



## **James, Colossians & Lukan Parables**

## **Path 5: Living the Gospel Life**

James, Colossians & Lukan Parables

### **Supplemental Reading:**

*“Celebration of Discipline”*

by Richard Foster

### **Memory Verses:**

Jas. 1:2-4, Jas. 3-17, Jas. 4:7,  
Col. 1:13-14, Col. 2:6, Col. 3:16-17

### **Outside The Journey:**

Being missional in the community

## **Disciple-makers,**

The Gospel Journey is about studying the Word of God, led by the Spirit of God, in a discipleship relationship, to grow in the grace of the Gospel. The Field Guide is NOT to be taught as a Bible Study or even as the primary curriculum for the Gospel Journey. The curriculum is the Word of God, and we want there to be great freedom for those in a group to discuss what the Holy Spirit has been revealing to them in their study that week. We do not want the discussion to be limited to the content covered in the Field Guide.

With that being said, the Field Guide is an effort to prepare you for significant theological terms, concepts, and themes that will likely arise in the course of discussion in a given week of reading. Thus, we encourage you to read over the content we have chosen to include in the Field Guide a couple times before your weekly discussion, so that you are able to explain these terms, concepts, and themes faithfully and clearly as they come up. If they do not come up naturally, we'd encourage you to bring them up at some point in the discussion, as we believe they are things that a mature and equipped disciple of Christ needs to understand.

Again, our hope is that far more than what is covered in the Field Guide be brought up in discussion each week, and that this tool might prepare you to explain foundational Gospel terms, concepts, and themes found in each week's reading. Ultimately the Gospel Journey is about studying the Word of God, led by the Spirit of God, in a discipleship relationship, in order to grow in the grace of the Gospel. May your journey be blessed!

## **The Harvest Team**

# Intro to James

The Book of James was written by the half-brother of Jesus. After the virgin birth of our Lord, Mary and Joseph had other children, one of whom was James (See Matthew 13:55). Thus, James grew up in the home of Jesus. However, he did not always believe that Jesus was the Messiah, who had come to save his people from their sins (See Mark 3:21 and John 7:5). Considering our own brothers and sisters, it is not hard to imagine why James might have had a hard time acknowledging his own brother as God in the flesh. In fact, James was most of all able to refute Jesus' claims, if they were not actually true. Who knows better than our own siblings that we are not divine? For that matter, who would want to declare it more? Yet, Jesus is divine, even His own half-brother, James, knew He is "the Lord of glory" (2:1).

As you read, you may notice that James has written a kind of New Testament wisdom literature. It is abundantly clear that James relied heavily on his brother's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and James was significantly influenced by the Book of Proverbs. It is no surprise, though, since he grew up with the Scriptures and knew them by heart. Thus, the Book of James is a book of short wisdom speeches, and so it does not read like a normal letter.

For James, true wisdom is about living like Jesus, which means loving the Lord your God

# Intro to James

and loving your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40). The most significant and repeated theme may well be spiritual “wholeness” – in other words, consistency and integrity with one’s beliefs. Additionally, James labors to convey the truth that genuine faith in Jesus always results in obedience to Jesus. Thus, James will challenge you to show your faith by your works (2:18). Allow this book to ask difficult questions of you and your faith in Jesus as you seek to live the gospel life.

# Intro to Lukan Parables

The parables of Jesus can be very illuminating to one person, but incredibly confusing to another if one does not understand the purpose for them. Parables are a comparison usually taken from the landscape of daily life that is used to communicate spiritual truth. The parables often are given to teach on the Kingdom of God. Snodgrass writes in *40 Questions About Interpreting the Bible*, “the primary focus of the parables is the coming of the Kingdom of God and the resulting discipleship that is required.” The Kingdom of God is at hand because the King has come to rule over his people by triumphing over evil and death.

But why did Jesus teach in parables? Jesus taught in parables to veil the truth from the hard-hearted because they willfully rejected his message. To those who have a right relationship with Jesus, the veil is lifted, and the secrets of the Kingdom of God are revealed. As Jesus says in John 3:3, “you must be born again to see the Kingdom of God.”

So how do we interpret the parables? We must start by trying to understand why the parables were given. We must search the previous passages to give us context clues for the purpose of the parable. Readers must avoid trying to find spiritual truth in every little detail of the parable; the parables usually have one central message, although some could have multiple points. We also must pinpoint the characters, the images,

# Intro to Lukan Parables

and what Jesus says at the end of the parable to discover the main point. There are striking twist and turns that happen all throughout the parables, and we must be attentive to notice these things in order to better grasp the meaning. The most important step we can take in trying to learn from Jesus' teaching is pray and ask for revelation and wisdom from above.

## Joy through Trials (1:2-3)

In these verses, James gives a clue to Christian growth. Faith grows through trials. As John Stott says, “the trials of life are God’s testings” (found in James Commentary in Tyndale New Testament Series). It is only by and through these testings that our faith can develop into persistent steadfastness or full maturity. Steadfastness involves what Stott calls “consistent living for Christ,” which includes “less fluctuating in our loyalty, [being] less erratic in our conduct.” Since trials in life only lead to stronger, time-tested faith for us, James tells us to consider them joy. In fact, perhaps the greatest reason for joy through trials is that God uses all things in the life of the believer to conform him or her to the image of Christ. As bad as suffering in this life can be, it is only a short blip on the timeline of eternity. When Christians see Jesus face to face, they will be transformed into his true and glorious likeness. (See also Genesis 22:1-24, Proverbs 3:5-6, Luke 21:19, Romans 5:1-5, 8:28-29, 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, 1 John 3:2, and Revelation 2:10, 3:10)

## That You May Be Perfect (1:4)

This verse reflects one of the primary concerns James has for his audience, and therefore, for us. Our English word “perfect” may confuse at first,

but it is helpful to notice that the word *teleios* in the Greek can also be translated as “mature” or “complete.” It is most likely that the idea James conveys here is one of wholeness or integrity. He wants his readers to live consistently with their beliefs about Jesus and their confession of Him as Lord. You will notice as you read through his letter, James wants his readers to devote themselves and their lives fully to the Lord. An example of this is the exhortation to no longer compromise with worldliness (4:4-5). Thus, spiritual “wholeness” is the centerpiece of this letter.

If, however, James intends the strongest meaning of the word translated as “perfect,” then he mirrors the teaching of Jesus who said, “you must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Jesus taught that only those whose “righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees” can enter the Kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:17-20). Like His first-century audience, we might first be alarmed at this statement. With man alone, this would be impossible! But with God, even our salvation from sin and judgement is possible. Jesus was pointing us to our need for Him and His perfect righteousness; it is only by turning from our sin and trusting in Him that we can be reconciled to God and receive eternal life.

(See also Matthew 5:17-20, 48, Romans 3:21-22, 5:6-8, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 2:20, 1 John 2:15-17)

## Asking for Wisdom (1:5)

Consider the connecting phrase “lacking in nothing” to the condition that we might lack wisdom in this verse. Clearly, James had a great sense of humor. He has just said he wants his hearers to be steadfast, so that they might lack nothing. In the very next verse he begins, “if you lack...” The thrust is obvious; we do lack wisdom. As we go through the trials of this world (1:2-3), we need other worldly wisdom. Furthermore, there is an infinite Source of wisdom available to us, God Himself, and God has appointed a means for receiving His wisdom – prayer. Because of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, we have access to God through Jesus, our Great High Priest, who lives forever to make intercession for us.

(See also Psalm 37:4, Matthew 7:7, 21:22, and Hebrews 4:14-16)

## God is Not the Author of Sin (1:13-15)

Living in this world, which is the dominion of Satan, we are all likely quite familiar with temptation (Ephesians 2:2-3). We know that everyone has inherited a sinful guilt and a sinful inclination by nature from Adam and Eve, having been born in their lineage (Romans 5:12, 18-19). In this passage, however, James gives his readers a view behind the curtain of the innermost workings of human beings. Human temptation and sin is born out of our own evil

desires; it does not come from God. Thus, men and women are personally responsible for their sinful offenses to God. But, the good news is that Jesus came to pay our debt in his atoning death for sin and sinners!

Given this important theological reality, we should not miss the greater context of what James is saying. His point here is that God gives good things to His creatures because of His good character. In fact, to quote James, “every good and perfect gift comes from above” (1:17). (See also Psalm 51, Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 5:12-21, Ephesians 2:1-4, and Galatians 5:16-26)

## God Does Not Change (1:17)

A great comfort in the Christian life is found in this verse. James says that in God “there is no variation or shadow due to change.” Theologians call this doctrine the immutability of God. That is, God is not mutable; He does not change. This truth is a profound source of comfort for us when we consider that God has not only revealed His character to us, but He has also made promises. In the Scriptures, we see time and time again that God is faithful to His promises. He is truth and He does not lie. He has said it, and He will surely do it. Given God’s immutable character, we know that He will bring His promises to pass, preserving His people into

eternity. This holy God has set his divine love on us in the Cross of Christ and He does not change. (See also Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29, Psalm 33:11, 90:2-4, 102:26-27, Isaiah 46:9-11, Ezekiel 24:14, Malachi 3:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:24, Hebrews 13:8, and Revelation 1:8)

## The Law of Liberty (1:25)

In this phrase, “law of liberty,” James finds friends where most in our day see enemies. In our culture, it is all too common to make law and liberty out as if they oppose one another. In the Bible though, God’s laws – or his commands to his creatures – are perfect. God’s perfect commands mirror his perfect character. Thus, walking in obedience to God’s commands is the fullest and freest expression of human living. God, as Creator, knows the only true path to human flourishing, and He has given it to us through His commands in His Word.

Therefore, liberty is not actually about having no constraints, but about having the proper, God-given constraints. Consider the words of Jesus on the topic of freedom in John 8:28-36. Immediately following the statement that He does nothing on His own, but only what the Father has taught him, Jesus tells his disciples that anyone who sins is a slave to sin – only the truth can truly set that person free. (See also Psalm 19:7-11, 119:45, John 8:26-36, and Galatians 5:1)

## The Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:4-15)

This parable is all about how one hears and responds to the preaching of the Word of God. Jesus gives four different types of soils, which are four different responses to the proclamation of the Word. The first three soils demonstrate the Word of God going forth to dull ears and hardened hearts. These three soils all have one thing in common: neither faith nor new life is brought about because the Word is not heard. However, the last soil is completely different than the first three. The good soil shows that hearing the Word of God with spiritual ears allows one to “hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.” The main point of the parable is that the reception and response to the Word of the Lord are determined by the condition of one’s heart.

## Showing Partiality (2:1)

For James, partiality towards others is not consistent with belief in Jesus Christ as Lord. Faith and favoritism are incompatible. It is interesting to note that the Greek word rendered “partiality” or “favoritism” in most English translations literally means “receiving the face.” The idea is straightforward; favoritism is prejudice based on outward appearance.

In this case, James’ audience was favoring the rich over the poor. Unfortunately, this is more the way of the world than the church. We know that the Lord judges based not on looks, but on the heart. Every human being is created in the image of God, and thus – regardless of age, race, gender, or social status – all human beings are to be treated with equal worth and dignity. (See also 1 Samuel 16:7 and Matthew 5:46-48)

## God Has Chosen the Poor (2:5)

In addition to the word on showing no favoritism, James gives specific counsel to the situation of his readers. The believers are overlooking the poor in their gatherings. However, the way that James confronts this behavior may surprise us. He says that God has chosen the poor. Indeed, we are all spiritually poor because the curse of sin on this world has affected and broken all of our relationships,

with God, with each other, and with the rest of the created order. Although we tend to think of poverty merely in not having material things, once we begin to see a broader scope of the effects of sin because of the Fall of Adam it changes the way we relate to one another. God has, in fact, chosen even us, who were once spiritually bankrupt until He saved us. Thus, for a Christian to disregard the poor makes no sense.

(See also Proverbs 19:17, Matthew 5:3, 5, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31, 2 Corinthians 8:9, and 1 John 3:17)

## The Royal Law (2:8)

By calling the command to love your neighbor as yourself the “royal law,” James mostly likely intends to say this is a law coming straight from King Jesus. When Jesus was asked about the first and greatest commandment, he actually responded with two commands. He said the first was to love God, but the second was like it – love your neighbor as yourself. This is the royal law for Christians.

When we come to the word “law” in Scripture, especially with regard to Christians, we may be startled at first. Is James trying to put us back under the Law that Christ freed us from? By no means! In fact, we can take our cue from the biblical principle: God the Redeemer and God the Lawgiver can never be separated, and the order is of vital importance. J. A. Moyter

says, “when people have received the wonders of God’s grace in redemption, will they not, in gratitude, want to know how to live so as to please the God who has poured his grace upon them? (found in James Commentary in The Bible Speaks Today series)” Our obedience to the law of Christ is not an a meritorious attempt to earn God’s favor, but a response of loving obedience to grace.

(See also Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:37-40, John 13:34-45, and 1 John 2:7-11)

## Works and Salvation (2:14-26)

Over the centuries, Christians have wrestled with the words of James in this passage of Scripture. Verse 24 is perhaps the most direct in saying quite explicitly, “a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” Is James aware of the teaching of the apostle Paul, in Romans 3:28, “a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law”? What about the teaching that people are saved “by grace through faith” in Ephesians 2:6-8? In fact, every person’s “righteous deeds” are nothing more than “filthy rags” according to Isaiah 64:6.

Notice a few particular aspects of this passage, which help us understand what James means. First, James is addressing “brothers” (2:1). Additionally, James makes clear – along with Paul and Isaiah – those whom God has chosen

to save are “rich in faith,” making them “heirs of the Kingdom” (2:5). However, his audience is not all acting in accordance with the faith they profess, as is evidenced by their showing partiality in their gatherings. Specifically, they are favoring rich people over poor people (2:1-4, 8-9). Yet, all the while they are saying they have faith in Jesus. James replies, “show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (2:18).

Thus, the question at hand for James and his audience is about the kind of faith that saves. This is clear because James introduces a category or kind of faith in verse 17 – specifically, he says faith without works is “dead faith.” Indeed, this passage confronts us with an important theological truth. While we are justified before God by faith alone, the kind of faith that saves necessarily produces good works. Saving faith reveals itself in works. As Kevin DeYoung says in *The Hole in Our Holiness*, “Faith and good works are both necessary. But one is the root and the other the fruit.”

Thus, James and Paul are perfectly compatible; together they explain the teaching of Jesus about fruit-bearing. Good trees produce good fruit. In the same way, Christians – having first put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone as their only source of righteousness before God – are bound to begin walking in the newness of life, doing the good works which God has prepared beforehand for them. Let this be a solemn reminder to us

to hold fast to our confession and work out our salvation, because God is working in us through the Holy Spirit.

(See also Genesis 15:6, Matthew 7:15-27, Romans 3:21-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 3:1-14, 5:16-26, Ephesians 2:4-10, Philippians 2:12-13, Titus 3:5, and Hebrews 11:6, 12:14)

## The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

Jesus gives this parable in response to a lawyer trying to put him to the test. The lawyer who was an expert in the law tries to set up Jesus with a question to accuse him by asking how one obtains eternal life. Jesus responds beautifully with a question concerning the Law, and the lawyer answers him with the two greatest commandments. Jesus proclaims that if this man keeps these two commands, then he will live. On our best days, we cannot love the Lord our God with all our heart because our sinful desires distort our motivations making our lives mostly about ourselves. The Law was supposed to bring to light the sinfulness of the Jews and reveal their need for salvation outside of themselves, but this was not the case for the prideful lawyer because of the sinful condition of his heart. The lawyer in his arrogance tries to justify his works by asking Jesus who was his neighbor. This man would only consider

a neighbor to be his fellow Jewish people, but Jesus obliterates this assessment by giving a parable that had everyone on the edge of their seats after every turn.

Jesus begins this parable by telling about a man who did the unspeakable in that day and time. The man went down the 17-mile stretch that was rampant with desert pirates who plundered his possessions leaving him half-dead. Both a priest and Levite pass this man who was left to die, but they rode by not attempting to help save him. While it may seem like the priest and the Levite both had legitimate excuses to abstain from helping this man, if there was any compassion in their hearts, they would have stopped. The majority of us, just like the priest and Levite, pass by those in desperate need every day, justifying our actions by the excuses of our busy lives.

Jesus goes on to tell how a Samaritan passed by but stopped to help the man due to his remarkable compassion. A Samaritan and Jew were hostile towards each other due to their history of strife described in the Old Testament. Any listener would have expected a priest or Levite to care for the man, but no one would have predicted a so-called enemy of the Jew to help him. The Samaritan went above and beyond to help restore this man back to life. Jesus is alluding to himself as the ultimate good Samaritan, who while we were still sinners, voluntarily went to the cross to die so that we

might be restored back to life. We all can relate to the man who was left dead, because that is exactly who we were before Christ in his great grace showed us immense compassion.

The parable ends with Jesus asking a question about who was the neighbor of the dying man, and the lawyer answers correctly proclaiming the one who showed him mercy. Jesus declares that he must do the same. Jesus has shown an immeasurable compassion meeting us in our spiritual poverty to save us for all eternity. Would we who have been shown such a great compassion from the King not also now want to reflect this great God to others? Those who have experienced great compassion will ultimately be driven to spend their lives showing that same compassion to others.



## Not Many Should Be Teachers (3:1)

As he begins a warning about the dangers and difficulty of the tongue, James singles out teachers as those who must be particularly careful. As those who proclaim and explain the Word of God to others, teachers will be held accountable by God for the way they lead others. In saying this, James is not hoping to deter those who have a genuine call to preaching or teaching, but to convey the seriousness and gravity of the call. At the very least, this verse should give us pause and cause us to consider the true motives for pursuing this weighty responsibility. Any desire to teach based in self-seeking, inauthentic, or flippant motives will not withstand the test of time or the judgement of God.

(See also Deuteronomy 11:18-21, Luke 6:40, 45, Titus 2:7-8, and Hebrews 13:17)

## Taming the Tongue (3:2-10)

Though it may be overlooked for its size, there is great power in the tongue. The same mouth can be used for life-giving encouragement or deadly devastation. It is true that a word spoken can never be taken back. James is teaching here that self-control regarding the tongue does not only evidence a person's spiritual growth, but also enables it (3:2). Using our speech in a godly way enables much opportunity for the building up

of the body of Christ. This is one significant way that we can love one another, even as Jesus has loved us.

(See also Proverbs 18:20-21, 25:11, Ephesians 4:29, James 1:26, and 1 Peter 3:10)

## Words Reveal the Heart (3:11-12)

Speaking about the tongue, James follows closely the teaching of Jesus. Jesus taught that what comes out of a person's mouth reveals what is in his heart. In fact, the analogy He uses in saying this is the same as that of James. Good trees produce good fruit, and bad trees produce bad fruit. This is why Jesus' teaching that you must be born again to see the Kingdom of God is so important. God can use the wickedness of our own tongue to show us the corruption of our heart, just like he did with Isaiah in His heavenly throne room (Isaiah 6:1-7).

(See also Luke 6:43-45, John 3:1-21, James 1:26, and 1 Peter 3:10)

## The Wisdom from Above (3:13, 17)

In this section of his letter, James compares and contrasts two kinds of wisdom. There is a stark contrast between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world – even the very nature of these two wisdoms is utterly different. One is

meek and pure, looking out for the interests of others. The other is proud and corrupt, seeking only the best for self. Do not miss, however, the force of James' argument: godly wisdom works itself out in godly conduct. There certainly are people who are constantly acquiring more and more knowledge (2 Timothy 3:7), but God is concerned primarily with our obedience to His good commands – this is true wisdom.

(See also Proverbs 1:7, 3:13-18, Matthew 5:3-11, and 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, 2:6-16, 3:18-23)

## The Parable of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21)

This parable is given in response to a man's desire that Jesus would judicially settle his case over an inheritance that is due to him. Jesus perceives that greed and idolatry of possessions are the driving force of his wish, prompting Jesus to remind them that one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Then, Jesus gives them a parable about a wealthy man who built bigger barns to store all of his crops and goods. The man finds security in what he owns leading him to live a self-indulgent lifestyle and forgetting that God alone gives life, breath, and everything. But in an instant, the Lord, who will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil, requires this man's soul.

The main point of this parable is the unexpected nature of the return of Jesus; He calls us to seek His Kingdom rather than the things of this world. We must not find our security and hope in the possessions of this world because all of those things are fleeting and unsatisfying. The King has come to establish His Kingdom, and one day He is coming to fully consummate the Kingdom. Until then we must live in light of Jesus' return, resisting the temptation to set up an earthly kingdom. We must be wholly dependent on the Lord who provides everything, and steward the possessions He gives us for His glory. The things of this world will always fail us, but by clinging to Jesus, who is the Bread of Life, we will be completely satisfied in Him.

## A Divided Heart (4:1-4)

The believers that James is addressing are experiencing disunity and strife within their gatherings. Verse 1 reveals the cause for these broken relationships. James says it is their “passions” or pleasures or desires that is the root of this division among them. In fact, these divided hearts are even affecting their prayers (4:3) and their relationships with God (4:4). In this, we see again one of the main themes in James, the theme of spiritual “wholeness.” Unfortunately for some, their lack of consistency with their beliefs and integrity in their daily lives has led to these terrible circumstances. Let this serve as a solemn warning for us to quickly turn our affections back to the Lord the moment we begin to see division in our body.

(See also Psalm 133:1-3, Matthew 6:24, Luke 11:17, Romans 16:17-18 and Jude 1:16-19)

## Condemning Others (4:11-12)

When we slander another person who was created in God’s image, James says we are putting ourselves in judgement over them. In fact, he goes on to say that there is only one Judge. Thus, our judging others is a way of placing ourselves as judge, rather than God. Who are we, as creatures, to make ourselves judge over others? Anything other than obedience

to God is a denial of the authority of his good commands; it is a denial of His own authority over us as Creator. Every interaction we have with a fellow divine image bearer reflects what we think of God and his law.

(See also Leviticus 19:16, Matthew 5:21-26, 7:1-5, 12:36-37, and Ephesians 4:29)

## The Arrogance of Wealth (4:13-16)

The activity of the men James refers to is that of going into town for a time “to make a profit.” This small detail is not a random addition by James. In fact, the people’s pursuit of wealth reveals their ignorance of God’s activity – and as such, their arrogance. Ignoring the Lord’s sovereignty and providence, even in the smallest of life’s details, can function as a sinful presumption on our part. Since God determines the casting of the lot and the boundaries of our dwelling places, let us not only acknowledge Him, but also seek Him, His glory, His Kingdom, and His righteousness in all that we do.

(See also Proverbs 16:33, 27:1, Matthew 6:28-34, Acts 17:26, and 1 Timothy 6:10)

## Sins of Omission (4:17)

While we might tend to think of sin only as wrong things we do (sins of commission), James provides another category of things we should do, but do not. This has been called a “sin of omission.” For example, consider the teaching of Jesus in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In the story, the priest and the Levite who pass by the dying man, both of whom knew better, have failed to do what they should have done; this is a sin of omission. Instead of following after these men, let us follow Christ and together with Paul, “let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (Galatians 6:9).

(See also Matthew 25:31-46, Luke 10:25-37, and Romans 7:14-20)

## The Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:12-24)

This parable was given to men who exalt themselves by choosing the places of honor. These men were the Pharisees, scribes, and lawyers who invited Jesus to have a meal with them. They were notorious for exalting themselves, and looking down on society’s outcast. Jesus instructs them to be humble and renounce their self-interest by inviting the poor, crippled, and lame to dine with them.

A man eating with Jesus, probably trying to fix the awkwardness, proclaims “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” So Jesus gives a parable to correct the religious leaders’ incorrect theology of salvation by making clear that those who accept the call of salvation will dine in the Kingdom of God. Those who reject the call of the gospel for various excuses will be excluded from the banquet. The parable reveals that the gospel will go out to the reviled Jews, who were not able to adhere to the purity laws, and also the Gentiles, who were once considered without hope and without God. Jesus ends the parable with an intense warning to the Jewish elite, that those who reject the Messiah will be rejected from the banquet for all eternity.

## The Dangers of Wealth and an Antidote (5:5-6)

James has much to say about money because it can so easily overcome and eclipse the deepest desires of our heart. There is nothing inherently wrong with money, but of the love of money and the serving of money the Scripture has only negative things to say. We must be ever watchful that our hearts are not taken captive by the deceitfulness of sin, especially with regard to our money. Perhaps the most clear antidote to loving money is generous giving. The truth

is our money only lasts for this life; as we have seen from the Parable of the Rich Fool, it is only temporary. As James says, both the rich man and his riches will one day “pass away” (1:9-10). (See also Matthew 6:19-24, Luke 12:12-21, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, and 1 Timothy 6:10)

## Patience and Endurance (5:8, 11)

While Christ’s return is certain and fast-approaching, James exhorts his readers to remain patient. This comes in contrast to the situations he’s just described about the arrogance and dangers of wealth. God’s people can rest in His sovereign care of them and His sure promises of future grace and glory. When the coming Lord returns, all those whom He finds diligently working and patiently waiting will be rewarded, much like James’ illustration of the farmer and his crops. On that Day, Christ will usher in an eternity of glorifying and enjoying God, when His full presence will finally be with His people forever. (See also Matthew 24:13, Romans 8:24-25, 12:12, and Philippians 4:6)

## Integrity and Truth (5:12)

Some have wrongly interpreted this verse as James prohibiting any kind of oath-taking. For example, James is not condemning the taking of an oath when required to do so by a court of law. In fact, even God takes oaths at times to guarantee that He will do what He has promised (Hebrews 6:17). Instead, ordinary conversations are likely what James has in mind here. Christians are to be truth tellers. Even our regular speech reflects the character of our Savior, who is the Truth.

(See also Numbers 30:2, Deuteronomy 23:21-23, and Matthew 5:34-37)

## The Power of Prayer (5:16)

James gives an urgent appeal to pray as he starts to close this letter. Many people have misunderstood verse 16 to say if I walk in a righteous manner then the Lord will hear my prayers, but that is not the case at all. James does not focus on the person praying, but the God to whom we pray to. He gives an example of Elijah who “was a man with nature like ours,” which means that Elijah was merely a man like us. Charles Spurgeon once said that “the best of men are but men at the best.” This is precisely the point that James is trying to make; the power comes not from the righteous man, but

from the Sovereign Lord who rules the heavens and the earth. When we are suffering, cheerful, sick, or broken, in every situation, we call upon the Lord in faith.

The early church is an excellent example of this throughout the book of Acts. No matter what happened to the church, whether good or evil, they were completely dependent on God their Father. They knew the mighty power that the Lord possessed over any situation, which led to continually lifting up their voices together in prayer. Like James and the early church, we must come to a deeper understanding of the God whom we are praying too. We must approach him in humility and faith. The only reason we can approach the Lord of the universe is because Jesus has imputed His righteousness to us. Since we have been declared righteous we can humbly approach a holy and righteous God in faith expecting that he will work powerfully through us.

(See also Matthew 21:21-22, Luke 18:1-8, John 15:7, and Philippians 4:6)

## Restoring Others (5:19-20)

James ends the letter by exhorting Christians to look after their brother and sisters. For Christians, the invisible becomes visible when they join a local church. Everyone can now look upon them as they represent Jesus Christ to the

world. In his book *Church Discipline*, Jonathan Leeman says, “Membership is the church’s affirmation that you are a citizen of Christ’s kingdom and therefore a passport-carrying Jesus representative before the nations.”

But, what happens when brother or sister stops misrepresenting Jesus by continually walking in intentional sins? James writes that if a person restores another from wandering, then “he will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.” Christ’s sacrificial death is the only way that one’s sins will be covered; if a brother turns back to Christ, then his sins are covered by the blood of Jesus.

The restoration of a brother requires a call to repent and turn to Christ. Repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. Without repentance, there cannot be restoration. Matthew 18 gives a great pattern for how a church deals with sin. The goal of Matthew 18 and James 5 is to restore a brother or sister back to Christ, which is precisely our goal as we graciously deal with brothers and sisters who have wandered from the faith. We must realize the great forgiveness that has been shown to us and display that forgiveness to others now. (See also Matthew 18:15-20)

## The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32)

Jesus gives this parable in response to the religious leaders grumbling that sinners and tax collectors were drawing near to Him. They could not comprehend why Jesus would show them mercy. This parable extends Jesus' teaching on God's mercy towards sinners and emphasizes the two responses from the brothers. The younger brother is clearly in sin as he asks for his inheritance to squander it on reckless living in the far country. The sinner longs to be as far away from the light as he can because those who are in the darkness hate the light lest their works be exposed (John 3:20). The younger brother eventually runs out of funds leaving him to pursue a job feeding pigs. As he longs to be fed by what the pigs eat, he has hit rock bottom, and no one gave him anything (15:16).

The younger brother is completely helpless and without hope until something incredible happens. He came to himself desiring to confess and repent to his father and willing to accept the lowest servant role that was available. God shows his great mercy when he draws the younger brother to himself opening up his eyes to see the wrong that he had done. The theological term to describe God's drawing sinners to himself is "effectual calling" (John 6:44). Those dead in their sins do not desire to repent of their wrongdoings, but when the Lord

graciously draws them to Himself, the sinner – like the younger brother – longs to repent.

The father is joyful to see his younger son as he feels compassion and runs to embrace his son. He throws a celebration for his youngest son for he was lost and now he is found. The actions of the father to his son resembles how our Heavenly Father meets us in our sins and completely restores us like we never ran away.

The older brother insults his father by refusing to go into the celebration, showing great indignation by what the father has done for his younger brother. The actions of the older brother are no better than the younger brother leaving with his inheritance. The father leaves the celebration to pursue restoration once again with one of his sons. This highlights the continued mercy and grace of God as he pursues the rebellious and self-righteous sinner. The older brother claims he is righteous, while he cannot understand why his father would forgive such a sinner. Jesus is ultimately putting the heart of the religious leaders on full display. They were trusting in their own righteousness, and did not see their need for a Savior. The Father is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, but He will not acquit the guilty. All those that repent of their sins and place their faith in Christ can say like younger brother, “I was lost and now I am found.”

# Intro to Colossians

Written by the apostle Paul from prison, the Letter to the Colossians is a response to everything Paul had heard from Epaphras about the state of the Christians in Colossae. Unfortunately, like many of the early churches, there were false teachers tempting the Colossians with different kinds of false spirituality and man made religion (2:21-23). However, Paul's letter refutes the false teachings that were plaguing the Colossians by expounding upon the sufficiency of Christ and its implications in all of life. For Paul, no aspect of human existence is untouched by the loving and freeing rule of Christ. Paul exhorts the Colossians to live in the present as if God's new creation arrived at the resurrection of Jesus (1:13-14). Ultimately, this letter is an encouragement toward unity and maturity among the believers as they resist false teaching and hold fast to the word of the truth, the gospel (1:5).

As you read, look out for Paul's responses to the false teachers in Colossae. It seems they were offering a spiritual "fulness" and "freedom" as well as claiming special insight into the powers of darkness. These teachers were known for their staunch asceticism and considered themselves superior to "ordinary" believers. They claimed to have a "deeper" knowledge of God and a greater experience of His power. Lastly, they were incredibly divisive among the Colossians.

# Intro to Colossians

In order to critique these false teachers, Paul offers affectionate warnings to the Colossian Christians, clear teachings on the person and work of Christ, and pointed diagnoses of false teachings. Although Colossians is a shorter letter in the New Testament, it is also one of the most highly concentrated and theologically dense. Take your time with this letter and try to absorb as much of the goodness and glory of our great Savior and how He transforms every area of our lives.

## The Hope Laid Up for You in Heaven (1:5)

In thanking God for the Colossians, Paul specifically mentions his gratitude for their faith in Jesus Christ and their love for all the saints. He says the hope that is laid up for them in heaven is the reason their faith is working through love now. The great New Testament hope, which motivates us to love one another now is at least twofold. First, Jesus will return to usher in His Kingdom in its final, forever fulness. In fact, those whom He has purchased by His blood will reign over all things with King Jesus. Second, eternity for believers in Jesus is not a disembodied reality. Paul is clear in Romans 8:18-30 that even the whole creation is longing and groaning for the redemption of the bodies of the saints of Christ. Like Jesus, all believers will one day have glorious resurrection bodies forever. Furthermore, these bodies will no longer have the stain of sin. Most importantly, God will dwell with His people.

Over and over again the Scripture connects this hope we have to our godly living now. This combination of faith, love, and hope is true, biblical spirituality. The promises of God have not yet reached their complete consummation, but what God has committed to do for believers is certain. In fact, the new creation arrived when Jesus rose from the dead! Thus, for Paul, Christian hope is the basis for faith and love. (See also Romans 8:18-30, 1 Corinthians 15:12-58, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, 1 Peter 1:13-21, 2 Peter 3:11-13, 1 John 3:1-3, and Revelation 21-22)

## The Word of the Truth (1:5)

For Paul, the single most fundamental and important teaching for the Colossians – and for anyone else – is the gospel, which he calls the word of the truth. No Christian ever grows beyond their need to hear, understand, and believe the gospel. It is this message, of which the whole Bible continues to remind us, that God the Holy Spirit uses to give life where there is previously only death.

While all human beings have willfully rebelled against their righteous Creator – attempting to decide for themselves what is good, true, and beautiful – the gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ is God, come in the flesh, to live in perfect obedience to the demands of the Law of God and in his atoning death satisfy the wrath of God against rebel sinners, reconciling them to God. In the gospel, God declares sinners righteous based only upon their faith in the perfect, finished work of Christ. Because of Christ, the Holy Spirit has transformed those who were once God's enemies into His own sons and daughters. There is no sweeter and better news than this!

(See also Acts 2:37-41, Romans 1:16-17, 3:21-31, 5:6-11, 10:9-13, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Ephesians 2:1-10, Titus 2:11-14, 1 Peter 2:24-25, 1 John 4:9-10, and Revelation 5:6-10)

## Understanding and Living (1:9-10)

Though we may tend to discuss either understanding or living at the expense of the other, and thus make them enemies, these verses show us how Paul considers them friends. While Paul has much to be thankful for regarding the faith and love of the Colossians, he continues to pray that they might be more pleasing to God. Notice two vitally important things about this prayer. First, the way to grow in faithful living before God is to grow in knowledge. Second, this knowledge is a means to an end.

Paul wants his readers to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and to bear fruit in every good work, but the only way for them to grow and mature in Christ in this way is to increase in the knowledge of God. The heart cannot swell with affection for the true Lord without the head. Only a heart with affections stirred will lead to hands that continue to work for the glory of God and the benefit of others. As we are discipling others, we should think in terms of both what they understand and how they live.

(See also Matthew 22:37-40, John 15:8-17, Galatians 4:9, Philippians 2:12-13, 1 Timothy 4:16, and 2 Timothy 3:10-11)

## The Kingdom of God (1:13–14)

Having been redeemed by Christ, the forgiveness of sins is a present reality we experience. In his perfect life, atoning death, and justifying resurrection, Jesus has reconciled people to God; the relationship which was once fractured and broken by sin is now repaired. However, this is not the limit of our present reality as Christians.

Two past tense verbs reveal a massive truth in these verses. Paul tells the Colossians that God has delivered us from the domain of darkness. Yet, he also says that God has transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son. This means that, even as we have forgiveness of sins now and deliverance from darkness now, we are also in the Kingdom of God now.

The biblical truth of the nature of the Kingdom of God may help to shed light on what might just seem like odd verb tenses. Biblically speaking, the Kingdom of God is best considered the “rule and reign of God (Psalm 22:28 and Psalm 103:19). Think of it as the people and place where God rules and He is willingly and joyfully obeyed.

We see a picture of the Kingdom of God in the garden of Eden, where Adam and Even lived with God as God’s people, under God’s rule. Yet, Adam and Eve broke God’s law, wanting

to be rulers for themselves. In doing so, they exchanged the rule of God for the rule of Satan; the earth would now become the domain of darkness. The rest of the biblical story is about God's Kingdom regained.

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Kingdom of God has returned and God is restoring His active rule and reign over His creation. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God is taking captive rebellious hearts and given them new spiritual life, forgiving them, and including them in the Kingdom of His Son. What we presently experience in part will be completed at the return of Christ as God defeats His enemies, recreates the cosmos, and once again dwells with man in a New Eden.

(See also Psalm 2:1-12, Matthew 6:9-13, Luke 17:20-21, 20:9-18, John 18:36, Acts 28:23-24, 30-31, and Revelation 11:15, 21:1-3, 22:1-5)

## The Person of Christ (1:15-20)

Since the beginning, Christians have confessed that there is one God, who eternally exists in three distinct, yet equal, divine persons. In the eternal plan of this triune God, the second person of the Trinity, the Son, would enter into creation and take the form of a human being in the body of Jesus of Nazareth. Although the Son was not always human, given that He has eternally existed in full divinity, He is

now and will forever be the God-man. Thus, in the incarnation, God the Son joined perfect humanity to Himself for us, forever. That Christ would subject Himself to hunger, suffering, and even death in one of the worst physical forms, and that He would retain this form forever, is utterly unique among religious claims and further demonstrates God's incredible, unfathomable love for His people.

You may have noticed as you read that Paul describes this same Christ as the "firstborn of all creation" (1:15). Some, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, have misunderstood this phrase to mean that Jesus was the first creature that God the Father created. Furthermore, groups such as this have sadly rejected the biblical doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. However, with close examination of the text and understanding the historical context, this phrase does not and cannot mean what some have thought.

That Christ is the "firstborn of all creation" in verse 15 is conveying the same point as his preeminence in verse 18. Historically, the firstborn son had the right of "primogeniture," which meant that he would succeed his father, inheriting the family's estate and carrying on the family's lineage. In the same way, Christ as the "firstborn" is the one will all glory and honor in all of creation. In fact, this word could not mean that Christ was created because – in the very next verse – Paul tells us that "by Him all things

were created,” and he even reiterates that “all things were created through Him and for Him” (1:16). If Christ were created, how could He create Himself? And in case it is still unclear to us, Paul emphatically states that “in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (1:19). The consistent and resounding teaching of Scripture is that Jesus Christ is completely divine and completely human at the same time, now and forever.

(See also Mark 2:5-12, John 1:1-18, 8:48-59, 10:22-39, 20:26-29, Romans 9:5, Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 2:9, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:1-9, 2 Peter 1:1, and 1 John 5:20)

## The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31)

This parable was given in response to the Pharisees who were lovers of money (16:14). The Pharisees believed their wealth and worldly success was a visible sign of God’s blessing on their life. To combat the system of belief that riches do not guarantee someone’s eternal life, Jesus gives them a parable that could be referred to as the “Great Reversal.” The rich man who starts the story clothed with royalty and who feasted sumptuously every day ends the story suffering eternally in hell. The poor man, Lazarus, who was suffering on earth due to his impoverishment ends the story reclining with Abraham at the heavenly feast. It is very

important to understand that this parable does not teach that those who are wealthy will eternally suffer, and those who are poor will inevitably go to heaven. The rich man's spiritual condition is on display as he trusts in his riches, and constantly neglects the poor whom God has commanded to help.

The second half of the parable gives us a unique conversation between the rich man suffering in hell and Abraham who is right next to Lazarus at the kingdom banquet. There is nowhere in Scripture that speaks of one in hell being able to communicate with those in heaven, except for this passage. So it is likely a stretch to construct a doctrine from this one place. Instead, we can conclude from this passage that one's eternal fate either heaven or hell is irreversible. The rich man believes that if someone would rise from the dead then that would be a sufficient sign for his brothers to repent. Abraham reminds him that his brothers have the Old Testament that points to Jesus Christ; if they do not believe that, then "neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead." Jesus reminds his listeners that there is still time to repent, but a time is coming when all will be judged and this opportunity will be no more.

## Filling Up What Is Lacking in Christ's Afflictions (1:24)

To quote John Piper, “the one thing lacking in the sufferings of Christ is the [in person] offer of those sufferings ... to those for whom He died” (excerpt taken from a podcast called Ask Pastor John). Since He has now ascended to the right hand of the Father, Christ cannot personally offer His sacrifice to others. This reveals what Paul means when he tells the Colossians he is “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” – that is the personal presentation of the message of Christ. Like Paul, the Lord Jesus has all of His followers into the world as missionaries to preach the offer of forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ. As we go to share the gospel with those who do not know Him, Jesus is offering Himself to them through us. (See also Matthew 9:37-38, 28:16-20, Mark 16:15, Romans 10:8-17 and 1 Peter 2:9-10)

## Proclaiming and Presenting (1:28-29, 2:6-7)

If we want to be disciple-makers, an incredible clue is given here from the life and mission of the apostle Paul. He declares to the Colossians that he toils and struggles. The word for “struggling” in this verse is the same as our word for “agony” (1:29). But, how exactly does Paul agonize for the sake of others?

The text says he proclaims Christ, both in warning and teaching (1:28). Paul's strategy for making disciples – specifically, for the Colossians being “rooted” and “built up” and “established in the faith” (2:7) – is proclaiming to them the Word of God, that is, Christ. Though the false teachers in Colossae would have them abstain from certain foods or observe certain feast days (2:16, 18), true spiritual power is found struggling for others, to proclaim the Word and present them mature in Christ. (See also Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Matthew 28:16-20, Mark 3:13-14, and 2 Timothy 2:2, 3:16-17)

## The Circumcision of Christ (2:11-12)

While the sign of the old covenant is the circumcision of the flesh (See Genesis 17:9-14), in the New Testament Paul teaches about a new kind of circumcision – the circumcision of the heart. In these verses, Paul says the “circumcision of Christ” is a circumcision made without hands. The sad but consistent testimony of Israel in the Old Testament is that, no matter what they did, they failed to keep the Law of God. The problem, of course, was not with the Law, but with the fallen condition of the human heart (See Romans 7:12-13). This is why God promised that one day He would begin to create a new kind of humanity who are able to obey and submit to His commands (See Deuteronomy 30:6, Romans 2:29, and Galatians 6:15).

Though the circumcision of the flesh was not enough to meet the demands of the Law, the Spirit of Christ circumcises the hearts of people in the new birth as they are converted into followers of Christ. Thus, believers in Jesus are the fulfillment of God's promise to circumcise the hearts of His people so that they can obey Him, no longer hindered by the penalty and power of sin. While the presence of indwelling sin does remain in God's people, a Day is coming when Christ will completely destroy all remaining evil in the world.

(See also Genesis 15:6, 17:9-14, Deuteronomy 30:6, Jeremiah 31:31-34, John 3:1-8, Romans 2:25-29, 4:1-12, Philippians 3:3, and Galatians 3:15-29, 5:2-6, 6:12-16)

## Cancelling Our Debt (2:14)

Paul gives one helpful metaphor to explain the work of Christ in this verse. As our Savior, Jesus canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. Given God's holy character, He must be perfect in His justice. Having all sinned against the most honorable One, we have a devastatingly great debt to pay before our thrice holy God. Legally, God must execute His holy wrath against sinners – if He is to remain perfectly just.

But, the good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ takes the place of sinners before God.

In His death, Christ satisfies God's wrath. The theological word for this is propitiation; in Jesus, the love of God propitiated – or satisfied – the wrath of God. Thus, our debt no longer remains because the Son of God has paid our fine, taking the wrath we deserve on Himself. We can now go free, and God is just to declare sinners like us right before him (Romans 3:26).

(See also Romans 3:23, 5:8, 6:23, 2 Corinthians 5:21, and 1 John 2:2, 4:10)

## Legalism (2:16-23)

In Colossae, there were people telling the Colossian Christians that they must not eat certain things and that they must participate in certain festivals (2:16). Another false teaching at this time surrounded the things the Colossians were not to even “handle” or “taste” or “touch” (2:21). However, Paul calls this “self-made religion” and says it is of no use (2:23). As Jesus taught, the things outside of us do not come in and defile us; instead, all evil things come from within, and they defile a person (Mark 7:14-23).

With regard to false teaching, not much has changed in two thousand years; there is truly nothing new under the sun. One commonly recurring pattern of false teachers and their false teaching is heaping more laws onto believers in Jesus as they seek to follow Him. This is called legalism. That is, legalism attempts to earn

God's love and favor through good works. If we want to please God, faith is required (Hebrews 11:6) and even our best works are but filthy rags before a holy God (Isaiah 64:6). It is as Matthew Henry said in *The Valley of Vision*, "even our repentance needs repentance" because everything we do is plagued by sin. Thus, only Christ's perfect righteousness will avail us before God.

(See also Matthew 15:10-20, Mark 7:14-23, Romans 3:9-20, and 1 Timothy 4:4-5)

## The Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8)

Jesus taught on the coming of the Kingdom of God right before he told this parable. In teaching on the Kingdom of God, Jesus expounds on his second coming, which will be on a day that no one knows. The King has come to establish his Kingdom, but the Kingdom will not come in its fullness until the second coming of Christ. Thus, Jesus gives a parable to his disciples, "to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (18:1). Jesus is going to come back for his bride, fully triumphing over evil and death, but until that great day, Jesus calls his disciples to live on mission. The life of a follower of Christ is strenuous; there is great suffering along the way, but Jesus summons his disciples to wholly depend on their Father. If the unrighteous judge

will assist the widow because of her persistence, what will your heavenly Father do, who is eager to vindicate his elect? Though there is a delay of the second coming, there is great grace in God's patience to gather all his elect through the preaching of the gospel. In the time of delay, we are called to cry out day and night for the return of our Lord and Savior who will one day swiftly bring justice for His chosen ones. Jesus ends the parable shifting the focus from Himself to the people, asking if they will prove to be faithful to the end.

## Hidden with Christ in God (3:3)

In chapters 3 and 4 of his letter to the Colossians, Paul practically displays how every part of the Christian's life is affected by what Christ has done in saving them. Because of the work of Christ, each of His followers dies to sin and self such that Paul can say to them, "you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (3:3). The gift of salvation is located in Christ, much like all spiritual treasures (2:3). Yet, even now we access this gift by faith and it is made visible in our lives every time we submit to the rule of Christ. In fact, this new life is lived out in the five ordinary relationships described by Paul: the holy life (3:5-8), the local church (3:9-17), the family (3:18-21), the workplace (3:22-4:1), and the outsider (4:2-6). (See also Romans 8:31-38, Ephesians 1:3-14, Philippians 1:21, and James 1:17)

## The Wrath of God (3:5-6)

In our time and culture, many do not welcome discussion on the wrath of God. In fact, most may even withhold worship from a God who would exercise wrath. Yet, we see the doctrine of the wrath of God often in the pages of Scripture. Because God is good, He has wrath against any and all kinds of evil. Do we not similarly hate that which is most harmful to our loved ones? As Paul says to the Colossians, the wrath of God is coming because of sin. Notice how Paul

identifies all the various sins he lists as “idolatry” (3:5). Ultimately, every sin is worship and service to something created, rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). However, God is the only One worthy of all glory and praise and honor. Since God is just, He cannot simply overlook our terrible sin against Him.

Though He did not have to, God provided one Way for sinners to escape His just wrath – faith in Jesus Christ. In God’s amazing grace, sinners who deserve His wrath can be spared as they trust in the One who took their place under God’s wrath. Because of this great exchange, God can destroy all evil and sin on the final day of Christ’s triumphant return without eliminating His people. All sin will receive just punishment, either on the cross by Christ or in hell for eternity. That being said, it is of the utmost importance that we now herald the message that Christ is the only way to escape God’s coming wrath.

(See also John 3:36, Romans 1:18-32, 2:4-5, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, 5:9-11 and Revelation 19:11-21)

## The Old Self and the New Self (3:9-10)

A common theme in the writings of the apostle Paul is the conversion of a Christian and its implications. The metaphor Paul uses to describe this spiritual reality is clothing. He refers to having taken off “the old self” (3:9) and having put on “the new self” (3:10). It is as if Christians have removed worldly uniforms and put on crucified jerseys. Now that we represent Christ, all the “practices” of our former selves must go the way of the old self. Therefore, the implication of conversion is sanctification, which is the theological word used to describe our being conformed to the image of Christ. Since the Holy Spirit has given the new birth, Christ’s followers must seek to bring their thoughts, feelings, and actions into conformity with Christ’s character.

(See also 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 4:17-32, and Galatians 5:16-26)

## Let The Word Dwell in You (3:16)

While this verse may be a favorite for personal Scripture memory – and that certainly is a noble cause – it appears Paul had the whole congregation in mind. Notice how he has shifted from discussing a single person’s relationship to the risen Christ (3:1-8) to all of the Colossians gathering together to live out the Christian life in the context of the local congregation (3:9-17).

This can be seen in the plurality of the nouns such as “one another” (3:9,16), “God’s chosen ones” (3:12), and “your hearts” (3:15). Thus, with this text, Paul would have the Word of God first and foremost dwell in local churches. In fact, the examples Paul gives are the three historic aspects of Christian worship: Word, song, and prayer.  
(See also Psalm 95:1-11 and John 4:23-24)

## Christian Households (3:18-21)

As he continues to lay out how Christ transforms every area of life, Paul turns now to the home. At this time, Roman households were highly authoritarian in nature as the male patriarch held the power of life and death over everyone in the house, including wife and children. In sharp contrast, Christian homes have Jesus as their Lord. Thus, the Christian wife allows her husband to become responsible for her (3:18). Furthermore, the Christian husband is subject to Jesus and loves his wife by placing her well-being above his own (3:19). While Christian children are called into maturity and respect for their parents (3:20), Christian parents are to lovingly shepherd and encourage their children (3:21). Thus, with Christ at the center of the home, Paul has radically reshaped the most basic human institution such that it is remarkably different.  
(See also Deuteronomy 6:1-9, Proverbs 22:6, Ephesians 5:22-6:4 and 1 Peter 3:1-7)

## The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14)

Jesus tells this parable to those who are trusting in themselves for righteousness and are treating others with contempt (18:9). Jesus previously told a parable teaching his disciples how always to pray, but here Jesus teaches that prayer and religiosity are not always acceptable to God. Jesus contrasts the hearts at work in the prayers of the pharisee and the tax collector. The pharisee reveals his hard-heartedness by his self-righteous prayer, and the tax collector reveals his humility by his cry for mercy to God. Jesus unveils a staggering outcome for both the pharisee and the tax collector. The tax collector was justified, and the so-called religious pharisee was left unforgiven in his sins. Justification is a legal term that means declared in right standing with God. The main point of this parable is that those who cling to the mercy of God will be justified, but those who trust in their own righteousness will be left unforgiven in their sins.



## Continue in Prayer (4:2-4)

With Christ's return sure, Paul can exhort the Colossians to be steadfast in prayer. As we seek to apply this to our own lives, do not miss a few important aspects of this prayer. First, it is regular and ongoing. Second, it is to be done with thanksgiving. Third, the spread of the gospel is one consistent petition. Finally, we must remain watchful because the second coming of Jesus will be swift and unannounced. Until then, we pray.

(See also Luke 18:1-8, Philippians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, and 1 John 5:14)

## Wisdom Toward Outsiders (4:5-6)

Having demonstrated the sufficiency of Christ in the areas of personal holiness (3:1-8), local church (3:9-17), and family (3:18-22), Paul now discusses how the Colossians are to relate to non-Christians – or, as he calls them, outsiders. He gives a few specific elements of wisdom toward outsiders. First, the way we live before others reveals what Jesus is like to them. Furthermore, we are commanded to make the “best use of the time,” intentionally looking for ways to bless and serve others. Finally, the way we speak to others and before others displays Jesus to them as well. Notice that our speech, which is “seasoned with salt,” is to be gracious,

full of grace and truth – just like our Lord Jesus. Ultimately, wisdom toward outsiders is prayerfully helping to see people meet Jesus and be changed by him.

(See also Matthew 28:19-20, Romans 1:16-17, 1 Timothy 3:7, 2 Timothy 4:5, and 1 Peter 3:15)

## Struggling for Others (4:12)

As we have seen from Paul's life, struggling for the sake of others is a focal point of the Christian life. Here, Paul presents another example for the Colossians to look to — their very own Epaphras. This servant of Christ has consistently labored for his brothers and sisters in Colossae, not only in bringing word to Paul of them, but also in bringing Paul's letter back. Notice how Epaphras struggles too, he does so in prayer for them. He prays that they would be mature and have full assurance. Likewise, let us conform our prayers to this pattern for the sake of others. Let us follow Epaphras and Paul as they have followed Christ.

(See also Colossians 1:28-29)

## The Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Luke 20:9-18)

Jesus gives this parable right after the religious leaders attempted to challenge His authority. He asked them a question concerning where the authority of John's baptism came from, but they would not answer due to their own ignorance. Then, Jesus gives a parable revealing how the Jews openly rejected the authority that came from the Father.

Jesus begins the parable by unfolding a story of a man planting a vineyard and entrusting it to tenants as he left the country for a long while. The parable is undeniably allegorical. The landowner represents the Lord, the tenants represent Israel, and the vineyard represents God's significant and gracious provision towards His chosen people. At the time of harvest, the tenants beat and wound the vineyard's servants who had come to collect the owner's fruit. Jesus is undoubtedly reaching back in history to recall the rejection of the prophets whom God had sent to call Israel to repent of their wicked ways. One by one, Israel rejected the authority of God by beating and treating the prophets shamefully.

The story continues as the owner graciously sends his son to collect the fruit, but the tenants conspire against the son and kill him, thinking that the vineyard will be theirs now. This is a

clear reference to God's great mercy in sending his only begotten Son into the world. Israel desired power, control, and affirmation so badly that they were willing to crucify God's only Son. Jesus is clearly prophesying about his imminent death on the cross.

Jesus ends the parable by proclaiming that the vineyard will be taken away from the tenants and given to others. Jesus has given the Kingdom of God to the church who will bear fruit for his glory and joyfully sit under his authority. Israel replies in disbelief to the parable, but Jesus looks directly at them quoting Psalm 118:22. In this, Jesus alludes to His vindication as He will become the cornerstone showing that God had planned the rejection of his Son long before this parable was spoken. In *Christ-Centered Exposition Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, David Platt says, "this parable would be played out vividly in just three short days when the Jews crucified the Son of God, the very Son the Father had sent to save Israel."

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