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Introduction

Colossians is a New Testament letter that celebrates the new life available through faith in Jesus. In this letter, we're instructed to reject any false teaching and human rules that create barriers between God and us since we receive - not achieve - the new life in Jesus. Regardless of your location or life stage, everything you need can be found in Jesus as you participate in the new creation that Jesus has brought through His life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

The mission of God's family, then, is to witness about this reality by proclaiming the good news of Jesus and living lives that demonstrate trust in Him.

Important Info

Colossians was written in

61 or 62 AD. Although there's *some* debate about this approximate date, it remains the dominant view among scholars.

The date is important because it shows us how Jesus was viewed hundred of miles from the area where most of His ministry took place just a few decades after His resurrection. Even in insignificant Colossae ("koh-loss-see"), which had declined (economically and socially) by the time Paul wrote this letter, Jesus was being worshiped as the almighty God in flesh who reigns over all things.

We could think of it like this: imagine one of the most Christ-focused and Christ-exalting New Testament letters being written to a church in Gabbs, Nevada.

Why Colossians was written

The apostle Paul's ministry partner, Epaphras, brought bad news about the Colossian church to Paul: false teaching was beginning to threaten these believers, a teaching that basically tried to add to and take away from the sufficiency of Jesus.

Study Resources

Course on Colossians (online)

https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/colossians-introduction/

Commentary on Colossians (online)

https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/commentary/colossians/

Study Bible (NET Bible - online)

https://netbible.org/bible/Colossians+1

Recommended Commentaries

Beginner

Discovering Colossians by S. Lewis Johnson, adapted by Mike Abendroth

Advanced

Colossians and Philemon by G.K. Beale in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

Colossians 1:1-2

MAIN POINT

Jesus's authoritative representative, Paul, reminds the Colossians that they are "in Christ" no matter where they physically live, work, and worship. Therefore, they - and anyone trusting Jesus - have grace and peace from God the Father.

GROUP INTRO

If you had the money to live anywhere in the world, where would you live? What specifics about that place make you want to live there?

TEXT

1. Paul begins his letter by mentioning his role as an "apostle of Christ Jesus". To get an understanding of this role, read Ephesians 2:19-21, Acts 1:21-26, and 1 Corinthians 9:1. To which New Testament group does the word "apostle" usually refer? What was the role of this group according to these passages?

LEADER HELP ON NEXT PAGE

Leader help: The word "apostle", as used by Paul here and in the passages above, refers to the 12 disciples of Jesus whom He appointed as His representatives. Paul was later made an apostle by the resurrected Jesus.

They established Christian doctrine, laying the authoritative doctrinal foundation of the church by teaching what Jesus taught them. It is from this foundation that we got the New Testament, or what Jude calls "the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

2. Since Paul is writing as an authoritative representative of Jesus, how is our reading and application of this letter impacted? Why can't we treat it casually or carelessly? What are some impacts of doing so?

Leader help: Since Paul writes for Jesus, if we ignore Colossians or treat it with disregard, we are ignoring and disregarding Jesus. This is destructive and dangerous because it will undermine our trust in Jesus, we will lose out on massive sources of comfort and assurance, and be more susceptible to sin and heresy.

3. Read Romans 3:9-12. How would you summarize these verses in your own words? Since Romans 3:9-12 is true, how can the Colossian Christians be considered "saints and faithful brothers"?

Leader help: Romans 3 basically states that people are not good. We aren't born good or desiring good.

If we continue reading the immediate context we see that Paul celebrates and mentions their "faith in Christ Jesus" - it is by faith alone in Christ alone that we become - and remain - saints. Contrary to Roman Catholic teaching, which elevates some Christians to the level of sainthood, Scripture teaches that all Christians are saints because they are "in Christ".

Our faithfulness absolutely matters, but our obedience is empowered by the Holy Spirit who lives in us; His power is a gift. Any spiritual growth is because of God's work in us (see Philippians 2:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, and Hebrews 9:14).

4. The saints in the city of Colossae ("koh-loss-see") are said to be "in Christ". How might their "spiritual location" (in Christ) impact their lives in their physical location (Colossae)?

Leader help: They can now think, speak, act, and feel differently as they begin to experience the new creation now while waiting for the return of Jesus.

APPLICATION

- 1. How should you react if you encounter someone who claims to be an authoritative apostle in the same way that Paul uses the term?
- 2. What is required of you to be considered a saint and faithful brother/sister? In your own life, what stands in the way of you trusting that this is true of you?
- 3. Ultimately, Paul didn't choose to become an apostle, he was made one by Jesus's sovereign call. What tasks or attitudes has God appointed you to that you complain about or resist? What truths about Jesus can change this for you?

Leader note: If it isn't mentioned, it may be fruitful to remind your group that every Christian is called to be a disciple-maker and evangelist - so who is the person or people that your group members are discipling and evangelizing? It could be family members, friends, neighbors, other church members, etc.

4. If you're a Christian, how has being "in Christ" impacted you over the last 6 months?

PRAYER

Thank Jesus for appointing apostles like Paul and preserving His Word for your benefit.

Passage to guide your prayers: Psalm 119:105

Confess and surrender your self-righteousness and ask God for help to live by faith in Jesus instead.

Passage to guide your prayers: Galatians 3:2-3

Ask God to help you live out your union with Jesus where you physically live.

Passage to guide your prayers: Acts 17:24-27

Colossians 1:3-8

MAIN POINT

Paying prayerful attention to God's grace and all that He provides in Jesus produces the right perspective for life in a fallen world.

GROUP INTRO

Intentional times of remembering God's goodness fuel our joy. Take time to share how God's grace showed up over your summer.

TEXT

1. How do Paul and Timothy describe the gospel in this passage? Does your understanding of the gospel line up with this description? Why or why not?

Leader help: The gospel is "the word of the truth"; the gospel is actively bearing fruit and increasing all over the world and and in each Christian in this local church; the gospel is "the grace of God in truth". This means that the good news about Jesus is powerful and actually produces transformation. The good news is also objectively true - it's not a "religious experience" or a leap in the dark - it's historically true and verifiable news about God's work through Jesus to redeem and rescue.

2. What exactly produced gratitude and joy in Paul and Timothy? What's the takeaway for Christians today?

Leader help: The news of the Colossians's faith in Jesus, their love for Christians, and how the gospel is impacting them in day-in and day-out as they remember their hope is secure in God's presence. If we, too, take time to notice what God has done, is doing, and will do, our hearts will grow grateful and joyful.

3. Why is it crucial to notice and understand that it is faith *in Christ*, not just a generic faith, that brings the gifts of love and hope to the Colossians?

Leader help: In the words of one commentary, "It is not simply faith that matters; it is faith and its object and a faith with its origin in God. Technically, faith does not save. It is the object of faith that saves" (S. Lewis Johnson, Discovering Colossians, pgs. 21-22).

It is Jesus, through His flawless life, death in our place, and resurrection, who has secured our hope of eternal life. And it is God, through His Spirit in us, who produces love for others. Only by trusting Jesus do these gifts come to us.

4. The original calling of humanity was to spread the glory of God through procreation and act as God's representatives across the world. But Adam, humanity's first representative, failed and sinned. Read Genesis 1:27-28 then read Colossians 1:5-6. What are some similarities between these passages? How does the gospel spread the glory of God all over the world?

Leader help: Just like Adam and Eve were supposed to have children and spread God's glory all over the world, acting as God's priests over creation, the gospel spreads God's glory by revealing both His holy justice (Jesus had to die for our sins) and His holy love (Jesus willingly died and resurrected for His people).

APPLICATION

- 1. There is some confusion in our culture about what Paul calls "the hope laid up for you in heaven." Which of the following would you say is the Christian hope and why?
 - A. Being with God in heaven when you die.
 - B. The promise of being physically resurrected by God with a new body within a new universe.
 - C. Waiting for God to approve of your life when you meet Him.

Leader help: Answer B summarizes the biblical teaching about our hope as Christians.

- 2. John Calvin once wrote that "the hope of eternal life will never fail...to produce love in us." Has the hope of eternal life with God ever helped you love someone? Describe your experience.
- 3. What about Jesus from this passage do you think an unbelieving loved one needs to hear? As a personal challenge, how will you present this to them in the next two weeks?
- 4. Take some time to encourage one another by telling one another how you have seen God at work in your lives to grow your faith, hope, and love.

PRAYER

Worship God for the secure hope of eternal life.

Passage to guide your prayers: John 14:2-3

Repent for any lovelessness you have displayed to your fellow Christians or leaders.

Passage to guide your prayers: 1 Corinthians 13:2

Ask God to save those without hope in Christ.

Passage to guide your prayers: Colossians 4:3

¹ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, 301-2. 1 John 4:7 states the same point: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."

Colossians 1:9-14

MAIN POINT

We were created to live for God's glory, but because of our sin nature, we can only step into this purpose after being united to Jesus.

Since Christians are those who have been transferred out of the kingdom of darkness, Paul now asks God to give the Colossians all that they need to live for God.

GROUP INTRO

Describe one of your worst vacations and what you most appreciated about returning home.

TEXT

1. What do we learn about prayer from this passage? What is prayer? What does it include and what can it look like?

Leader help: Prayer is a personal, intelligible interaction with the triune God and can include requests in response to known and unknown needs. Prayer reveals what we think about God - if we believe He is good, gracious, and generous, we will go to Him with our needs. 2. How does being filled with the knowledge of God's will, as well as spiritual wisdom and understanding, help Christians live in a way that pleases God? Where do we access knowledge of God's will?

Leader help: To live for God, we have to know who He is, what He is like, what He demands, and who we are to Him and we have to be given, by God Himself, spiritual insight. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:11-13 that we need the Holy Spirit to even comprehend spiritual realities. God's will is revealed in His Word, by His Spirit.

3. What are the Colossians lacking that Paul is asking God to supply them? What does this reveal to us about God? What's it tell us about humanity?

Leader help: Paul's praying they'd be given spiritual wisdom, strength, power, endurance, patience, joy, and the right perspective which leads to giving thanks. This tells us that God is incredibly gracious and generous, and that we are weak, dependent, and beloved. We're sinners needing forgiveness and divine help. God also supplies an inheritance (eternal life in a new creation), a new identity (saints), a place of permanent belonging (the kingdom of Jesus), redemption and forgiveness.

4. Why does Paul want the Colossians to be empowered to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord"? How is this goal different from the life goals our culture advocates?

Leader help: If we go back to Genesis 1-2, we see that God created us in His image and tasked us to be His representatives and stewards on this earth. That's our purpose. Only after we're united to Christ can we step into living for God and His glory.

Our culture recommends life goals like happiness, being true to yourself, living your truth. None of these will satisfy us because none of these compare with living out our purpose with our Creator.

APPLICATION

1. Following Jesus is discouraging and disappointing when we focus on *our* strength, *our* commitment, and *our* obedience. How can we help each other keep the focus on what Paul reveals in this passage?

Leader help: Our focus could be on: God is our Father, we've been rescued from sin and darkness, we have an inheritance earned by Jesus, we're in Jesus's kingdom, etc.

2. What's it look like when someone is trapped in the domain of darkness? If you can remember a time before being united to Jesus, what was it like for you? 3. Where in your life do you most need God's wisdom or strength right now?

PRAYER

Take an extended time to pray for one another, as well as those who are trapped in the domain of darkness.

You can pray for:

- 1. God to give His wisdom.
- 2. God to give His strength & power.
- 3. God to help you endure this week with joy and gratitude.
- 4. God to rescue specific people from darkness.
- 5. God to awaken you to the reality of your redemption and forgiveness.
- 6. God to forgive you for specific sins from this week.

Colossians 1:15-23

MAIN POINT

Paul has just expressed his desire for the Colossians to mature in their faith, and he now hones in on who it is that he calls the *beloved Son* in verse 13. How does beholding Jesus fuel Christian maturity?

In this section, Paul celebrates the Son of God, Jesus, who is King over both the old creation (verses 15-17) and the coming new creation (verses 18-20). Astonishingly, this King didn't crush sinners in their rebellion, He makes them acceptable to the Father.

GROUP INTRO

If you could only use one of the following words to describe Jesus, which would you use and why?

Savior, Friend, Lord, Creator, God, or Teacher.

TEXT

1. Cults use verse 15 to argue that Jesus is a created being since He's called the "firstborn." But Scripture uses this term to communicate something else. Read Psalm 89:20-27. What does "firstborn" mean in this psalm? Where else can we look in the Bible to know Jesus is eternal, not a created being?

Leader help: Psalm 89 describes king David, who is a foreshadow or "type" of Jesus, using royal language. David was the youngest of his family, not the literal first born, so to be "firstborn" here means preeminent, authoritative, or ruling. Not only this, but in the Greek translation of Psalm 89, the word "christos" is used twice, which reenforces that this is Psalm heavily foreshadows Jesus.

We can also look at Colossians 1:16, Luke 5:8, John 1:1-3, and John 20:28 to see that Jesus is God.

2. Read Genesis 1:27 then read Colossians 1:15. Jesus is both the true image of God and the faithful Son of God that neither Adam nor any Israelite could be. What, then, is the point of the Old Testament stories about Adam, Noah, Israel, David, and others?

Leader help: Far from being a bunch of disconnected stories, the Old Testament is a unified story about Jesus, revealing human failure to faithfully represent and honor God and showing our need for the Redeemer who is both truly human and truly God.

3. Why does Paul go into such detailed descriptions of Jesus's lordship and sacrificial death? How do these verses connect to his earlier prayer in verses 9-12?

Leader help: Paul had prayed that the Colossians would be empowered to live obedient, God-glorifying lives. This kind of life is fueled by the goodness and beauty of Jesus. When we know who Jesus is and what He has done, our hearts are changed to want Him and His will.

4. Despite modern ignorance, the universe is both visible and invisible, physical and spiritual. What are the implications of Paul's statements that Jesus created and sustains everything? Are there challenges, comforts, or lessons we can draw from this?

Leader help: Jesus has total ownership of everything and everyone. Thus, those who trust and rest in Him can have confidence even in the worst chaos and confusion. But those who reject the peace offered by Jesus will be declared guilty of treason against the King of kings.

Not only this, but Christians can have assurance when we experience the attacks of demons (here called "thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities").

APPLICATION

- 1. Sometimes we may hesitate to describe Jesus in ways similar to verses 15-23 (God in flesh, sovereign King, etc.). Why do we do this? What are some possible impacts of not emphasizing Jesus's deity, sovereignty, and power?
- 2. What situations, experiences, or thoughts tempt you to shift from the hope of the gospel?
- 3. What graces and gifts has God given us to help us collectively continue in the faith?
- 4. Since Jesus is King over all things, what aspect of your life do you need to surrender to Him? Finances? Relationships? Unconfessed sin? Wounds?

PRAYER

Praise Jesus for reconciling you to God.

Passage to guide your prayers: 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

Pray for someone in group, that God would help them trust in the lordship of Jesus.

Passage to guide your prayers: Psalm 16:2

Ask God for His power and help to not shift from the hope of the gospel.

Passage to guide your prayers: Exodus 15:2

Colossians 1:24 - 2:5

MAIN POINT

Paul rejoices in his personal sufferings - which happened due to his ongoing apostolic work of preaching Jesus - because his sufferings are worth their end result: unbelievers trusting in the Lord and believers spiritually growing.

GROUP INTRO

Tell us about a time in your life when a hardship helped you know God better or learn something new about Him. Would you say that the hardship was worth it?

TEXT

1. Read verses 24. Here Paul does not mean that there was anything lacking in the atoning death of Jesus; he's referencing the connection between proclaiming Jesus and suffering like and with Jesus. Read Acts 9:1-5, Philippians 1:27-30, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, and John 15:20. What do these passages tell us about the connection between proclaiming Jesus and suffering?

Leader help on next page.

Leader help: Pastor Tony Merida summarized the point of verse 24 by stating that Jesus's suffering and death was for **propitiation** (He took God's wrath on Himself so that we get God's favor) but the suffering of Christians is for **propagation** (the spread of the good news about Jesus). As we verbally spread the news of Jesus, more people are saved and united to Jesus. But something else happens as we proclaim this news: we experience the world's hatred of Jesus, and thus sometimes experience sufferings such as rejection, abuse, imprisonment or even death.

2. In verses 26-27, "mystery" does not refer to a difficult puzzle to be solved or understood, but something that was hidden throughout the Old Testament and is now revealed by God. Who or what does Paul say this once-hidden, now-revealed truth is about? How might this change the way we approach the Old Testament?

Leader help: The "mystery" is centered on Jesus and His work of reconciling both Jews and Gentiles to God through His life, death, and resurrection. Not only this, but Jesus fulfills God's long-prophesied promise to be with His people, and He does this by mysteriously indwelling us through His Spirit, who empowers us to tell others about this "mystery".

The Old Testament is a crucial part of God's unfolding plan to send His Son. We should always read the Old Testament knowing that Jesus is the fulfillment of all its promises and foreshadowing - He is the true temple, priest, atoning sacrifice, etc. 3. What goal does Paul say he's striving and suffering for?

Leader help: Paul wants the Christians to be presented mature in Christ (verse 28), which is presumably a reference to the Day when Jesus returns. He also wants people to be encouraged and united in love (2:2), strong in the face of false teaching (2:4), and confident in their faith (2:5).

4. How is Jesus described and presented in this passage? What description sticks out to you most and why?

APPLICATION

- 1. Do you view yourself as someone responsible for helping other Christians grow in their faith? Why or why not? How might your life look if you actively took on this mindset?
- 2. Paul summarizes his ministry as a call to "make the word of God fully known", which he then describes with the words, "Him (Jesus) we proclaim". This is evangelism. What does evangelism look like for us today?

Leader help: Evangelism is always a verbal proclamation of the good news about Jesus (that He has taken the judgment and wrath we deserve and conquered death and will one day return to renew creation). Evangelism is <u>not</u> acting nicely, being moral, inviting someone to church, or talking generally about God. 3. If we've trusted in Jesus, we're saints in God's eyes, so we can be honest and open about our personal failures. What would you say is the main motivation for your personal lack of evangelism? How can we, together, help you grow in this area?

Leader help: Part of "growing up" in our faith is actively evangelizing. And Paul gives us the best way to grow in our desire and ability to evangelize in verse 29: it takes God's strength and power, which we can ask Him for, to go out and proclaim Jesus. In other words, it takes faith in Jesus and dependency on Jesus to proclaim Jesus.

PRAYER

Praise God for the hope we have as Christians, the hope of glory.

Passage to guide your prayers: Romans 5:1-5

Confess your personal reasons for not evangelizing and ask God to forgive you and help you repent.

Passage to guide your prayers: Joel 2:12-13

Ask God to give you an opportunity to proclaim the gospel this week and the boldness to do it.

Passage to guide your prayers: Acts 4:29-30

Colossians 2:6-15

MAIN POINT

The way to continually live as a disciple of Jesus in world filled with temptations, demonic influence and unbiblical worldviews is to live in a state of childlike, humble trust in Him and His victory.

GROUP INTRO

What are some habits, traditions, or ways of celebrating that helped shape you and how you see yourself?

TEXT

1. In this passage, what does Paul say God has done? What does he say the Colossians must do?

Leader help: God has sovereignly saved His people through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son. The Colossians, and us today, are to embrace this reality by faith alone and live by faith. As Romans 1:16-17 declares, the righteous live by faith. This looks like living in daily dependence upon Jesus, thanking Him, learning more about Him, and helping others know Him. 2. In verse 8, the apostle tells the Colossians to diligently guard against being taken captive by "philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition." How does Paul tell them to guard against this?

Leader help: There are two methods: 1) Verse 6 says, "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him". How did the Colossians receive Jesus? By faith alone. So, by continuing to trust in Jesus and what He has said (as summarized in the teaching of the apostles), the Colossians can guard against false teaching. 2) In verse 16, Paul begins a discussion about standing firm against being enslaved to the rules and regulations of the Mosaic Law in the Old Testament; Jesus has fulfilled these rules and regulations, and we now live by faith in Him and by the power of the Spirit, not by external rituals and rules. So once again, they are called to live by trusting in Jesus and the new covenant He has established, as taught by the apostles.

3. What does Paul mean by "circumcision" in verses 11-13? To what event or act is he referring?

Leader help: Circumcision was the physical sign of God's covenant with Abraham and his offspring (eventually known as the Israelites - see Genesis 17:9-14). Paul here references a different circumcision, the circumcision of the heart (referenced in passages like Deuteronomy 30:6). This means that God cuts away our spiritual death, forgives us based on Jesus's life, death, and resurrection and gives us new life through faith in Him. The Holy Spirit then indwells us and empowers us to trust, enjoy, and obey God.

4. Read verses 13-15. What is the "record of debt" Paul references? Why does a record of debt stand against sinners and how did God deal with this debt?

Leader help: This record is all of our thoughts, motivations, desires, words, and actions that violate God's holy character and will. From the moment we are born, we begin adding to this sin record every day, and, because He is holy and righteous, God must deal with it. For those who are united to Jesus by faith alone, Jesus has taken the eternal punishment we deserve. For those outside of Jesus who refuse to trust in Him, they will bear the eternal penalty for their sins against God. Only in Jesus - and through His death on the cross - is this record of debt dealt with.

5. The death and resurrection of Jesus didn't just deal with the guilt of God's people. What else did Jesus accomplish?

Leader help: Jesus has disarmed the devil and all demons, meaning that they no longer have any way to successfully accuse us in God's heavenly courtroom since Jesus has died for us. Jesus has accomplished total victory over them and will one day completely destroy them.

APPLICATION

- 1. What are some deceptive human ideas alive and well in our culture today? What would it look like for someone to be "taken captive" by these deceptive ideas?
- 2. Based on the previous question, are any of the ideas or worldviews mentioned personally appealing or tempting to you? Why or why not?
- 3. How can someone have assurance that their "record of debt" has been forgiven by God?
- 4. Share with us any practices or habits that have helped you grow more mature as a follower of Jesus. What has helped you trust, love, and enjoy Jesus more and more?

Leader help: Paul mentions some crucial practices in Colossians 3:1-17.

PRAYER

Thank Jesus for His death for you and for His victory over the devil and all demons.

Passage to guide your prayers: 1 John 3:8

Ask God for the strength to commit to regular practices that will help you grow as a Christian.

Passage to guide your prayers: Colossians 3:16

Colossians 2:16-23

MAIN POINT

The "faith once for all delivered to the saints" doesn't demand from Christians an extra package of extraordinary religious practices in order to enjoy God and grow in godliness. The Lord's life, death, and resurrection are enough to secure our welcome and our maturity. Our job is to cling to Christ and His Word, not swerve off course when someone offers "Jesus + ____."

GROUP INTRO

Growing up, was there anything that your parents did or said that made you want to obey and trust them? Was there anything they did or said that made you resist obedience?

TEXT

1. To what does the "therefore" at the beginning of this passage refer?

Leader help: The all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus and our union with Him by faith alone. Since we are united to Him, we have new hearts, a new and perfect record (all sins forgiven and our hearts cleansed), and we have been given a new life that doesn't depend on external practices or rituals.

2. What's Paul talking about when he mentions food and drink, festivals, new moons, and Sabbath? Why aren't Christians obligated to submit to the regulations surrounding these things?

Leader help: These are old covenant ceremonies and observances. The saints of the Old Testament had strict dietary laws, festival observances, and special days in the Israelite calendar. But these were all just a "shadow of the things to come", i.e. they were foreshadowing Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Our lives are not marked by what we do but what Jesus has done for us - He is our true Sabbath rest, by union with Him through faith we are made holy, not by the rituals and practices we participate in.

3. Carefully read verses 18-20. How does Paul say Christians actually mature and go deeper in their faith? Does this align with what you've been taught about sanctification or growing in godliness?

Leader help: Our growth comes from God, and God has appointed means or ways that He provides this growth: through His Spirit within us, through His Word, through the church, and through experiences like suffering and His discipline. Our role is to "hold fast to the Head", aka, keep trusting Jesus and remembering how He has given us new life.

4. Describe the differences between the mindset described in verses 20-23 and the biblical mindset that Paul goes on to recommend in Colossians 3:1-4.

Leader help: The merely human, external mindset of verses 20-22 is all about us and what we shouldn't do. But Colossians 3:1-4 describes Jesus and points our attention toward Him and all that He has done and promised. The real power for Christian obedience and maturity comes not from external rules but from an ever-growing realization of God's love for us in Christ.

APPLICATION

- 1. Are there any external strategies for overcoming sin or growing in godliness that you have personally tried? Why didn't this work for you?
- 2. Do you view yourself as "dead to sin and alive to God", or, to put it another way Do you view yourself as God's child who is no longer a slave to sin? Why or why not? Why do we struggle to live by faith alone?
- 3. Do the unbelievers in your life think that Christianity is all about rules and being good enough to go to heaven? If so, how can you turn the conversation toward Jesus and His life, death and resurrection?

4. There are two dangers for every Christian: legalism and antinomianism. Legalism is the insistence that a person is accepted by God on the basis of his law or rule keeping. Antinomianism says that God does not require Christians to obey the moral law (i.e., the Ten Commandments). Which danger do you tend toward? Do you know why?

PRAYER

Thank the Lord Jesus for who He is and what He's done.

Passage to guide your prayers: 1 Corinthians 15:3-5

Confess your legalism and/or your antinomianism to God.

Passage to guide your prayers: Galatians 2:15-16

Ask God to help you think of yourself as dead to sin and alive to Him and to live by faith alone.

Passage to guide your prayers: Romans 6:9-11