



# **COLOSSIANS**

**A DEVOTIONAL FROM WHCC**





# **COLOSSIANS**

**A DEVOTIONAL FROM WHCC**



# Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>Preface</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>Background to Colossians</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>Devotionals</b>	
	<b>Uh-oh - The Agave's Blooming</b>	<b>9</b>
	<b>Now That's a Rescue</b>	<b>10</b>
	<b>When Strength Fails</b>	<b>11</b>
	<b>God's Image on the Earth</b>	<b>12</b>
	<b>How to See the Invisible God</b>	<b>13</b>
	<b>A Gift for the Son</b>	<b>14</b>
	<b>The Labor of Love</b>	<b>15</b>
	<b>Journeying with Christ</b>	<b>16</b>
	<b>Alive and Well</b>	<b>17</b>
	<b>Topsy-Turvy Living</b>	<b>18</b>
	<b>Don't Cling to a Picture</b>	<b>19</b>
	<b>I just want to touch the cookie</b>	<b>20</b>
	<b>Focus Your Heart and Mind</b>	<b>21</b>
	<b>Don't Feed It</b>	<b>22</b>
	<b>Me Wearhouse</b>	<b>23</b>
	<b>Make Up Your Mind</b>	<b>24</b>
	<b>House Rules</b>	<b>25</b>
	<b>Slaves &amp; Masters</b>	<b>26</b>
	<b>Painful Prayer</b>	<b>27</b>



## **Preface**

As we've already experienced in our February retreat, the book of Colossians pays rich dividends to those who are willing to sit with it and meditate on the truth it contains. It's not just a letter written to *those* Christians at *that* time; as if we could keep it's influence at arms length. It's a living, active word (Heb. 4:12) for us today as well.

I pray that this devotional booklet will stimulate your mind, motivate your will, and capture your affections with the beauty of our Lord Jesus Christ. Use it in your quiet times. Take it on a retreat. Read it during family devotions.

Our goal, as always, is that Jesus Christ might "...come to have first place in everything" (Col. 1:18). May this collection of thoughtful reflections aid you in that process in your own life.

I'd like to take a moment and thank all of the contributors who

participated in the production of this booklet: Paul Cochrane, Lindsay Hislop, Liz Stuart, Faith Hart, Melina & Randy Rabon, and Larry Dixon. Thank you for following the Holy Spirit's lead as you wrote these devotionals.

Finally, may the Lord encourage all of our hearts and knit us together in love that we might "...reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:2-3).

Blessings,

Dave Strobolakos  
March, 2015



## Background to Colossians

### Location:

Colossae was a small city of Phrygia in the Roman province of Asia. It was located in the Lycus valley about 10 miles from its neighbor city of Laodicea and approximately 120 miles from the coastal city of Ephesus.



(<http://www.ccel.org>)

**Authorship of Letter:**

There has been some debate in 19th-20th century scholarship concerning who wrote the letter to the Colossians. Some suggest a close disciple or a member of the Pauline community. However, due to Colossians close association with the letter to Philemon (most certainly a Pauline letter) and inconclusive textual evidence, Pauline authorship remains most likely. (Translate all of this to: We don't have any good reason to think that Paul didn't write the letter, so he probably did).

**Date and Place of Writing:**

The letter to the Colossian church was most likely written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome somewhere around AD 57-62.

**Paul's Relationship to the Colossian Believers:**

It may surprise you, but Paul never actually visited the church in Colossae. He notes this in Colossians 2:1 when he says, "For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face." It's clear from this text that Paul did not plant the church in Colossae. Well, then who did? Epaphras, of course!

It seems that Epaphras (Col. 1:7) had traveled to Ephesus during Paul's three year stay there (Acts 19) and heard the gospel. After some time spent learning, Epaphras traveled back to Colossae and shared the good news of Jesus with people there. Thus, the Colossian church was born. No fireworks. No magic. Just a faithful man delivering the good news to other people.

Nevertheless, even though Paul had never met these people face to face, he was burdened in his heart for them. He wanted them to reach "...full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ..." (Col. 2:2). Ever since Paul heard about the Colossian church from Epaphras, he hadn't stopped thanking God for them and praying for them (Col. 1:3-8).

In some ways, then, we can think of Paul as a spiritual father to the Colossian church. A father who thanks God to hear of his children's good faith and steadfast love. A father who faithfully prays that his children reach full maturity in the gospel. A father who instructs and steers his children away from dangerous teachings.

### **Reason for the Letter:**

Although Epaphras had faithfully delivered the gospel message to the Colossians there began to arise some misunderstandings and blatant false teachings that threatened the purity of the gospel. There are at least three things we can deduce about these false teachings from Paul's letter:

1. These teachings overemphasized the importance and place of certain spiritual beings (2:18) and undermined the supremacy of Christ (1:16).
2. These teachings overemphasized the importance of outward actions (2:16; 2:11) and undermined the completed work of Christ (2:20).
3. These teachings overemphasized the importance of their "higher philosophy" (2:8) and undermined the wisdom and knowledge found in Christ (2:3).

### **Sources:**

F. F. Bruce. "Colossians." In *New Bible Dictionary*, edited by J.D. Douglas, F.F. Bruce, J.I Packer, N. Hillyer, D. Guthrie, A.R. Millard, and D.J. Wiseman. 2nd ed. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale Publishing, 1987.

Craig S. Keener. "Colossians." In *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Craig S. Keener. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 1993.



# **Devotionals**



## Uh-oh—The Agave’s Blooming!

*...bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God. Colossians 1:10*

The University of Michigan’s 80-year-old American Agave Plant has decided to bloom! Uh-oh!

You may know that Agave plants are *monocarpic*, meaning they only bloom and bear fruit once—right before they die. Sometimes called the Century Plant because of how long it takes some of them to bloom, agaves spend their lives storing up resources so that at the end they can grow a tall stalk that will bloom and

bear fruit. As soon as the stalk bears fruit, the mother plant dies. Then the unsupported stalk topples and efficiently propels the offspring to the earth.

The University of Michigan agave was collected in 1934 by student botanist Alfred Whiting while on an expedition in New Mexico! Recently, the stalk has shot up more than 25 feet. But it isn’t done yet, so workers removed the glass ceiling panels to let it continue its skyward growth through the roof.

In a testament to the brilliance of our Creator, the Agave devotes its whole life to the goal of bearing fruit. Talk about being *focused*—just one branch of this stalk has over 150 buds, each one a potential next generation agave! Says one garden photojournalist, “Agaves are nothing if not determined to reproduce.” (<http://www.gardeninggonewild.com/?p=7002>)

Paul’s prayer for the Colossians is that they would be “bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God” (1:10). His prayer matches the Lord’s will for each of us—that we bear much fruit (John 15:5-8).

If the Agave plant could talk to us, it might say something like:

- I was designed to bear fruit. So I do it with all I’m worth. I don’t let anything distract me from my goal. And I do it to the day I die. How about you? Are you as determined as I am to fulfill your Creator’s design?
- What kinds of things do you let discourage you from bearing fruit? Parasites? Intense drought? Scorching heat? Being stuck in the same place your whole life?
- How’s your energy holding up? I’m getting up there in years, but I’m just as focused as ever on reproducing myself. Are you?

~ Paul Cochrane

### NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

## Now That's A Rescue!!!

In today's world, I can't think of a more hopeless or terrifying situation to find yourself in than being a captive of ISIS. With them you're just a propaganda pawn. They know nothing of mercy, have no regard for life, and revel in their brutality. The survival rate is nil. The end is always gruesome.

If ever there were a dominion of darkness, it's ISIS.

Imagine the mounting hopelessness as each day passes. No ISIS hostages have been successfully rescued. So why, as you sit in your metal cage, are you holding out hope that any day now Seal Team 6 will come bursting through the doors and whisk you away to safety on a Blackhawk helicopter?

But ruthless as the ISIS mugs are, they are only henchmen for their Prince. *He* wrote the book on darkness. And according to Colossians, it's not just a few unfortunate captives who are in his dominion of darkness, but rather *EVERY* single person. *ALL* are held hostage by Satan. He knows nothing of mercy, has no regard for life, and revels in his brutality. Under his regime the survival rate is nil, and the end is always gruesome. (See where ISIS gets its cues?)

Enter the Father.

From the domain of thickest darkness He rescued us. From terror and hopelessness. From ruthless captors. From a gruesome end. From certain eternal death.

He snatched us from the stranglehold of darkness... and transferred us to the kingdom of His dear Son.

Now *that's* a rescue!

*Father, all too often my attitude is, "What've You done for me LATELY?" or worse, "What HAVEN'T You done for me lately?" Forgive my self-centeredness! Even if You'd never done another thing for me, rescuing me from the dominion of darkness is enough! I purpose to think more regularly about Your gracious rescue... and give You thanks!*

~ Paul Cochrane

### NOTES

---

---

---

---



## When Strength Fails...

*And we pray... that  
you will be  
strengthened with all  
power  
according to His  
glorious might  
so that you may have  
great endurance  
Colossians 1:11*

Everyone knows gym attendance soars in January... and fizzles out within a few short weeks.

But according to a recent study, the same thing happens on a weekly basis. After a weekend of falling off diets and exercise plans, people start the new week off on a tear by hitting the gym, running, or walking. As the week progresses, however, their determination wanes.

The conclusion? Says one of the data gurus, "For all these studies, we have found that willpower is a limited resource" (<http://usat.ly/1wojDkN>).

I'll bet you didn't need an extensive study to tell you that willpower or endurance are in limited supply. Endurance is "the ability or strength to continue on a course of action in spite of fatigue, stress, or other difficulties and testings." Yes, I regularly find that in short supply. And I'll bet I'm not alone.

Maybe that explains Paul's prayer. "And we pray... that you will be strengthened with all power according to His glorious might *so that you may have great endurance*" (Colossians 1:11).

Apparently it's one of our greatest needs. The writer to the Hebrews agrees: "You have need of endurance" (Hebrews 10:36). But how do you get it?

Since Paul thought it important to ask God for endurance for the Colossians, does it make sense for us to *ask* Him for endurance? He seems willing to give it. Or do we keep on spending our prayer energy asking God to *take away* the "fatigue, stress, or other difficulties and testings"?

Is James' exhortation masochistic or spiritually mature? "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops endurance" (James 1:2-3).

Could Jesus' endurance be key to increasing our endurance? "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus... who for the joy set before him endured the cross.... Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:2-3).

~ Paul Cochrane

### NOTES

---

---

---

# God's Image on the Earth

God has an amazing imagination. He created the zebra and the giraffe, the orangutan and the kangaroo, and everything from the ladybug to the elephant. And Moses tells us he created all these things 'according to their kinds.' That is, he had a distinct idea for each one—a pattern envisioned in his imagination.

*The Son is the image  
of the invisible God...  
Colossians 1:15*

However, when it came to creating the ones who would rule his creation, God looked in the mirror for a pattern. He created Adam in his own image.

It is apparently obligatory, if you are commenting on Gen. 1:26-27, to say that man being made in the image of God does not refer to his physical nature, but only to the immaterial part of man. The theory is that since God is a spirit he has no shape. However, I find it difficult to think of God as a shapeless cloud. I don't mean he has to have a physical shape, but can he not have a spiritual shape? Can he not have form as well as substance?

Nor do I mean when I say this, that it is only our physical form that is created in God's image. I suspect every part of us is—our mind, our imagination, our consciousness of right and wrong, our emotions, our spiritual awareness, our body—everything. We were made to be like God, but in a finite way and able to fall.

When God gave the law, he commanded his people, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth." He said this, partly at least, because he had already set his image on the earth—a living image, created to rule this planet.

However, we failed and marred that image, so God sent a second Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). This one has come as "the image of the invisible God" in a much deeper way (Col. 1:15). This is the face of God himself.

### *Reflections:*

- If the Lord Jesus Christ is the image of God, what does that tell us about the nature of God?
- If I am created to be a reflection of God, am I happy with the way God made me? So many personal doubts can be erased if I realize I am made in his image.

~ Lindsay Hislop

## NOTES

---

---

---

## How to See the Invisible God

*The Son is the image  
of the invisible God...  
Colossians 1:15*

I've been told I look like my father, and the resemblance is obvious. He's gone now—passed on to a new life—but since we still have pictures of him you can check out the resemblance. But what if we had no pictures and I was the only one who remembered him? We have no pictures of our

Heavenly Father, but we know what He looks like. “The Son is the image of the invisible God, . . .” (Col. 1:15).

Through the centuries, artists have tried to paint pictures of the Son—some we may like and some not. But if we take the word *image* to mean something other than physical appearance, we can say we know the Son. We can know his character, his personality, his demeanor, his heart. And if we know these we know the Father.

We know the Father through the words of the Son, but perhaps we know Him more through the person of the Son. This would be true if we just acknowledged that the Son is like the Father, but there is more to it than that. The Son himself said, “I and the Father are one.” The mystery of the trinity is beyond us, but we can say that when we see the Son we see God.

If our Bible consisted of only the gospels—if it consisted of only one of the gospels—we would know almost as much about God as we do now. Given a choice between the gospels and the letters of the New Testament, I would give up all the depths of the letters for the simple, clear, and concise stories of the gospels. It is there God gives us a full portrait of Himself. From the manger to the cross and the grave and beyond, He reveals Himself in brilliant colors, walking on weary legs, touching with tender hands, speaking sometimes with gentleness and sometimes with authority. There can be no substitute for the portrait we see on these pages. The Son is the image of the invisible God.

### *Reflections:*

- Read through the gospels, and when you come to each incident jot down the answer to this question, “What does this tell me about the character of God?”
- Turn your heart to Him and praise Him for this aspect of His person.

~ Lindsay Hislop

### NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

## A Gift for the Son

When we were kids, our parents made things for us; and if we are parents now, we have made things for our kids. I remember my dad making all kinds of things for us—a skating rink in the backyard, a soccer field with sidelines and goals, racing sleds. And, of course, Mom made all kinds of wonderful baked goods and hot chocolate when we came in from the cold. Some of the most memorable things were those that we could help with—when we got to flood the rink or lay down the lines for the soccer field. Then gradually we took on the projects ourselves—soap box cars, kites, and ham radios.

*.. all things have  
been created through  
him and for him.  
Colossians 1:16*

In Col. 1:16 we read a remarkable statement about the Son of God: “. . . all things have been created through him and for him.” He is the one who created everything there is, and everything there is was created for him.

He spoke and the starry heavens came to be—heavens billions of light years across and still expanding. The creation of the galaxies is summed up in a remarkable statement in Gen. 1:16: “He made the stars also.” He spoke, and the energy of his word started a great light show, with galaxies continually emerging and expanding, spraying off whirling planets one after another.

And on the rim of one of these ever turning galaxies is our little sun, and around it we spin in a regular orbit, held in place by the eternal Son as part of his creation. As Col. 1:17 tells us, “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

He holds the universe together, but when he created us he gave us freedom, and we have gone off the rails. So the Son, for whom the universe was created, came down and walked among us, sharing our flesh and blood. He subjected himself to all the unfairness of this bent world—indeed, to the greatest unfairness this world has experienced. He was nailed to a cross, mocked and spit on. And he did this to free us from our own crookedness, to redeem his universe.

### *Reflections:*

- If we were made as part of a gift for the Son and then he had to redeem his gift, we are doubly his. In what areas does my life reflect that?
- Are there areas where it does not, and am I prepared to change those?

~ Lindsay Hislop

### NOTES

---

---

---

## The Labor of Love

*...that they may have  
the full riches of  
complete  
understanding...  
Colossians 2:2*

Read Colossians 2:1–5 and contemplate the depth of devotion and love Paul had for those in Colossae and Laodicea. The word “struggle” in verse 1 denotes a perpetual distress. Paul is persistent in his burden for the believers. He is intent to see them mature in Christ. Paul felt deeply and anguished over people he had never personally met. Paul had not seen them but prayed earnestly and purposely for them.

Do we have that type of compassion and concern for believers whom we have never seen? Do we persistently pray for Christians in other parts of the world who need prayers for maturity or wisdom? Paul was in prison and yet his thoughts turned towards others instead of himself. He concerned himself with prayers for their spiritual well-being and growth.

Paul wanted them to be encouraged, comforted, and strengthened in Christ. His prayer was for a uniting of hearts in God’s love. If the Colossian believers bonded together in love, they could stand together against the false doctrines. As they received wisdom, they increased in spiritual understanding. Wisdom created a barrier of knowledge against the deceptive speech of the false teachers. If the believers were faithful to the truth of God’s word and dependent on the Holy Spirit, they would progress towards maturity in Christ. However, they needed each other in order to fight against the persuasive words.

### *Reflections*

- How were the Colossian believers able to mature?
- Do we have steadfastness and discipline in Christ to fight not only for ourselves but also for others?
- Do we yearn for others to be encouraged and to understand the full riches of Christ? Do we delight to see others growing and becoming steadfast in their faith?

~ Melina Rabon

### NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Journeying With Christ

If we are to be alive in Christ, Paul tells us we need to “walk in him.” The walking is a transforming of our life in Christ. We join with him in the journey of faith. When we walk with Christ, several changes take place:

*...just as you  
received Christ Jesus  
as Lord,  
continue to live your  
lives in Him...  
Colossians 2:6*

1. We are rooted in him. We continue to grow deep in our faith because of our relationship and connection with Christ. Plants that have strong deep roots stabilize soil and control erosion around them. What are you doing to grow strong deep roots to stabilize yourself when the winds of trouble, hard circumstances, or sin blow your way?
2. We are built up in him. We allow Christ to be the firm foundation on which God constructs us. Examine your life to see if there is anything that would prevent Christ from being the firm foundation of your faith.
3. We are established in the faith. We have a stable faith that is steadfast in the face of worldly philosophy or lies. Are you spending time with God so that you become more and more stable in your walk with Christ?
4. We are abounding in thanksgiving. Thankfulness permeates us to be grateful to Christ for who he is and what he has done. When something permeates a room, it spreads and passes through every part of it like bright sunshine in a dark room. Are we permeating a room so that we bring light to those around us? Are we abounding in thankfulness? Take time to thank Christ for who he is and what he has done for you.

The first two changes grow stronger as we pray, read God’s Word, meditate, and commune with believers. The last two are results of our devotion and worship to God. However, each change results from God’s grace rather than purely our efforts alone. Christ is still the central figure in rooting, building, establishing, and permeating our faith.

~ Melina Rabon

## NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Alive and Well

*...and you, who were  
dead in your  
trespasses...God  
made alive...by  
canceling the record  
of debt that stood  
against us.  
Colossians 2:13-14*

There is a chapter in our family history that is, unfortunately, not such an uncommon story. Through a twisting and turning set of circumstances (another story for another day), we found ourselves responsible for a monthly mortgage payment that we could not handle. The money coming in each month was not enough to keep up with all the money that needed to go out. Despite our best efforts, we ended up losing the house when it was foreclosed upon by the bank.

It would be easy to feel badly toward the folks at the bank for telling us we could no longer live in the house that had become our home. But the cold, hard facts are that they were well within their rights to foreclose. We had not held up our end of the deal. We had made a promise . . . in writing . . . in triplicate, even . . . but had failed to keep that promise. We had an indebtedness that the banking authorities used against us to legally condemn our rights to home ownership. There were many days when we felt helpless and hopeless . . . though we were doing everything we knew to do . . . waiting for a buyer, wishing for a miracle . . . but nothing.

How long has it been since you felt the desperation of being condemned by your sin? Sometimes we forget that we were guilty (can you feel it?!) of a sin-debt that could NOT be repaid, no matter how hard we tried. But God demonstrated His amazing love for us, through Christ's sacrifice, to pay a debt (ours!) He did not owe. Our obligation now is simply to accept the miraculous gift that's been offered and then, out of gratitude, genuinely turn from the sin that condemned us.

Take a few moments to remember what you've been saved from . . . and continue to be saved from . . . then watch / listen / sing along to "Amazing Love (You Are My King)" and respond with thankfulness that, in Him, you are now "alive and well." (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avJ41DnZWRU>)

~ Randy Rabon

### NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Topsy-Turvy Living

I love how God's economy turns everything upside down. Here are some examples of that from Colossians 2:16-3:4:

*...the substance belongs to Christ. Colossians 2:17*

- Dying brings freedom.
- Shadows are not reality.
- The tangible things we see around us do not matter as much as the eternal invisible things.
- Worldly rules are useless.

When I read these verses, I can't help thinking about a puppet stage. The set looks like a garden with flowers painted on the background and some fading, chipped blue paint for the sky. The puppets are completely controlled by the puppeteers and the script that has been written for them (the "rules" of this world). But what if the puppets turned into real humans some day and were set free to live a real life in the real world? Imagine the joy and freedom and excitement of going from such a faded, captive existence into a glorious real life? That is what we get to experience as Christians.

We have been given real life in Christ. The real world is the invisible spiritual world that is around us. Are we living in that world or are we continuing to be bound to our puppet stage world? If we have the correct perspective, *that* world (the puppet set, our physical, tangible world) is the imaginary one, the one that is just carrying out a pretend story while our *real* life is our spiritual life in Christ.

Okay, is that confusing enough? Like I said, God's Kingdom turns things upside down and inside out. What would it be like if we really lived this way? Would we be a little less occupied with accumulating earthly things that are only going to pass away? Would we spend more time on our knees and less time in front of the television? Would that annoying driver in front of us take up just a little less of our emotional energy and attention? Would we find ourselves daydreaming about heaven instead of our next vacation?

Prayer of Reflection: *Am I setting my mind (my affections, my thoughts) on eternal things or earthly things? Please give me the right lenses to see this world the way You see it, Heavenly Father. I want to have your perspective on my life.*

~ Liz Stuart

## NOTES

---

---

---



## Don't Cling To A Picture!

*These are a shadow  
of the things that  
were to come...  
Colossians 2:17*

Imagine this: a little boy's father goes off to war. The days are long for that little boy and he dreams of things he will do with his father when he returns. He carries a tattered picture of his father in his pocket and sleeps with it under his pillow at night. He even has a favorite game he plays with the

picture every morning and evening. How strange would it be if the father finally returned and the boy greeted him but then went back to playing with his picture? The father was ready to spend time with him and introduce him to new activities, but the boy only wanted to play the same games with his picture that he had played every day since the father left?

This is the idea that comes to mind when Paul says in verse 17 that religious traditions are a *shadow* of things to come but the *reality* is found in Christ. Why would we continue to cling to a picture when we have the real Person with us? Any tradition or even new philosophies (false doctrines Paul is warning about) that take the place of Christ in our hearts and in our lives are but a pale shadow of the Real Thing.

As long as we continue to live connected to Christ our Head, we will continue to grow and mature as He causes us to grow. We have no ability to grow on our own apart from Christ. If we think of the Church as a single unit as Paul refers to it here, a body, we get a clear picture of the body growing and moving together as one. If an individual is not living in that daily dependence on Christ, he quickly gets out of sync with the rest of the sinews and ligaments of the body that *are* connected to Christ.

### *Reflections:*

- Am I getting distracted from Christ by any "shadows" (religious traditions, philosophies), even ones that are supposed to point me to Him?
- Am I living with Christ as my Head – the decision-maker for my daily life?

~ Liz Stuart

### NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## “I just want to touch the cookie!”

Have you ever seen a child who is tempted to eat a forbidden cookie? His eyes light up, he moves toward the cookie as if in a trance, smelling the delicious aroma and reaching out “just to touch” it? As a vigilant parent, his mother sees all the warning signs and tells him not to even touch the cookie, in hopes of helping him avoid the temptation. Still, he stares longingly and drinks in the smells wafting from the cooling cookies. As soon as her back is turned, he may succumb to the temptation and not only eat the cookie but lie about it when questioned. Why? Because no matter how well-intentioned the rules and boundaries are, they are not capable of restraining human desire.

*...why, as though  
you still belonged to  
the world, do you  
submit to its rules?  
Colossians 2:20*

Many religious traditions like to impose rules about food or other endless restrictions and regulations, and Paul is pointing out the futility of those rules. In his words, human rules “lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.” And as in the example above, sometimes the rules not only fail to keep us from sinning but may cause us to add on extra sins as well, as we try to cover up or hide our rule-breaking. Only when we live in our *position* in Christ – realizing that we have died with Him and are no longer bound to the ways of the world can we experience freedom and victory over sinful desires.

Because human rules and standards are focused on outward things that perish (v.22), they cannot change our hearts, and heart change is what is needed to truly overcome temptations. But so often we get focused on the rules themselves. If we could just dwell on our all-sufficient Christ and all that He has done to secure victory for us (v. 8, 15, 20), I wonder if some of those temptations would fade?

Prayer of reflection: *Lord, please give me true wisdom and not “an appearance of wisdom” in regards to gaining victory over worldly desires. Am I focusing on man-made rules or am I relying on You to transform my heart?*

~ Liz Stuart

### NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Focus Your Heart & Mind

*Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.  
Colossians 3:2*

Some years ago, God gave me a question to ask myself whenever I was feeling particularly flustered or upset about something. “Is this going to matter in 10,000 years?” This question isn’t meant to trivialize or invalidate my feelings. Rather, I’ve found it helpful because it gives me the chance to “set my mind on things above” in real, everyday life.

Instead of spending time and energy worrying about something completely out of my control, or complaining about a problem at work, or stewing over feelings of being left out, I can consciously let go of those feelings by focusing on eternity. Usually, there is one element of the situation that *will* matter in eternity – the state of my heart (my submission to Christ and my enjoyment of Him). To me, that is the core of setting my mind on things above – spending every day *in Christ, with Christ* and enjoying Christ as I will be doing in eternity.

So if I break it down, I feel like there are two areas I am most likely to get waylaid from this eternal perspective Paul is talking about: my heart and my mind. As far as my heart is concerned, I can either get too attached to *things* here on earth that won’t last for eternity or I can get too caught up in my emotions and feelings (which are also fleeting). Both of these are ways that I find my heart losing its eternal perspective. And when it comes to my mind, I often find the percentage of time I spend thinking about earthly things far outweighs the percentage of time I spend thinking about eternal things.

### *Reflections:*

- What is my biggest problem or challenge right now? What part of it is going to matter in 10,000 years?
- How can I set my mind (my thoughts, my affections) on things above this week?

~ Liz Stuart

### NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Don't feed it!

An Eskimo fisherman came to town every Saturday afternoon. He always brought his two dogs with him. One was white and the other was black. He had taught them to fight on command. Every Saturday afternoon in the town square the people would gather and these two dogs would fight and the fisherman took bets. On one Saturday the black dog would win; another Saturday, the white dog would win – but the fisherman always won! His friends began to ask him how he did it. He said, “I starve one and feed the other. The one I feed always wins because he is stronger.”

*Put to death  
therefore what is  
earthly in you...  
Colossians 3:5*

In Colossians 3, we are commanded to put to death what is earthly in us. One way to put a living thing to death is by starvation – depriving it of what it needs to grow in size and strength. Stated another way - Don't feed it! Paul and Timothy cared so deeply for the saints at Colossae that they left no ambiguity regarding the specific deeds that should be put to death: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness (3:5).

The lures of sexual immorality and impurity are virtually everywhere. Billboards, TV shows, websites, magazines and personal electronic devices can be gateways to fuel our passions and evil desires. Deceiving ourselves, we might actually believe that our inner passions and desires are private issues limited to the confines of our own mind. However the constant nurturing of these passions and desires causes them to grow stronger, inevitably leading to some form of impurity or immorality. It is understandable, then, to see why these issues must be dealt with decisively at the moment of temptation. The crucial choice: Feed or starve.

### *Reflections:*

- If I take inventory of what I enjoy watching, listening to, and participating in when no one else is looking, what does it reveal about my inner passions/desires?
- Lord, would You give me a clean heart, and help me to see my sinful desires the same way that You do?

~ Faith Hart

## NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

## “Me Wearhouse”

*Put to death  
therefore what is  
earthly in you...  
covetousness  
Colossians 3:5*

Driving past a major shopping plaza last evening, something interesting jumped out at me. Amongst all the bright lights and business signs, my eyes were drawn to the Men’s Wearhouse© . A few of the sign’s bulbs were blown, so the bright letters simply read “Me Wearhouse”. How interesting, I thought, if there were actually a warehouse that was all about me! A storefront where I could go to get anything I desired or wanted.

As I considered this thought, I began to ponder Paul’s words in Colossians 3:5. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On an initial reading it may seem that covetousness is misplaced in Paul’s list. After all, a connection can readily be made between the other four sins. So how does covetousness fit in? In simple terms, when I covet, I desire something that isn’t mine, and does not rightfully belong to me in the first place. The fact that it does not belong to me is of no consequence because I want it anyway. Coveting is like taking a trip to the “Me Wearhouse” where the only thing that matters is me getting the things I desire.

Covetousness is powerful because it is a form of idolatry. When we hear the word idolatry, we may envision tiny carvings of wood, bronze or stone propped up on a mantel, but idolatry is often more close and personal than we prefer to admit. The truth is that in coveting, we worship our desires and wants with such fervor and intensity that fulfilling them becomes more important to us than God. For this reason, Paul warns us to put covetousness (idolatry) to death.

### *Reflections:*

- Lord, would you uncover areas in my life where I have been desiring things that do not rightly belong to me?
- Lord, please forgive me for my preoccupation with personal pleasure, and focus my heart and attention on the way You want me to live.

~ Faith Hart

## NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Make up your mind!

Several years ago, some friends and I went to dinner at a restaurant in downtown Atlanta. As we walked down a quiet street to return to our car, one of my friends excused himself abruptly. Moments later, I overheard him speaking with a man I had not previously noticed who was rummaging through a large trashcan. When my friend asked if he was hungry, the man immediately denied it, adding instead that he was looking for something he'd lost. After a few more minutes of conversation and sharing, my friend, moved by the Holy Spirit, handed his box of food to the stranger while telling him of Jesus' love. I remember being so impacted by my friend's awareness of things happening around him. This was one of many instances where I saw him promptly responding to the needs of others.

*Put on then, as God's  
chosen ones, holy  
and beloved...  
Colossians 3:12*

On a daily basis, we must make up our minds about what clothing we will wear. This varies according to the day's duties and obligations, and we choose what is appropriate. Likewise, we, who have been made alive by Christ, must consciously determine our daily spiritual clothing. Thankfully the attire is specific. We are told, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience" (Col 3:12). Above all these things, we are to put on love (3:14).

Correct thinking leads to correct decisions – the kinds of decisions that further God's kingdom and extend hope to others. This is what I saw being manifested in my friend's life. Our world is bombarded with people clothed in anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk and lying. The world doesn't need any more of that; what it needs is a fresh infusion of life, light and hope. When we consciously decide to clothe ourselves with kindness, love, patience, etc. we are more aware of opportunities to exercise those virtues in a world that so desperately needs them.

### *Reflections:*

- Lord, today I am consciously deciding to clothe myself with spiritual virtues. Please use me as your instrument throughout my day.
- Lord, what remnants of the "old self" do I still hold on to? What am I unwilling or afraid to let go of?

~ Faith Hart

### NOTES

---

---

---

---

# House Rules

*Wives...Husbands...  
Children...Fathers...  
Colossians 3:18-21*

Robert Frost said, “Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” Our world suggests that everything about the home is up in the air, including the very definitions of the family, of marriage, of parenting! One writer says, “Most stress is caused by three things: family,

money, and family with no money.” Colossians 3:18-21 says nothing about money, but gives practical advice to four specific audiences: wives, husbands, children, and fathers. Let’s look at each of these commands:

In verse 18, wives are told to *submit* to their husbands! What does it mean to be “fitting in the Lord”? (This, of course, is not a command for abused wives to remain in an unsafe environment).

In verse 19, husbands are told to *love* your wives! Why are husbands tempted to be harsh with their wives?

Verse 20 commands children to *obey* your parents! Why is this pleasing to the Lord? If parents are babysitters for God, then disobeying one’s parents means disobeying God.

Fathers are told in verse 21, *don’t embitter* your children! What does this mean -- and in what sense will they become discouraged? The word “embitter” comes from a word meaning “to stir up, arouse, or irritate.” Technically, this verse is saying “Stop provoking, irritating your children.”

What advice from our text do you need to work on today?

### *Reflections:*

- Compare our text (Col. 3:18-21) with Ephesians 5:21-33. Put into your own words some of the extra details we are given in Ephesians 5 about God’s desire for the family.
- Any thoughts as to why *mothers* are not specifically addressed in our passage?
- What would be the opposite of fathers’ embittering their children? How might fathers become more proactive in their parenting?

~ Larry Dixon

## NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Slaves & Masters

Isn't it interesting that the Bible doesn't overtly try to eradicate slavery, but instead provides instructions for both slaves and their masters? There are several kinds of slavery, as Paul Copan points out in his excellent article (found at [http://enrichmentjournal.org/201102/201102\\_108\\_slavery.htm.cfm](http://enrichmentjournal.org/201102/201102_108_slavery.htm.cfm)).

*Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything...*

*Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair...*

*Colossians 3:22; 4:1*

In our text, we learn that slaves are to obey their masters whether the master is present or absent.

This heart-obedience is a pattern for all believers everywhere, for Paul says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (v. 23). The reason for such obedience (other than that one's real Master is the Lord) is that there is an inheritance waiting for faithful servants (v. 24)! Wrongdoing will incur punishment, for there is no favoritism with the Lord (v. 25).

Masters are commanded to provide their slaves with what is right and fair. Why? Again, because these very masters have a Master in heaven -- the Lord Jesus!

If these servants are of the indentured servanthood category (discussed by Copan), then they are seeking to pay off a debt. Their conduct shows their heart of reverence for the Lord and their hope of an eventual inheritance.

Both the slaves and the earthly masters appear to be believers in Jesus -- and they are both to live their lives honorably before their Master in heaven.

### *Reflections:*

- Read over Copan's paper so that you can respond to unbelievers who charge the Bible with endorsing slavery.
- How might you more practically view your life as a slave of Jesus Christ? How would this impact every decision you make?
- Meditate on other verses that talk about your inheritance in heaven (Mt. 25:34; Acts 20:32; Eph. 1:14 & 18; Col. 1:12; Heb. 9:15; and I Pe. 1:4).

~ Larry Dixon

## NOTES

---

---

---

---

---



# Painful Prayer

*Continue steadfastly  
in prayer, being  
watchful in it with  
thanksgiving.  
Colossians 4:2*

In The Screwtape Letters, C.S. Lewis has Screwtape (an arch demon) write his nephew understudy demon Wormwood on “the painful subject of prayer.”

Why is prayer such a painful subject? Is it for you? I think sometimes it is because we don't pray -- and we know we should. It might also be that we have lost confidence in prayer -- we don't get what we want when we want it. It might also be that we view prayer as a last-ditch effort to drag God into our mess, a kind of having God's number (911) on speed dial. “Well, I guess all we can do now is pray!” we sometimes think or even say.

But if prayer is talking to the living God who loves us, what's the problem? It may be that we treat God as a celestial vending machine rather than as our Almighty, loving Creator and Redeemer. It may be that we rely much too much on our own wits, strength, and perception to trust Him in our circumstances. It may be that we play at praying and recess is over!

In Col. 4:2-4, we learn that prayer requires devotion, watchfulness, and thankfulness. It appears to be the key to opening doors of ministry. It also seems that prayer (for others) will give them clarity in their ministries.

### *Reflections:*

- Why do you not take prayer as seriously as you should?
- What is this “mystery of Christ” to which Paul refers? (see also Rom. 16:25; Eph. 1:9; 3:6; Col. 1:27; and 2:2).
- List several specific steps you can take to “devote” yourself to prayer.

~ Larry Dixon

## NOTES

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---





