both truths are essential to God-honoring unity. Yesterday, we saw how believers can support other *individual*

believers. Today, in this final passage, we will see how one believer can cultivate unity through supporting entire *groups* of believers, directly or indirectly. Paul now mentions one of his most treasured team members.

Luke the beloved not only blessed Paul, but the entire church. Paul relayed that he **greet**s the Colossian church. Luke also greatly impacts the early church and all Christians by authoring both *The Gospel of Luke* and *Acts*. In *Acts*, Luke identifies his time with Paul, using the pronoun “we” when serving together vs. “they” when apart. Here, we learn that Luke is a trained **physician**. Paul also named Luke in two other letters (Philemon 24 and 2 Timothy 4:11). Spiritually, Luke may have been a “God-fearing” Gentile—a convert to Judaism, minus circumcision—before becoming a Christian.

Paul mentions **Demas** in only two other places in Scripture—once in *Philemon* (24) and several years later in his final letter. Here he supports Paul, but later he fell in *love with this present world and deserted* the apostle (2 Timothy 4:10) causing Paul to lose both a personal friend and supporter.⁷ It’s one thing to have others leave you physically, but how sad when close friends abandon values and people that once led them to sacrifice that which later entraps them.

The apostle also wanted to reach **outside of the Colossian church** and **give his greetings to the brothers at Laodicea**. Likely, in that fairly large city, **Nympha and the church met in her house** (see God’s House). **When this letter has been read among** the Colossians, Paul instructed to **have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans**. Later, the apostle John sent this same church a letter (Revelation 3:14-22). This custom became known as circular letters. Without the ability to simply forward correspondence, early believers would circulate a letter from one city to believers in another city. Paul makes this

custom quite evident as he encouraged the Colossians to **also read the letter from Laodicea**. This methodology kept everyone informed.

For his last personal word, Paul basically dictated what to **say to Archippus**, “**See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.**” Perhaps his service didn’t have the vision or stamina it needed. Whatever the situation, Paul mobilized the entire church to hold him accountable.

“ **NOBODY SAID YOUR JOB WOULD BE EASY**

Finally, the pastoral warmth of the apostle becomes evident as he calls attention to the switch that must have been obvious to the reader. He penned, “**I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.**” Many have speculated that the apostle had some problems with his eyesight, possibly worsening as he aged. Nevertheless, like a war veteran struggling to stand in honor of the flag, Paul sought to emphasize his personal affection by physically communicating it himself.

He closed his letter, with a heartfelt request of this church, “**Remember my chains.**” Perhaps, like we often do, the Colossians might have easily become so focused on the words Paul wrote, that they forgot the circumstances under which he wrote them. Never wanting to draw attention to himself, he humbly summarized his need in just three words. However, with those words, he communicated his vulnerability as well as his love and partnership with them.

Finally, Paul closed with, “**Grace be with you.**” This little phrase carries much more meaning than a simple salutation. Experiencing God’s grace was Paul’s primary desire for everyone in all the churches. He knew that only by God’s grace, expressed through Christ, can a person experience salvation. Only by

God’s grace, expressed in a believer, could God’s child experience maturity. And only by God’s grace, expressed through believers, could God’s family ever hope to experience unity.

Coach, a big part of your job involves pulling your team together. You must vigilantly keep them on the same path, at the same time, with the same goals, all while working with very different people and backgrounds. Nobody said your job would be easy. Nobody who has ever done it well has ever claimed it happened naturally. Establishing and maintaining team unity takes work, hard work. The same is true for the unity of God’s people.

So far, Paul’s devotion to and instruction toward unity have focused on the horizontal relationship (with one another) in *Philippians*; and the vertical relationship (with Christ) in *Colossians*.” In *Philemon*, the next letter we will study, he pulls these two paths together to heal a *very* strained relationship. It is *so* strained, that one believer might literally have the other *killed*. Hopefully, with all the relationships in your life, none have reached anywhere near this point. *What* Paul says to Philemon and *how* he says it, provides a powerful lesson for us on how to use our relationships with others to bring healing unity to even the most fractured bodies. There’s no other book like it.

GOD’S HOUSE

Using homes for meetings as in Acts 2:42-47 remained the case until the Roman Emperor Constantine in the 300’s made Christianity legal throughout the Roman Empire. During the first few centuries, most often, they met in a wealthy person’s house, in the open air, or in underground catacombs. This practice can be seen in some of Paul’s other letters (Ro. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Phile. 2).



BIG PICTURE

In this study, we've seen how humility empowers our horizontal relationship with other believers and our vertical relationship with God. We've also seen Paul's heart for the importance of unity expressed in his letters to churches in Philippi and Colossae. However, we've never seen Paul more personally engaged than in his passion-filled letter to Philemon. On Paul's behalf, Tychicus delivered both this letter and Onesimus, a runaway slave, to Philemon. Despite possessing apostolic authority, Paul never ordered Philemon, Onesimus' owner, to do anything. Instead, he pled with this Colossian church leader to choose the most compassionate path.

We cannot appreciate the full message of Philemon without recognizing its strong parallels to the gospel. Onesimus, the slave, owes both a positional debt (as a runaway slave, subject to execution) and a possession debt (it appears he stole from Philemon's home). This slave represents all sinners in debt to God. Philemon, the master, holds the authority to take life or grant it. This master represents the Father, who could justifiably take the lives of sinners for our rebellion against him. Paul, the intermediary, pleads for Philemon to treat Onesimus as he would treat Paul himself and offers to pay any debt Onesimus owes. This intermediary represents Christ, who pays our sin debt and pleads for the Father to show grace, granting us both reconciliation and eternal life.

OBSERVATION

- How did Paul ID...(1) himself?

Timothy?

Philemon?
- Why did Paul pray for Philemon? (4-5)
- What did Paul pray for? (6)
- How has Philemon already blessed Paul? (7)

INTERPRETATION

- Why might Paul have ID'd each as he did? (1) himself?

Timothy?

Philemon?
- Why might Paul have highlighted these 2 qualities and their effect? (5-6)
- Why might Paul have reminded Philemon of his track record? (7)

APPLICATION

- What broken relationship might God want you to mediate toward restoration and forgiveness?

PHILEMON 1:1-7

¹ Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ² and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, ⁶ and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. ⁷ For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

When my daughter, Braiden, needed to buy a used truck, we went to a friend and owner of a dealership with just the right vehicle. Greg, the salesman, treated Braiden (a first-time buyer) graciously and respectfully. He also explained how buying her F-150 could grow her credit through a wise payment plan.

Grateful, I emailed my friend to tell him how well Greg handled everything, copied Greg for encouragement, and clicked "Send." Coincidentally, Braiden was in Greg's office as he read that email. She saw how much it means when an intermediary esteems them to a superior.

Greg's character, behavior, and relational skills were well-known. Still, the commendation moved him. Now, imagine two parties, wounded and separated by a severe offense. God called Paul, someone who knew and loved both parties, to help heal that relationship. That calling resulted in Paul's letter to Philemon. God may similarly call *you*. If so, this letter can provide wisdom for the task.



In our first two letters, **Paul** intentionally identified himself in different ways in each introduction. In *Philippians*, he identified as a servant, stressing the church’s need for humility. In *Colossians*, he identified as an apostle, stressing the church’s need for authority.

Unique to this letter, Paul introduced himself as **a prisoner for Christ Jesus**. This title stresses Paul’s loving sacrifice for Christ toward others, including Philemon. That is precisely the sacrificial love he’ll ask of Philemon in this letter. As a good leader, Paul asks nothing more of others than he has already done himself. Next, he identifies other mutual friends, consistently using the language of partnership and unity.

When Paul wrote this letter, **Timothy** and this slave owner may have been well-acquainted given their close partnership with Paul. Keeping this letter very personal, Paul refers to Timothy as **“our brother.”** This begins the first of five times in this short introduction where Paul uses the pronoun “our” to highlight *shared* relationships within God’s family.

Paul primarily wrote this letter **to Philemon**, a wealthy church host/leader (see Nice House!). However, Paul calls him **“our beloved fellow worker”** revealing 1) he’s willing to risk their deep friendship to challenge his brother toward godliness *and*, 2) this very personal letter isn’t for his eyes only. **Apphia, our sister** was likely Philemon’s wife. Custom grants her responsibility for slaves and, therefore a key party in deciding Onesimus’ fate. ¹ The third individual, **Archippus**, was **our fellow soldier**. Beyond individuals, he intended it for **“the church in your house.”** Paul used all of these people,

known and trusted by both he and Philemon, to bring great accountability upon this man.

As he often does, Paul extended **grace** to his readers **and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. He continued his positive perspective, assuring them, **“I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers.”** Apart from either habit or duty, Paul had good reason to be thankful for this church **because**, as he told them, **“I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.”** Perhaps this status report came from Onesimus or Epaphras. However, as we have seen in the previous two letters, Paul always wanted believers to continue growing.

“ WISE LEADERS KNOW HOW TO MEDITATE CORRECTLY

To that end, Paul would **pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective**. “Sharing your faith” usually means “evangelism” to *us*. However, Paul used it here to mean “our common faith.” That certainly fits with this introduction’s five uses of “our” and Paul’s expressed motive.

Paul prayed **for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ**. In this case, the “good thing” is forgiving his brother, Onesimus. Paul attributes much church growth directly to Philemon by saying, **“For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love.”** How could Philemon bless Paul, even while suffering the physical discomforts of imprisonment? By seeing Philemon’s love once again. Paul freely tells him, **my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.** By loving those Paul cared about,

this servant-leader comforted his concerned friend a thousand miles away. Onesimus puts that love to the test.

This introduction is powerful! Rather than dissect what Paul *wrote*, we need to see what Paul *did*. By recognizing Philemon’s great contributions, Paul prepared the ground for this leader to know and feel Paul’s confidence in him. Perhaps the apostle sensed that Philemon’s situation might test the Lord’s instructions regarding slaves and masters (Colossians 3:22–4:1). Would love triumph over social and economic distinctions? ² If it worked in this situation, it could work anywhere.

Coach, this introduction illustrates Paul’s command, **“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear”** (Ephesians 4:29). Too often, leaders miss this wise step. Instead, we jump into *sowing* the ground with our *correction* before *tilling* the ground with our *recognition*.

All leaders must correct others. However, wise leaders know how to mediate correctly. Wisdom instructs mediators to make the most of their existing relationships. As Paul continues his intermediary work, we will continue to learn from his wise example.

NICE HOUSE!

Scholars presume Philemon’s wealth because he had at least one slave and a house in which a church met. In major cities, most people lived in rooms, rather than houses. Further, the fact that he had a room large enough for meetings suggests a high income. ³



OBSERVATION

1. Besides mediate, what could Paul have done and why didn't he? (8-9a)
2. Circle Paul's emotive language regarding himself and Onesimus? (9b-12)
3. What options did Paul have and why did he make this choice? (13-14)

PHILEMON 1:8-14

⁸ Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, ⁹ yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. ¹¹ (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) ¹² I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. ¹³ I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴ but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord.



INTERPRETATION

4. What might Philemon have been "required" to do? (8)
5. Why might Paul have referenced himself and Onesimus with such an emotional tone (versus logic/reason)? (9b-12)
6. Why do you think Paul took this risk and what did he likely communicate to Philemon by his choice and reasoning? (12-14)

Yesterday, Paul set the tone of his communication regarding Philemon's relationship with Onesimus. Today, we'll see how Paul preferred lasting, heart change, bringing unity, over short-term, outward change, maintaining division. He had the authority to *insist* Philemon comply, and told him so. However, forcing the right decision wouldn't grow Philemon spiritually. It might even plant resentment in him against both Paul and Onesimus. Watch how Paul used his authority to compel to further his desire to appeal.

Accordingly, given his apostolic authority—which he never surrendered, only restrained—Paul was **bold enough in Christ to command** Philemon **to do what is required**. What was Philemon "required" to do? The Lord himself said that believers, forgiven much by God, should likewise forgive others (Matthew 18:21-35). As a believer and church leader, Philemon was probably keenly aware of Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, which probably explains why Paul didn't say more about it.

APPLICATION

7. In what decisions, where you could exercise your authority over an athlete, might you choose to have your athlete make that decision? Why and how would you do it?

Yet, Paul chose a totally different path. **For love's sake**, Paul modelled for us what it looks like to **prefer to appeal to** a friend's inner desire to do what is right. Instead, of boldly placing Philemon under his authority, he boldly placed the choice under Philemon's judgement. This one very risky choice changed the entire dynamic and direction of the letter. Therefore, rather than forceful threats we read heartfelt appeals that seem to border on emotional manipulation. For example, have you ever heard Paul speak of himself as he does in the next verse?

Paul begins his appeal by describing himself as *an old man*. Understand, this is no doubt true since he wrote this letter while in his early sixties. Yet nowhere else in any of his writings did Paul communicate in a way to elicit such sympathy. To pile on even more sympathy, he reminded Philemon that he was *now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus*. This reminder, however, causes more than just sympathy. It subtly compels Philemon to recognize Paul's sacrificial obedience to the Lord as this master weighs his own sacrificial obedience in forgiving his slave.

To further his *appeal to* Philemon, Paul explained his relationship to Onesimus through four statements, each progressively more intense and personal. *First*, he calls the runaway slave "*my child*," making *Onesimus* his son. *Second*, Paul sees his *own* role as a *father*. The only other person he describes this way was Timothy, his son in the faith. In similarly referring to Onesimus, most scholars conclude that Paul *became* his spiritual father during this *imprisonment*. In other words, Onesimus placed his trust in Christ *after* he ran away and somehow found Paul in Rome. This timing becomes critical for Paul's next strategic argument.

Third, Paul cleverly played on the name "Onesimus" which means *profitable* or "useful." *4 Formerly, he was useless* (not "Onesimus") *to* Philemon. *But now*, as a fellow believer and brother in Christ, *he is indeed useful* ("Onesimus") both *to* Philemon *and to* Paul himself. Without elaborating on the details of this contrast, Paul appealed to Philemon's pragmatic side. That is, Paul knew a slave wasn't worth keeping if they were not useful, but that was no longer true, so he ought to welcome him home just as a practical matter. However, Paul didn't rely on

pragmatism alone. Again, he went for the heart.

Introducing the *fourth* term of endearment for Onesimus, Paul told Philemon, "*I am sending him back to you*," Then he showed great emotional vulnerability, telling his friend he was "...*sending my very heart*." With the possible exception of Timothy, has Paul ever communicated with so much intimacy?

“ RESTRAINING AUTHORITY REQUIRES COURAGE

Reinforcing his argument about Onesimus' usefulness, Paul wrote, "*I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel*." Translation: I could have kept him here and thanked you for "loaning" him to me.

But, that would go against everything Paul believed in about morals *and* about Philemon. He *preferred to do nothing without* Philemon's *consent*. If there's one relational language that men, especially men in authority, respond to, it's respect. Keenly aware of this, Paul spoke to this wealthy man in charge of his household and leader within the church by communicating a very large dose of respect. Paul certainly knew the art of friendly persuasion!¹⁵

Paul clearly gave his reason that, again, underscores his strong desire for genuine reconciliation. The apostle prefers to receive Philemon's consent *in order that* his *goodness might not be by compulsion but of his own accord*. Paul wanted Philemon to grow

in grace. That growth, that choice, cannot be forced on anyone. It must come from within as we yield to the Holy Spirit moving in our heart.

Coach, you'll certainly get a lot more accomplished by exercising your authority to order your athletes to do whatever is needed...and often that's *perfectly* appropriate and necessary. It gets the job done faster, they learn to obey, and you can move on to many other pressing responsibilities. *However*, in other situations, that approach misses the opportunity to grow someone's character, including your own. Further, *not* developing their character may even create more trouble down the road.

When the maturity of someone you oversee can grow by making a tough decision, take that opportunity to grow them. Whether they choose wisely or not, you've put a stake in the ground to identify their maturity level. Warning: Restraining (*not* surrendering) authority requires courage. It is not for the weak. However, if you wisely *appeal* rather than *compel*, you'll likely *both* grow toward greater maturity and genuine unity.

|| MOTIVATION IS THE ART OF GETTING PEOPLE TO DO WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO DO BECAUSE THEY WANT TO DO IT.

-DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER



OBSERVATION

1. What possibility did Paul leave open? (15)
2. How did Paul describe Onesimus before and after? (16)
3. What "deal" did Paul offer Philemon? (17-19)
4. How did Paul communicate his sincerity? (19a)
5. How did Paul express he was "confident" Philemon would make the right choice, yet still provide accountability? (21-22)

INTERPRETATION

6. What phrase shows Paul's persuasiveness and how? (15)

APPLICATION

7. Think back to the parties for whom you might mediate toward reconciliation. To build greater trust and commitment...
 - What "credit" of yours might you need to leverage with each party?

- What risks might you need to take?

PHILEMON 1:15-22

¹⁵ For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. ¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. ¹⁸ If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. ²⁰ Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. ²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. ²² At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

CO

Paul spoke to his treasured friend, Philemon, graciously urging him to do the right thing. The apostle didn't withdraw his authority. He chose not to use it. Through rhetorical wisdom, Paul exposed his ready-to-use firepower, but kept it holstered. Today, Paul calls attention to God's sovereignty as well as his own willingness to sacrifice as needed to restore this relationship and bring unity to God's family.

We often look for divine purpose in uncertain or unwelcome circumstances. Similarly, Paul pondered the purpose behind Onesimus' wrongful actions, "**For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother.**" He doesn't excuse the wrong, nor ask for Onesimus' freedom (see Why Not Freedom?). He does allow that God may use Onesimus' wrong for a greater good as Joseph saw God's hand in his brothers' evil (Genesis 50:20).

Certainly good came out of this, **especially to** Paul whom Onesimus assisted in unspecified ways, **but how much more to** Philemon? The returning slave, now a brother, was useful to Philemon **both in the flesh and in the Lord**. That is, this new convert would be both a hard-working servant and an asset to the Church. That's the pragmatic argument. Next, Paul got *very* personal.

So, in light of these considerations, Paul proposed to Philemon, “*If you consider me your partner*, (more literally, “business partner”⁶) *receive him as you would receive me.*” Not so subtly, Paul said, “If you *reject* him, understand, you also reject me.” The apostle risked losing a relationship with someone he has known and loved for years in order for everyone involved to unite and grow in their walk with Christ. However, he’s not finished inserting his own commitment yet.

Paul acknowledged the problem *if* Onesimus *has wronged* Philemon *at all, or owes* him *anything* from his illegal exit. The debt Paul refers to could be a valuable object, money, or the value of lost labor rightly expected of a slave.⁷ Whatever Onesimus took when he ran, he could probably *never* repay. Undoubtedly, this debt would hinder any reconciliation with Philemon.

“ YOUR SACRIFICE FOR OTHERS EARNS YOU "CREDIT" ”

Paul’s solution: *charge that to my account.* This intermediary sacrificially committed himself toward unity. He willingly opened his own wallet, offering what little money he had to help heal this relationship. Not at all a passive observer, Paul was all in.

To add even more power to that punch, Paul adds, “*I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it.*” Philemon could trust Paul, and Paul likely knew it. However, Paul still emphasized how seriously he believed in Onesimus. Not that Philemon needed to, but, if there were *any* doubt in his mind, he could always compare this handwriting to the letter to the Colossians that came with it.

However, he followed authentication by writing, —*to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.* If the handwriting analysis didn’t prove its authenticity certainly the twinkle in the eye that pops through the ink would identify its author as his friend. With Paul’s offer to cover Onesimus’ *financial* debt, he seized the opportunity to remind Philemon of the far larger *spiritual* debt *he* owed Paul.

Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. So, refresh my heart in Christ.” Certainly, there’s no theologically valid indebtedness which a convert owes to the one who led them to Christ. Philemon didn’t actually *owe* Paul anything for leading him to Christ. Let’s remember, we’re reading a personal letter between two strong male friends. It’s one of those times you give a knowing nod and say, “I’m only *half-kidding.*” You don’t mean it literally, yet you kind of do. Paul concludes his appeal with a friendly, yet forceful, rapid-fire level of accountability.

First, he tells Philemon, “I am *confident of your obedience.*” Communicating this expectation builds the desire to meet it. *Second*, in saying, “*I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.*” Paul one-upped even his own high standard, believing Philemon would exceed it

on his own. *Third*, saving the best for last, Paul wrote, “*At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.*” Perhaps the most compelling level of accountability in the entire letter, Paul announces his plans for a personal visit.

Coach, you know the old saying, “Put your money where your mouth is!” That’s what Paul did in today’s passage. In doing so, he models how *you* can put all *your* sacrifices for the team to godly use. You wouldn’t ever bring it up to manipulate someone to do a favor for you. However, don’t rule out reminding someone of your kindness to them as motivation for them to do something for someone else.

If you have forgiven them, you’ve earned the right to ask them to forgive others. If you have invested extra time in them, you’ve earned the right to ask them to invest such time in others. If you have intervened for them...you get the idea. Bottom line: your sacrifice for others earns you “credit” you can “spend” to bring reconciliation and unity where animosity and division now thrive. By seeing our sacrifices as God’s tools, we’ll make them more willingly and use God’s tools more wisely.



WHY NOT FREEDOM?

Many people read this letter and wonder why Paul did not ask Philemon to set Onesimus free. To consider this question more fully, click on the QR code.



OBSERVATION

1. Who did Paul first ID and how? (23)
2. Who else did Paul mention? (24)
3. What did Paul wish for Philemon? (25)

INTERPRETATION

4. What else do you know about Epaphras? (23)
5. What else do you know about each of these people? (24)
6. How might Paul's letter have helped answer his blessing? (25)

APPLICATION

7. Consider the 3 primary men in this letter. Which one do you most identify with? Why?
8. How can this group pray for you?

PHILEMON 1:23-25

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴ and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. ²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Empty box for prayer requests

PRIMARY APPLICATION - RECORD ON PAGE 101

Empty box for primary application

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How has God used your study of Unite! to encourage you through areas of restriction and/or build greater unity?



Over the last three days, we've looked over Paul's shoulder at his very personal letter to his dear friend, Philemon. Turning away from an authoritative approach, the apostle appealed directly to Philemon's heart. He leveraged, even risked, their close friendship in order to heal the relationship between Philemon and his runaway slave, Onesimus. Today, we'll see some names familiar to us from Paul's letter to the Colossians. As a family, they all held each other

accountable and spurred one another on to grow in Christ. However, we'll spend most of today seeing the strong parallel between Paul's message to Philemon and Christ's message to the world. Then we'll wrap up our study by looking at the playbook's overall application to us.

Paul began his greetings by first naming *Epaphras*. Of all those named, he certainly was the most prominent among

the Colossians. This man planted the church in Colossae and has pastored since being Paul's *fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus*. Since this was a separate letter, it made sense that Epaphras *sends greetings to* Philemon's household. He probably knew each one by name.

Beyond the greeting from Epaphras, Paul sent greetings from *Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke*, his *fellow workers*. Since we've discussed each of these men in our study of *Colossians*, we won't repeat that same personality survey.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." If Paul became known for anything, it was his planting the gospel of grace. He lived for it and eventually died for it. In that tradition of offering grace, we close this study of *Philemon* asking, "What kind of person are you?"

Are you a *Paul*, aware of a rift between two staff members, groups, athletes, or family members? Both parties trust you and need you to intervene. As God leads, be willing to step into the rift, offer God-given wisdom, and sacrifice your resources to bring forgiveness, unity, and healing.

Are you an *Onesimus*, indebted to another, perhaps God himself, for wrongs that you have never made right? If you need to, find a trusted friend like Paul who can help you make things right.

Are you a *Philemon*, a wronged party with an opportunity to forgive and restore, but hesitant? Humbly ask the Lord for the grace to fully receive and forgive the one who wronged you. Pray for and be open to God using an intermediary.

These three roles, critical to bringing unity, do not tell the *most* important

story of *Philemon*. More than a picture of a runaway slave, an intermediary, and a wealthy man, *Philemon* paints a picture of Calvary.

Like Paul, Christ found all of us in the same condition as Onesimus, runaway slaves, law-breakers, and rebels. However, when we placed our trust in him, he identified us with himself before his Father. His work on the cross paid our debt of sin which we could never pay. As a result, The Father has forgiven us. This is the doctrine of imputation. "To impute" means "to put to one's account." Believing in Christ puts our sins on Christ's account, and his righteousness to our account. Such grace caused the Psalmist to exclaim, *"Blessed is the man against whom the*

LORD counts no iniquity" (Psalm 32:2; Romans 4:1-8; 2 Corinthians 5:21).⁸

Two phrases in this letter accentuate and summarize this beautiful analogy. *First* is the phrase, *"receive him as myself"* (17). It points to our new identification with Christ, forgiven members of God's family. *Second* is the phrase, "put that on my account" (19). This phrase points to the Father's act of imputation—our sins placed on Christ.⁹ If you have not already placed your faith in Christ to be reconciled with him, please go to page 105 to learn more. No unity is more important than our oneness with the Father found in and through Jesus Christ.

“ GOD CAN DO GREAT THINGS THROUGH YOU



Coach, consider all God has shown you about achieving unity in this study. In *Philippians*, we learned how God uses our humility to put others before ourselves to bring us together. In *Colossians*, we learned how God uses our humility to put ourselves under the Lordship of Christ, our Head, to bring us together. In *Philemon*, we learned how God uses both our relationship with others and our relationship with God to restore a severely broken relationship.

Think about it. God used the Apostle Paul, even while he served a 4-year term as a Roman prisoner. During that time, he penned these letters and served not only his original readers, but many millions more over the centuries, including you. Just as God used Paul to do far more than he could ever ask or imagine under highly restrictive conditions, he can do great things through you. No virus, nor any other perceived limitation, can stop his work through you to build others up and bring them together as one.

In these divisive days, it may be easier to bring a team to victory than to unity. Yet the number one goal in God's plan and prayer for his people (John 17) is unity. Even for those who don't know the Lord, the humble character such unity requires will benefit their marriage, their work, their friendships, and maybe even introduce them to a walk with the Lord. Keep unity your number one goal. In other words, if you pursue unity with one another, and especially with God, no matter what your W/L prospects looks like, you will Unite!

WEEK 13 SUMMARY OF PRIMARY APPLICATIONS

A STUDY OF THE PRISON EPISTLES

Before ending the study, write down a principle or theological truth from each lesson and one way you will apply it in your personal life or coaching ministry. Come ready to discuss.

WEEK 1 - GOD MAY BIND BELIEVERS TO HEAL OTHERS

PRINCIPLE

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE

WEEK 2 - UNITY WITH OTHERS REQUIRES GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

PRINCIPLE

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE

WEEK 3 - UNITY WITH OTHERS ADVANCES THE GOSPEL

PRINCIPLE

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE

WEEK 4 - UNITY WITH OTHERS BEGINS WITH HUMILITY

PRINCIPLE

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE

WEEK 5 - UNITY WITH OTHERS STRENGTHENS WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS

PRINCIPLE

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE

WEEK 6 - UNITY WITH OTHERS REQUIRES MUTUAL SUPPORT

PRINCIPLE

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE

WEEK 7 - UNITY WITH GOD REQUIRES GOD'S AUTHORITY

PRINCIPLE

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE

WEEK 8 - UNITY WITH GOD COMMUNICATES THE GOSPEL

PRINCIPLE

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE

WEEK 9 - UNITY WITH GOD SETS BELIEVERS FREE

PRINCIPLE

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE

WEEK 10 - UNITY WITH GOD FULFILLS POSITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

PRINCIPLE

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE

WEEK 11 - UNITY WITH GOD CHANGES A BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIPS

PRINCIPLE

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE

WEEK 12 - UNITY WITH OTHERS AND GOD COMES THROUGH WISE MEDITATION

PRINCIPLE

APPLICATION TO MY LIFE

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HOW YOU CAN HELP

IF YOU ARE A COACH

First, if you know of other coaches who have not participated in one of our studies yet, spread the word. Second, if you're married, let us spoil you and your spouse for a weekend at one of our Summer Marriage Retreats. Check our website for a Retreat near you.

IF YOU ARE A RETIRED COACH

We provide a ministry, starting up new studies. It's part time and flexible as well as simple, fun, and meaningful. The Lord can use you to impact your community for Christ. If interested, contact us.

IF YOU ARE A LAYMAN

Help us help coaches. Pray for your local coaches and consider leading a Bible study. The books teach themselves; so we're just looking for someone to facilitate discussion for 12 weeks during fall and spring semesters. Finally, please support us both prayerfully and financially.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Chalemin grew up in Maywood, NJ and earned his BS in Communications from Fairleigh Dickenson University. While studying for that degree, he worked in the Youth Ministry of his local church. That labor of love led him and others to recognize God's calling to full-time pastoral ministry. Due to that calling, Mark moved to Texas to attend Dallas Theological Seminary where he graduated in 1990 with a Master's in Theology.

Shortly after graduating, Dr. Gene Getz asked Mark to join his staff at Fellowship Bible Church North (now Chase Oaks Church) as their Singles Pastor. Soon afterwards, Dr. Getz invited Mark to serve as his Research Assistant. This new responsibility offered an extraordinary opportunity to express and develop both his research and communication skills, including a passion and gift in writing. Following Dr. Getz' retirement as Senior Pastor, Mark pastored in both East Texas and Princeton, TX. He has also developed *Run Thru the Bible*, which tells the big story of the Bible in a very easy-to-remember style. Regarding his new work as Education Director at Coaches Outreach, Mark has said, "I believe that everything God has done in and through my life has been to prepare me for this ministry."

Mark has always enjoyed vigorous physical activity, beginning with 100-mile bike rides and swimming. That grew into running, martial arts, weight lifting, hiking, and keeping up with his active family. Although increasingly difficult, Mark still enjoys a good workout and Rocky-style push-ups.

Mark lives in Princeton, TX with his wife, Kristi, their two college-age daughters, Braiden and Eryn, and their 8-year old son, Colton.



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HOW TO START A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

God's Word tells us that he loves us just as we are. His love can save us from our sin and allows us to become his children. How? The answer is found in both bad news and good news on a path often called, "The Roman Road."

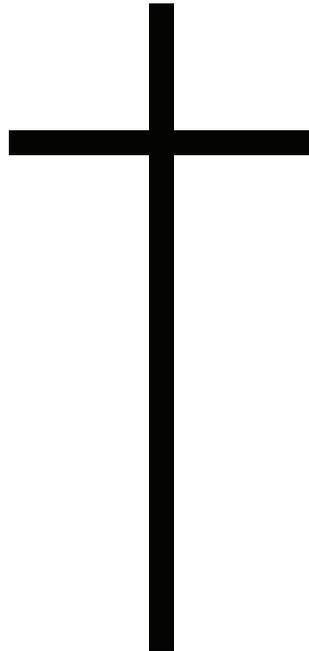
THE BAD NEWS

1. We have all sinned

None of us is perfect. *We all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). That's where we all start.

2. Sin brings death

Not only have we all sinned, but that sin comes with a payback. *The wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23a). That pretty bad news...but there's more news...good news.



THE GOOD NEWS

3. God brings life

God also tells us that *when we were in our sin, Christ Jesus came to die for us* (Romans 5:8). He died as our substitute, paying the price for our sin. Then he arose from the grave to conquer sin and death. But that sacrifice must be recognized and received by faith to bring us benefit.

4. Eternal life is God's gift

When we respond to God in faith and receive Christ as God's free gift, God gives us his *free gift eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 6:23b).

These verses don't require anyone to clean up their life first... or do anything to add to what Jesus has done for us. We receive God's gift by faith and then God begins to transform our life!

In short, a person receives God's free gift of love and life by placing faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ alone. To believe is simply to take God at his word. Do you acknowledge that you are a sinner? Do you believe by faith that Jesus, God's Son, died for your sin on the cross? Will you now confess Him as your Savior and Lord?

OTHER WAYS WE SERVE



MARRIAGE RETREAT

Give us a weekend and we will provide a place where your marriage can be renewed, recharged and reminded of how God helps you to love and live together in unity during every season ahead.

What will we do?

These retreats are held in beautiful places at greatly reduced rates. They feature respected Bible teachers, great music, much laughter, good food, and great talks with other coaching couples.

"My wife and I have really enjoyed the Marriage Retreats. Getting to bond with each other and the other families has been a big part of our summer."

Che Hendrix,
Athletic Coordinator/ Head Football Coach

THE REACH

Many coaches' wives had no idea of the time, drama, and pressures of the coaching life. We seek to connect wives with at least one other wife who understands and can wisely and practically help them through their common challenges and struggles.

About three times each semester, hundreds of coaches' wives nationwide, older and younger, meet geographically in small groups to find help, perspective, and friendships as they filter the seasons and daily real-life challenges for a coaching family through the Word of God.



"We encourage each other, pray for each other, speak truth to each other, and honestly NEED each other to go to the battlefield each day as a coaches' wife."

Ashley Hall, Coach's Wife



A STUDY OF THE PRISON EPISTLES

CONFINEMENT

Dallas Cowboy's left tackle, Tyron Smith, is a big dude. This seven-time Pro Bowler, made news in 2018 when he needed a brace for a lingering elbow injury. However, no elbow brace would fit the 6'5", 312-pound behemoth. Cowboy's writer, Clarence Hill Jr., summed it up well when he tweeted, "Tyron Smith is wearing a knee brace on his injured elbow. Why? Because his elbow is as big [as] a d*** knee, per a Cowboys staffer."

Tyron Smith needed a solution. God designed his elbow to bend one way, but his elbow had other opinions. Smith used his knee-turned-elbow brace, such that his arm only bent the God-ordained direction.

Nobody would look at Smith's brace and consider that "confinement" a bad thing. However, when we face confinement in our own lives, we often cry out, "God set me free!" To which God responds, "Don't worry, this is my design. I've got you on track." As we will see, sometimes when we're locked up, held down, or held back, that's when God can use us the most. That was certainly the case for the Apostle Paul.

ACTS 28:23-31

²³ They set a day to meet with him, and they came to him where he was staying in even greater numbers. From morning until evening he explained things to them, testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus from both the law of Moses and the prophets. ²⁴ Some were convinced by what he said, but others refused to believe. ²⁵ So they began to leave, unable to agree among themselves, after Paul made one last statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah ²⁶ when he said, '*Go to this people and say, "You will keep on hearing, but will never understand, and you will keep on looking, but will never perceive. ²⁷ For the heart of this people has become dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have closed their eyes, so that they would not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.*'"²⁸ "Therefore be advised that this salvation from God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen!"

³⁰ Paul lived there two whole years in his own rented quarters and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete boldness and without restriction.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The backbone of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If he awoke from the dead after three days, that changes everything, right? We should probably listen to what he has to say about sin and salvation.

Lee Stroble is well-known for his book and now movie, *The Case for Christ*. Like many before him, he tried to disprove the resurrection. In the end, he gave up and gave his life to Christ.



DISCUSSION

What has been the best and worst parts of your Covid confinement?

ICEBREAKER

1. What do we know about Paul's meeting with the Jewish leaders? (23)

Attendance:

Duration:

Content:

OBSERVATION

2. Summarize the passage Paul quoted. (26-27)

3. What did Paul make known? (28)

4. What do these verses convey about Paul's attitude and activity re: his confinement? (30-31)

INTERPRETATION

5. Consider your current circumstantial limitations. How can you take advantage of current spiritual opportunities?

APPLICATION

As we begin a new semester, you may have questions about your relationship with God. If you aren't sure about your relationship with God, talk to your coach today.

STUDY NOTES THE CHAMP IS HERE

Muhammad Ali once said, “Champions aren’t made in gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them—a desire, a dream, a vision. They have to have the skill, and the will. But the will must be stronger than the skill.” Two words to describe the Apostle Paul are “grace” and “grit.” Nothing could stop his relentless determination to turn the world upside down for Christ. His training and background made him one-of-a-kind, but his “desire, dream, and vision—the will stronger than skill,” truly set him apart.

The book of Acts opens with some of Jesus’ final words to his disciples, “*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). God established the Church in Acts 2 with the Day of Pentecost. From that moment on, the Gospel spread throughout the Roman empire.

As we discussed in Zero Week, the greatest church planter and missionary of that time was the Apostle Paul. Through appealing to Cesar as a Roman citizen, Paul fulfilled Acts 1:8. He took the Gospel, bound in chains, to the most powerful man in the most powerful city in the world. He’d been imprisoned for years and the treacherous journey would have made cowards of most men. But not Paul. In our passage today, Paul has finally made it to Rome after many months of hazardous travel. He’s bound under house arrest, but he immediately got to work.

GOD MAY BIND BELIEVERS TO HEAL OTHERS

Paul was a highly respected Jewish scholar having studied under one of the great rabbi’s of that time, Gamaliel. The Roman Jews hadn’t heard the message of Christianity, still thinking of it as a “sect” of Judaism. All they know is that “*people speak against it everywhere*” (Acts 28:22)

Though bound under house arrest, **they came to Paul where he was staying in even greater numbers.** I’m sure Paul had amazing stories from his missionary journeys, but **from morning until evening he explained things to them, testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus from both the law of Moses and the prophets.** Many who heard believed, **but others refused to believe.**

For those who left unconvinced, Paul quoted **the prophet Isaiah, “You will keep on hearing,**

but will never understand, and you will keep on looking, but will never perceive. For the heart of this people has become dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have closed their eyes, so that they would not see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”

When the Jews rejected the Gospel, Paul let them know that **salvation from God has been sent to the Gentiles;** because **they will listen.**

Like many other portions in the book of Acts, time sped up and **two whole years** passed in a single verse. Paul wasted no time. He **welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with complete boldness and without restriction.**

GOD’S BINDING OPENS NEW OPPORTUNITIES

You may have discovered already, if you live sold out for Jesus, you will meet plenty of people who hear, but will not understand. They will look, but will not perceive. And, while some people know how to have a healthy debate, increasingly our world hates the phrase, “I disagree.”

The problem comes when identity wraps around opinion. To reject an idea is to reject the person. Obviously, as Christians we strive to love people while standing for truth. Truth, however, cannot be found *within* a person. The Bible says *the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure* (Jeremiah 17:9, NIV). Jesus came and died on the Cross to set us free from sin rising again after three days. If Jesus really rose from the dead, as history suggests he did, what do we do with that fact?

For those of us who have accepted that message, it means submitting to Christ in all things. It means I am bound to Christ. However, like Tyrone Smith’s knee-elbow brace, being bound with Christ is to be bound according to my design. It means finding hope, joy, and peace that we can find in nothing else.

Like Paul, if we are bound to Christ, we must not waste our time or opportunities. With the same grace and grit as Paul, we must stand for truth, always. This must be done in love, respectfully, and with tactful wisdom—like a baton passed between relay runners, it requires care and precision. Christians earn a bad name when sharing the Gospel like a linebacker blindsiding a QB. Instead, use the time you have now to impact eternity. Pray for your lost friends. Invite them to join you in this study. Most of all, love them where they are, but love in truth with grace and grit.



COACHES
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OUR MISSION

Coaches Outreach exists to impact communities through the Christlike leadership of coaches transformed by Biblical truth.

14140 Midway Road
Suite 102
Dallas, TX 75244-3672

214-654-0042
CoachesOutreach.org

UNITE!

W E E K			D A Y		
#	Principle	Text	#	Text	Principle
1	God May Bind Believers to Unify Others	Acts 28	1	28:11-16	God's binding may follow obedience
			2	28:17-22	God's binding opens new opportunities
			3	28:23-27	God's binding frees believers to speak
			4	28:28-31	God's binding frees believers to serve
2	Unity with Others Requires God's Perspective	Philippians 1	1	1:1-2	God sees our people
			2	1:3-6	God sees our faithfulness
			3	1:7	God sees our loyalty
			4	1:8-11	God sees our hearts
3	Unity with Others Advances the Gospel	Philippians 1	1	1:12-14	The Gospel advances by growing bolder
			2	1:15-18	The Gospel advances by proclaiming Christ
			3	1:19-26	The Gospel advances by focusing on eternity
			4	1:27-30	The Gospel advances by our suffering
4	Unity with Others Begins with Humility	Philippians 2	1	2:1-4	Believers show humility by their attitude
			2	2:5-11	Believers show humility by their sacrifice
			3	2:12-24	Believers show humility by their obedience
			4	2:25-30	Believers show humility by their care
5	Unity with Others Strengthens with Righteousness	Philippians 3	1	3:1-6	True righteousness guards its freedom
			2	3:7-11	True righteousness delights in Christ
			3	3:12-16	True righteousness perseveres towards maturity
			4	3:17-4:1	True righteousness longs for eternity
6	Unity with Others Requires Mutual Support	Philippians 4	1	4:2-7	Mutual support brings peace between rivals
			2	4:8-9	Mutual support begins in our hearts
			3	4:10-20	Mutual support finances mission work
			4	4:21-23	Mutual support unites God's family
7	Unity with God Requires God's Authority	Colossians 1	1	1:1-2	God's authority empowers his messenger
			2	1:3-8	God's authority validates his truth
			3	1:9-14	God's authority warrants our prayers
			4	1:15-20	God's authority elevates his Son
8	Unity with God Communicates the Gospel	Colossians 1	1	1:21-23	Communicating the gospel brings hope
			2	1:24-29	Communicating the gospel brings out our best
			3	2:1-3	Communicating the gospel brings clarity
			4	2:4-5	Communicating the gospel brings stability
9	Unity with God Sets Believers Free	Colossians 2	1	2:6-11	God sets believers free from Man's wisdom
			2	2:12-15	God sets believers free from sin and death
			3	2:16-19	God sets believers free from improper worship
			4	2:20-23	God sets believers free from Man's doctrine
10	Unity with God Fulfills Positional Responsibilities	Colossians 3	1	3:1-11	Believers have heavenly responsibilities
			2	3:12-17	Believers have community responsibilities
			3	3:18-21	Believers have family responsibilities
			4	3:22-4:1	Believers have vocational responsibilities
11	Unity with God Changes a Believer's Relationships	Colossians 4	1	4:2-6	Believers show non-believers wisdom and grace
			2	4:7-9	Believers inform one another about their lives
			3	4:10-15	Believers support other believers
			4	4:16-18	Believers support other groups of believers
12	Unity with Others & God Comes Through Wise Mediation	Philemon	1	1-7	Wise mediators engage existing relationships
			2	8-14	Wise mediators prefer to appeal rather than compel
			3	15-22	Wise mediators willingly sacrifice
			4	23-25	Wise mediators provide strong accountability