

**“DO I
REALLY UNDERSTAND
THE GOSPEL?”**

from the book
of

Colossians

- ◆ The comments in italics below the scriptures are an attempt to capture the meaning and provide a running commentary in more contemporary terms.
- ◆ The summaries on most pages are designed to bring out the message of the book as clearly and concisely as possible.
- ◆ The scriptures are all taken from the Revised English Bible translation, to add a slightly different flavour.

Paul begins his letter to the Colossians much like his letter to the Philippians, very pleased with how they responded to the gospel:

Colossians 1:3 - “In all our prayers to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank him for you, (4) because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you bear towards all God’s people; (5) both spring from that hope stored up for you in heaven of which you learned when the message of the true gospel first (6) came to you. That same gospel is bearing fruit and making new growth the whole world over, as it does among you and has done since the day when you heard of God’s grace and learned what it truly is. (7) It was Epaphras, our dear fellow-servant and a trusted worker for Christ on our behalf, who taught you this, (8) and it he who has brought us news of the love the Spirit has awakened in you”

✓ *Paul writes to the Colossians after hearing from Epaphras what’s been happening since the Colossians understood the gospel & believed it. It’s ALL GOOD NEWS. The Holy Spirit has given them a deep love for God & the message of God’s grace has given them hope, which in turn has given them a love for each other & trust in Christ. It was a wonderful beginning. It was great news hearing the same things happening wherever God’s grace was being preached, too -*

Colossians 1:9 - “This is why, ever since we first heard about you, we have not ceased to pray for you. We ask God that you may receive from him full insight into his will, all wisdom and spiritual understanding, (10) so that your manner of life may be worthy of the Lord and entirely pleasing to him. We pray that you may bear fruit in active goodness of every kind, and grow in knowledge of God. (11) In his glorious might may he give you ample strength to meet with fortitude and patience whatever comes; (12) and to give joyful thanks to the Father who has made you fit to share the heritage of God’s people in the realm of light”

✓ *Paul loved praying for the Colossians because he knew God would give them all the insight, wisdom, spiritual understanding & strength they could wish for to grow in their understanding of God, live the kind of life God had in mind for us humans, make good things happen & face the troubles of life with courage & patience. They’d also experience enormous joy & gratitude as they themselves realized what was happening to them as the days went by -*

It greatly pleased Paul hearing from Epaphras that the Colossians had responded to the message of God’s grace, because they were full of hope, love for each other & trust in Christ. The Spirit was also giving them insight, wisdom, courage, endurance, the ability to do good & to live as God intended with joy & deep appreciation to the Father for being willing to share all this with them now.

CHECKPOINT No.1 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) Like the Colossians I have that hope God intended for us, the signs of which are our trust in Christ & love for each other.
- 2) Like the Colossians I have that love the Spirit “awakens” in us too, the signs of which are our deep desire to please God by living our lives well, doing good, learning all we can about God’s will & wisdom, & receiving from him all the strength we need to meet whatever comes our way from here on out with courage & patience, in joyful appreciation to God for giving us the chance right now to share all that he has planned for his people - & *all because of* -

Jesus Christ, the heart & core of the gospel message:

Colossians 1:13 - “He rescued us from the domain of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his dear Son, (14) through whom our release is secured and our sins are forgiven”

✓ *At the centre of the message of God’s grace is Jesus Christ, because it’s through him that God rescues us from the “domain of darkness” & places us in a “realm of light (verse 12)” instead -*

Colossians 1:15 - “He is the image of the invisible God; his is the primacy over all creation. (16) In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, not only things visible but also the invisible orders of thrones, sovereignties, authorities, and powers: the whole universe has been created through him and for him. (17) He exists before all things, and all things are held together in him. (18) He is the head of the body, the church. He is its origin, the first to return from the dead, to become in all things supreme. (19) For in him God in all his fullness chose to dwell, (20) and through him to reconcile all things to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood on the cross - all things, whether on earth or in heaven”

✓ *It’s through Christ that the mess sin created in both heaven & earth will be sorted out & everything returned back to God fully restored. Christ is the key. Why? Because of who he is, first of all. He is everything God is, existing as God did before our world came into being. He was the one who made the universe too, who now reigns supreme over it & keeps everything running. He’s also the originator & head of the church through which that restoration would begin. And it was Christ’s death that started the ball rolling, enabling us to be at peace with God, which was followed next by his resurrection, giving Christ supreme power over absolutely everything, guaranteeing God’s purpose will be completed -*

Jesus Christ is the key to everything. It is through his death, his church & his supreme power that God is restoring all things back to himself.
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CHECKPOINT No.2 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

1) I understand the importance of Jesus Christ as the heart & core of the message of God's grace - because it's through Christ's death that God graciously rescued us from darkness, forgave our sins & brought us into the kingdom of his Son.

2) I understand the importance of Jesus Christ himself - as the mirror image of God; he is everything God is. He's also in charge of all creation, having created all things himself in the first place & through his power now keeps it all going. He began the church too, through which everything is being restored back to God, first through Christ's death, then through his resurrection & now in his position as supreme ruler over all powers in heaven & earth - *there is, therefore* -

A hope we have that need never be shaken:

Colossians 1:21-22 - "Formerly you yourselves were alienated from God, his enemies in heart & mind, as your evil deeds showed. But now by Christ's death in his body of flesh & blood God has reconciled you to himself, so that he may bring you into his own presence, holy & without blame or blemish. (23) Yet you must persevere in faith, firm on your foundations & never to be dislodged from the hope offered in the gospel you accepted. This is the gospel which has been proclaimed in the whole creation under heaven, the gospel of which I, Paul, became a minister"

✓ *The gospel is meant to give hope, because we may have been God's enemies in the past but because of Christ's death we become totally reconciled to God & utterly faultless in his sight. He holds nothing against us. This is the message going out to the whole world, giving us humans a hope that need never be shaken -*

Colossians 1:24 - "It is now my joy to suffer for you; for the sake of Christ's body, the church, I am completing what still remains for Christ to suffer in my own person. (25) I became a servant of the church by virtue of the task assigned to me by God for your benefit, to put God's word into full effect, (26) that secret purpose hidden for long ages & through many generations, but now disclosed to God's people. (27) To them he chose to make known what a wealth of glory is offered to the Gentiles in this secret purpose: Christ in you, the hope of glory"

✓ *Paul's hope & joy came from knowing Christ was working in & through him to help these Gentile Christians experience the full effect of God's secret purpose, now that they could understand it, too. To Paul, it was worth the suffering to him personally to see the church grasp the enormity of what was in store for them as Christ began to live his incredible life in them, too -*

Christ is the source of all hope, not only in making us faultless before God, but also in living the full wealth of his life in us, as well.
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CHECKPOINT No.3 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if: I'm experiencing the hope that comes from:

1) Knowing through Christ's death I am no longer alienated from God or his enemy in heart & mind anymore. I have been brought into his presence, totally reconciled to him, & totally free of all blame, fault & blemish.

2) Knowing Christ is in me, which opens up a "wealth of glory." I not only understand his secret purpose hidden for so long, I can also experience ALL the benefits of God's word AND have Christ living HIS serving heart, mind & actions in me so that even suffering becomes a joy, as it was for Paul.

It's a hope that isn't easily shaken, either, because it's firmly based on trust in Christ - & *that's because* -

Jesus Christ is the source of all wisdom & knowledge:

Colossians 1:28 - "He it is whom we proclaim. We teach everyone & instruct everyone in all the ways of wisdom, so as to present each one of you as a mature member of Christ's body. (29) To this end I am toiling strenuously with all the energy & power of Christ at work in me"

✓ *Paul gave his all to teaching everything there was to know about Christ to mature the church as members of Christ's body, knowing THIS was what Christ's power & energy was at work in him FOR -*

Colossians 2:1 - "I want you to know how strenuous are my exertions for you & the Laodiceans, & for all who have never set eyes on me. (2) My aim is to keep them in good heart & united in love, so that they may come to the full wealth of conviction which understanding brings, & grasp God's secret, which is Christ himself, (3) in whom lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom & knowledge. (4) I tell you this to make sure no one talks you into error by specious arguments. (5) I may be absent in body, but in spirit I am with you, & rejoice to see your unbroken ranks & the solid front which your faith in Christ presents"

✓ *But why was it so important to Paul to "proclaim Christ?" Because God had hidden all the treasures of wisdom & knowledge we humans could ever need in Christ. That was what the church needed to understand, so Paul did his best to keep the church in good spirits & getting along together, because in that kind of atmosphere their conviction would grow, as would their faith in Christ & their ability to stand steady & firm when others were trying to lead them into error -*

<p>Proclaiming Christ, & the wealth of wisdom & knowledge that can be found in him, was the heart & core of Paul's teaching. He worked hard at creating a positive, learning, loving atmosphere in church too, as the key to nurturing & maturing their faith & conviction.</p>

CHECKPOINT No.4 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if: I see what Christ was giving his power & energy to Paul for. It was to give him the desire & the ability to:

1) Teach everything there is to know about Christ, because Christ is God's greatest secret, & in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom & knowledge.

2) Keep the church encouraged & united in love, because it's in such an atmosphere that we learn & mature best as members of Christ's body, in our conviction, faith & ability to stand firm against error.

It was these 2 things that drove Paul to work so hard - in the hope that -

Christ is the one we lock onto:

Colossians 2:6 - "Therefore, since you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, live in union with him. (7) Be rooted in him, be built in him, grow strong in the faith as you were taught; let your hearts overflow with thankfulness. (8) Be on your guard; let no one capture your minds with hollow & delusive speculations, based on traditions of human teaching & centred on the elemental spirits of the universe & not on Christ"

✓ *Having recognized the supremacy of Christ, the next step for the church was to lock onto Christ so that they'd experience for themselves the living Christ building, strengthening & teaching them, to the point their hearts would overflow with joy & gratitude. They were also up against people pushing human teachings & other powers in the universe as being more important than Christ, which was daft -*

Colossians 2:9 - "For it is in Christ that the Godhead in all its fullness dwells embodied, (10) it is in him you have been brought to fulfillment. Every power & authority in the universe is subject to him as head. (11) In him also you were circumcised, not in a physical sense, but by the stripping away of the old nature, which is Christ's way of circumcision. (12) For you were buried with him in baptism, & in that baptism you were also raised to life with him through your faith in the active power of God, who raised him from the dead"

✓ *Why would we need anything beyond Christ when he is everything God is, he's in charge of the entire universe & he's the one God raised from the dead to fulfill his purpose in us? We need only trust in Christ, not only for stripping off our old useless nature & burying it, but for lifting us by the power of God to life as HE lives it, too -*

Christ in us is all we need because all that God is, he is, & there's no greater power in the universe than him. He's the one God raised from the dead to lift us to life with him, so lock onto Christ & trust him, never letting the useless, empty teachings of people distract us.

CHECKPOINT No.5 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if: I'm locked onto Christ, rooted, built & trusting in him because:

1) God in his fullness dwells in him. He's Lord & chief over the entire universe, actively working in our lives ever since God raised him from the dead to complete the job of stripping away our old nature & raising us to life with him.

2) Without Christ in our lives we are limited to the "elemental" powers within the universe. Without him we'd know nothing of God's power or purpose.

So, realize what we've got in Christ, enjoy it to the full, thanking God for it & making sure we aren't captivated by the emptiness of human teaching instead.

SUMMARY SO FAR -

1) Paul was delighted with the Colossians' response to God's grace because the hope stirred by that message had led to them trusting Christ & loving each other. The Spirit had given them a deep love for God, evident in their desire to live their lives as God intended, to actively do good, learn all they could about God, meet whatever came their way with patience & courage, & to thank God for their chance, even as Gentiles, to share everything God had in mind for his people.

2) And what does God have in mind for his people? It's lifting us out of this messy world into the world of his Son through his Son's death, his resurrection, his church & his power. Through his death, our release from this world is secured & our sins forgiven. We are at peace with God & brought before him completely free of blame or fault. Through his resurrection, our entrance into God's world is secured next, where the "treasures of wisdom & knowledge" & the "wealth of glory" hidden in Christ are opened up to us. Through his church, over which Christ is head as well, Christ is now putting everything in God's word into full effect in us, building our conviction, faith & ability to stand firm against error. And through Christ's supreme power over all creation, God is restoring everything in heaven & earth back to himself, paving the way through us in the church now.

3) What human teaching & tradition offer by comparison is so limited, whereas Christ isn't limited by anything. The entire universe is subject to him, & when God raised him from the dead it was to give him all the power he needed to raise us to life with him. So don't let any empty human speculation capture our imagination when we can live in union with Christ & experience the overwhelming confidence & joy of being rooted, built & strengthened by him.

Why fall for human stuff when we know God's greatest secret?- that -

God's great plan for us is being fulfilled in total in Christ:

Colossians 2:13 - "And although you were dead because of your sins and your uncircumcision, he has brought you to life with Christ. For he has forgiven us all our sins; (14) he has cancelled the bond which was outstanding against us with its legal demands; he has set it aside, nailing it to the cross. (15) There he disarmed the cosmic powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them, leading them as captives in his triumphal procession"

✓ *God's great purpose is to make us "fit to share the realm of light (1:12), bring us into the kingdom of his dear Son (1:13), & raise us to life with him (2:12)." He's lifting us from this world into his world, from the death of sin to life with Christ. And how does he do it? Entirely through Christ - first of all through Christ's death to forgive our sins & nail our guilt to the cross, & secondly through the triumph of Christ's resurrection from the dead - because when Christ rose it was to resounding victory over every opposing power & authority in the entire universe & beyond: he disarmed them, took them captive & paraded them through heaven to show that he is in charge, with all power & authority in his hands now to complete God's purpose, starting with his church, so -*

Never lose hold of Christ:

Colossians 2:16 - "Allow no one, therefore, to take you to task about what you eat or drink, or over the observance of festival, new moon, or sabbath. (17) These are no more than a shadow of what was to come; the reality is Christ's. (18) You are not to be disqualified by the decision of people who go in for self-mortification and angel-worship and access to some visionary world. Such people, bursting with the futile conceit of worldly minds, (19) lose their hold upon the head; yet it is from the head that the whole body, with all its joints and ligaments, has its needs supplied, and thus knit together grows according to God's design"

✓ *Some lose their hold on Christ because they think Christ being the source of all we need & the one growing us up according to God's design is not enough. They believe there are other powers & rituals we can tap into, that do away with our total dependency on Christ, like observing Old Testament rituals, human willpower, our own personal angels guiding us, or accessing other imaginary powers. But that's the futile pride of a worldly mind that thinks it's smarter than God & therefore refuses to step outside the shadows to discover the reality of Jesus Christ & what God designed for us through him -*

<p>God has provided for all our needs through Christ's death, resurrection & through his church. So, never lose our hold on Christ. He is reality. All else is but shadows or the delusions of conceited human minds.</p>

CHECKPOINT No.6 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if: I realize God has provided for our every need in Christ. How?

1) Through Christ's death the penalties we brought on ourselves for breaking God's law are totally wiped out, nailed to the cross & forgiven.

2) Through Christ's resurrection we are brought to life with Christ & share his triumph over all the opposing powers that caused us to sin in the first place.

3) Through Christ's church Christ supplies our needs directly & grows us up exactly according to God's design for each of us.

We're not missing out, therefore, if we aren't into Old Testament rituals, angel-worship, willpower or other imaginary powers - *because* -

We're living in Christ's world now:

Colossians 2:20 - "Did you not die with Christ and pass beyond reach of the elemental spirits of the universe? Then why behave as though you were still living the life of the world? Why let people dictate to you: (21) 'Do not handle this, do not taste that, do not touch the other' - (22) referring to things that must all perish as they are used? That is to follow human rules and regulations. (23) Such conduct may have an air of wisdom, with its forced piety, its self-mortification, and its severity to the body; but it is of no use at all in combating sensuality"

✓ *Now that we're connected directly to Christ, lifting us beyond all dependence on anything in this world, why would we think people & their strange, limited ideas have anything to offer? The idea, for instance, that we can bring our appetites under control by rules & regulations, extreme self-discipline or by acting all pious & being very severe on oneself may sound impressive but it's ludicrous, because how can you deal with spiritual problems by physical means? -*

Colossians 3:1 - "Were you not raised to life with Christ? Then aspire to the realm above, where Christ is, seated at God's right hand, (2) and fix your thoughts on that higher realm, not on this earthly life. (3) You died; and now your life lies hidden with Christ in God. (4) When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you will be revealed with him in glory"

✓ *God lifted us out of all dependence on this world & into a direct connection with Christ. The life we used to live, therefore, of constantly falling prey to our physical appetites has come to an end, it died & no longer dictates how we think & live. Christ now has us under his constant care, filling us with his incredible life, his thoughts, his nature, his spirit & his ability to curb the pull of our senses, so that one day what he's created in us will be revealed in all its beauty for all to see -*

<p>The world & its methods cannot make us into the marvellous beings Christ is making us into, as he fills us with his amazing life.</p>
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CHECKPOINT No.7 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:
I realize I live in a different world now because:

1) I died with Christ, ending my dependence on this world & its rituals, rules & regulations, none of which work anyway in curbing my appetites, & -

2) I was raised to life with Christ, lifting me into his world now where, hidden away from sight, he's forming me into something wonderful, filling me with himself & all that he is, so that one day the life he's made me into, that nothing in this world could possibly create, will be revealed at his return in all its glory - so -

Live what Christ is making us into:

Colossians 3:5 - "So put to death those parts of you which belong to the earth - fornication, independency, lust, evil desires, and the ruthless greed which is nothing less than idolatry; (6) on these divine retribution falls. (7) This is the way you yourselves once lived; (8) but now have done with rage, bad temper, malice, slander, filthy talk - banish them all from your lips! (9) Do not lie to one another, now that you have discarded the old human nature and the conduct that goes with it, (10) and have put on the new nature which is constantly being renewed in the image of its Creator and brought to know God"

✓ *The way I used to think & act is being replaced every day by how Christ thinks & acts, so that more & more I can see the beauty of what God is like compared to the typical, awful attitudes of this world. We can also see, as we pull away from our selfishness, our wrong & hurtful thoughts toward others, our bad temper & lies & all the other rotten attitudes we had, why God doesn't tolerate these attitudes either, & why he unleashes his fury on those who persist in them -*

Colossians 3:11 - "There is no question here of Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman; but Christ is all, and is in all. (12) Put on, then, garments that suit God's chosen and beloved people; compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience. (13) Be tolerant with one another and forgiving, if any of you has cause for complaint: you must forgive as the Lord forgave you. (14) Finally, to bind everything together and complete the whole, there must be love"

✓ *God has no favourites when it comes to filling his church with the spirit & nature of Christ. All who are his "chosen and beloved" can be clothed with the beauty of all that Christ is, his forgiveness, endless patience & mercy, kindness & compassion, tolerance, humility & gentleness, & especially his love -*

Every day God is more than willing to clothe all those in his church, no matter who we are, with the lovely nature & spirit of Christ, replacing all the awful attitudes of our human nature we used to have.

CHECKPOINT No.8 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:

- 1) I see what human nature is like, so full of rotten desires & hurtful actions, & -
- 2) I see what Christ's nature is like by comparison, & how Christ is now replacing my nature with his, filling us with all that he is day by day - so -

Let Christ's spirit fill our hearts, words & actions:

Colossians 3:15 - "Let Christ's peace be arbiter in your decisions, the peace to which you were called as members of a single body. Always be thankful. (16) Let the gospel of Christ dwell among you in all its richness; teach and instruct one another with all the wisdom it gives you. With psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, sing from the heart in gratitude to God. (17) Let every word and action, everything you do, be in the name of the Lord Jesus, and give thanks through him to God the Father"

✓ *Christ's nature in us gives us amazing wisdom, the ability to make peace in all our dealings with others, a heart full of gratitude to God that we love to express, & a deep desire to have our every word & action tuned to perfection by Christ. This is the richness of the gospel God would love us to experience -*

SUMMARY of Col 2:13 to 3:17 -

1) Sin left us dead but God gave us life through Christ - first of all by Christ's death granting us forgiveness & wiping out the penalty we incurred for breaking God's law, & secondly by Christ's triumphal rising from the dead giving him all the power he needs to grow us up exactly according to God's design for us. Lock onto Christ, therefore, because he is all we need.

2) Some, however, lose their hold on Christ because they think self-discipline & willpower, strict rules & regulations, looking to angels & accessing other powers work just as well in controlling our cravings. But they're all useless, they don't last & besides, when we died with Christ & rose with him, God lifted us out of our dependence on this world & into the powerful care of his Son, because only he can prepare us perfectly for eternity. We look to Christ, then, to form our lives, as daily he replaces the typical ugly attitudes of our human nature with his lovely nature.

3) God has no favourites, he wants us all to experience the richness of Christ's spirit filling our every word, thought & action, giving us wisdom, peacemaking ability, a deep thankfulness to God that we love to express, & the desire in all of us, children included, to fulfill God's will in our relationships -

- *which Paul covers next...*

Fulfilling God's will in our relationships:

Colossians 3:18 - "Wives, be subject to your husbands; that is your Christian duty. (19) Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. (20) Children, obey your parents in everything, for that is pleasing to God and is the Christian way. (21) Fathers, do not exasperate your children, in case they lose heart. (22) Slaves, give entire obedience to your earthly masters, not merely to catch their eye or curry favour with them, but with single-mindedness, out of reverence for the Lord. (23) Whatever you are doing, put your whole heart into it, as if you were doing it for the Lord and not for men, (24) knowing that there is a master who will give you an inheritance as a reward for your service. Christ is the master you must serve. (25) Wrongdoers will pay for the wrong they do; there will be no favouritism. (4:1) Masters, be just and fair to your slaves, knowing that you too have a master in heaven"

✓ *It's in the practical, everyday world of family & business relationships that Christ's spirit in us makes such a difference. Wives, for instance, willingly support their husbands; husbands are gentle & caring toward their wives; children readily comply with their parents' wishes; Dads always keep their kids encouraged; employees work hard for their employers, & employers treat their employees fairly. All of these Christ in us makes possible, so that we CAN fulfill God's will in our relationships AND have a huge impact as well on -*

Helping others discover the secret of Christ:

Colossians 4:2 - "Persevere in prayer, with minds alert and with thankful hearts; (3) and include us in your prayers, asking God to provide an opening for the gospel, that we may proclaim the secret of Christ, for which indeed I am in prison. (4) Pray that I may make the secret plain, as it is my duty to do"

✓ *Paul lived to help others discover the secret of Christ in us changing the way we think, act & treat others. It would need the church's enthusiastic support, though, not only in their prayers but also in their example -*

Colossians 4:5 - "Be wise in your dealings with outsiders, but use your opportunities to the full. (6) Let your words always be gracious, never insipid; learn how best to respond to each person you meet"

✓ *We have the chance every time we meet someone or work with them to paint a wonderful picture of the difference Christ's spirit makes, because what they see in us is a work of beauty, of exquisite wisdom, kindness & concern -*

<p>God wants us fulfilling his will in our family & business relationships & in the way we treat people all the time, so that others can see & discover what a wonderful difference Christ's spirit in a person makes.</p>
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CHECKPOINT No.9 - "Do I really understand the Gospel?" - "YES I DO" if:
I understand that Christ's spirit in us is meant to make a difference, not only in:

1) Enabling us personally to fulfill God's will in the very practical, everyday relationships we're involved in, like family & business, but also in -

2) Enabling us to help others discover the secret of Christ too, in the wisdom, kindness & concern they see in us in all our dealings with them. It is through our example (& our prayers) that we make Christ known to people - *remembering, of course, that this is -*

What we're in the church for:

Colossians 4:7 - "You will hear all my news from Tychicus, our dear brother and trustworthy helper and fellow-servant in the Lord's work. (8) I am sending him to you for this purpose, to let you know how we are and to put fresh heart into you. (9) With him comes Onesimus, our trustworthy and dear brother, who is one of yourselves. They will tell you all that has happened here. (10) Aristarchus, Christ's captive like myself, sends his greetings; so does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (you have had instructions about him; if he comes, make him welcome), (11) and Jesus Justus. Of the Jewish Christians, these are the only ones working with me for the kingdom of God, and they have been a great comfort to me. (12) Greetings from Epaphras, servant of Christ, who is one of yourselves. He prays hard for you all the time, that you may stand fast, as mature Christians, fully determined to do the will of God. (13) I can vouch for him, that he works tirelessly for you and the people at Laodicea and Hierapolis. (14) Greetings to you from our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and from Demas."

✓ *Paul had the tireless, dedicated support of many others, as determined as he was to keep in mind what they were all in the church for, to fulfill God's will -*

Colossians 4:15 - "Give our greetings to the Christians at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the congregation that meets at her house. (16) Once this letter has been read among you, see that is read also to the church at Laodicea, and that you in turn read my letter to Laodicea. (17) Give Archippus this message: 'See that you carry out fully the duty entrusted to you in the Lord's service.' (18) I add this greeting in my own hand - Paul. Remember I am in prison. Grace be with you."

✓ *Paul's letters acted as wonderful reminders that -*

<p>We exist as God's church to demonstrate the kingdom of God through the impact of Christ's life in us, not allowing anyone or anything to hinder that happening as fully as possible, all the time.</p>

CONCLUSION -

1) Epaphras had noticed the same things happening to the Colossians that Paul had noticed happening to the Galatians, that when people are taught the true gospel of God's grace & they accept it, God then opens up the hope stored in that message, gives them the Spirit & that's when miracles begin (Galatians 3:2-5, Colossians 1:5-7). What kind of miracles? According to Epaphras' report, the Spirit was stirring up love in these Colossians, love that translated into trust in Christ & love for all God's people. It was the same report wherever the gospel was being preached, too, which delighted Paul immensely. It was his unceasing prayer, therefore, that the Colossians receive all that the Spirit had in store for them, like insight into God's will, wisdom & spiritual understanding which would enable them to know God, live as God intended, do much good, & experience great joy & appreciation for all that the Father was giving them, & be given the strength, courage & patience to see them through whatever came their way. And all this from the Spirit for nothing more than hearing the gospel & believing it!

2) So what was it they heard & believed? It was a message about God rescuing us humans from death caused by sin to life with Christ, about God lifting us from the darkness of our world into the light of his Son's world, changing us from being his enemies to being at peace with him, ending our alienation from him & bringing us into his presence forgiven & without fault, & taking us from knowing nothing about his secret plan to knowing exactly what he has in mind for us.

3) And how does God accomplish all of this? Well, that's the grace of it, because he does it entirely through Jesus Christ - which he can because Jesus is everything God himself is. Jesus is the mirror image of God, the Godhead in all its fullness who, like God, existed before our universe came into being. Jesus then became the creator who made our universe, reigns supreme over it & keeps it all running. It's through him & for him, therefore, that the mess in both heaven & earth that sin created is being cleared up & all things are being restored.

4) And how is that restoration being done through Christ? It began with his death on the cross, because it's by his death that God forgives our sins, cancels the death penalty we brought on ourselves for breaking his laws & ends the enmity between us. The next step was Christ rising in triumph from the dead, the first ever to do so, & being given total supremacy over every power & authority in the universe. He is now in a position to raise human beings to life with him in his world, which he began doing through the church he created & became head of.

5) The church, then, would be the first to understand God's hidden purpose, the first to experience the full effect of all that God had in mind for his people & the first to know the power of Christ at work in them. This was the "wealth of glory" that God assigned Paul to make known & teach to the church. Paul worked extremely hard too, with all the power & energy Christ could give him, to help the church discover, grasp & experience the treasure trove of wisdom & knowledge that God had hidden away in Christ. It was important, therefore, to keep the church encouraged & at peace with one another so they could concentrate their attention on learning about this great secret called Jesus Christ, because with understanding would come conviction, faith & maturity as members of Christ's body.

6) And how does one become a wise & mature member of Christ's body? That's Christ's doing, too. When he raises us to life with him, he buries our old life (2:12) & he now becomes our life (3:4). How? By living his life in us, gradually replacing our old nature with his, so that more & more we become like him (3:10). This is what God raised him to life for, to accomplish this for us, because we are stuck with a nature that's subject to a host of problems we have no power within ourselves to control, like fornication, independence, lust, evil desires, ruthless greed, rage, bad temper, malice, slander, filthy talk & lies (3:5-9). Christ, however, "renews" us in his image, gradually developing the qualities of his nature in us like compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, peace & thankfulness, & above all, love (3:12-17). And how does Christ perform this miracle in us? Through the love the Spirit "awakens" in us (1:8). It is not by any doing of ours. He does it, not us - this, of course, being the "hope stored in the gospel" - that God in his grace does it all for us through Christ. Our part is simply believing that & never being "dislodged" from it.

7) This is why Paul encourages the Colossians to lock onto Christ & never lose their hold on him, because it's by Christ alone that we are "made fit to share the heritage of God's people in the realm of light (1:12)," that we are "brought to fulfillment (2:10)," we are "knit together according to God's design (2:19)," we come to "know God (3:10)," & one day will be "revealed with him in glory (3:4)." And only Christ can change us into his likeness (3:10-11) & take care of our every need (2:19). All we do is simply accept what God has done for us in Christ & never stop trusting Christ to do his job perfectly. That's why Paul says be "rooted" in Christ & remain firm in our hope & trust in Christ as the "active power of God" supplying us with everything we need for our eternal glory. This was the key to how the Colossians would mature as members of Christ's body, too - they would grow as their faith in Christ grew.

8) Their faith in Christ would need to grow, too, because some in the church were losing their hold on him (2:19). And why were they losing their hold? Because of the “futile conceit of (their) worldly minds (2:18).” They thought, in their superior understanding, that there were other ways of changing human behaviour, other than Christ. Were there not, for instance, other powers they could tap into, like angels? And what about their own powers, like willpower & self-discipline, or following a strict regime of rules & regulations, like the Old Testament food & Sabbath laws? There was a certain appeal to their arguments, too, in being able to impress other church members with one’s “severity to the body (2:23)” & one’s ability to access other powers. It gave them an “air of wisdom” & an edge over others in the church who didn’t have such willpower, such piousness & such intimate contact with other “visionary powers.”

9) And at times the arguments of these people must have sounded very convincing & plausible because Paul felt the need to warn the church to “be on guard (2:8)” & not let anyone talk them into error or capture their minds away from Christ. And he countered their arguments with several arguments of his own, too, like:

a) First of all, we were dead because of sin (2:13). Why, then, would we think we have the power within ourselves to change our human nature when it had already killed us?!

b) Secondly, we were a mess before we trusted in Christ (3:7). Why, then, would we think we can turn to laws & rules or other powers to strip away our old nature, combat our sensuality (2:11) & deal with the horrible state we were in (3:5-9), when they didn’t work before, did they? And -

c) Thirdly, why would Jesus raise us to life with him (3:1) if we could still depend on this world & its powers to change us? Clearly, we can’t, which is why our dependence on ourselves & all other powers died with Christ (2:20), & why Christ has now lifted us beyond the reach of, & the need for, anything from this earthly life, because only he can change us & prepare us for glory (2:20).

10) Paul was drawing some clear battle lines here. Where did they as Christians put their trust? Was it in the “active power of God (2:12)” or the “elemental spirits of the universe (2:20)?” Was it in the power & authority of Christ, or angels & other visionary powers? Was it in their own willpower & self-discipline to combat human nature, or the power of Christ living in them? Was it in rules & regulations like the Old Testament laws, or being rooted in & built by Christ? And was it in the gospel message clearly transforming their lives daily, or the delusive, hollow arguments of human tradition & teaching that would do absolutely nothing for them? Which of the two was it?

11) The choice in Paul's mind was clear. There was nothing in this earthly life that could do what Christ could do for them. That's why they'd been lifted into Christ's world where, hidden away with him, he would now mould them for eternity, fill them with himself & open up all the treasures & richness of wisdom he had to offer. No wonder Paul encouraged the Colossians to fix their hopes & aspirations on Christ, & the proof that they were on the right track would be:

a) Their "unbroken ranks" & "solid front" (2:5) when confronted with those didn't put all their trust in Christ,

b) Their determination to do God's will in word & action in every aspect of their lives (3:17) - in particular in their family relationships, their business dealings with others (3:18 to 4:1), and in the thoughtful, gracious way they treated everyone they met & knew (4:6),

c) The effect they were having on others, who could see in how Christians dealt with them personally the clear difference Christ's spirit makes in a person (4:2-6),

d) The desire they felt to get this message of hope out to others (4:3-4), of who Christ is & what he's up to, not only with his church, but the entire universe one day, too.

To understand the gospel, then, is to understand & receive the hope stored away in it (1:23), that -

1) Through Christ's death we are no longer dead because of sin, & -

2) Through Christ being raised from the dead, we are raised to life with him where he now lives his life in us, preparing us to be revealed with him in glory.

It is through us that God then shows other people what a difference his life & his spirit makes, to start them on the road to the hope, faith & love that the gospel can open up for them, too.