

# WHAT TO DO UNTIL JESUS COMES

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*By the Book™* A Chapter by  
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## Let's Begin

*Paul closes out the book of Colossians determining to forge the church's direction in the pathway God had set. What would they do until Jesus comes? The Apostle clearly puts them on the right pathway, fulfilling the mission of Jesus, a mission which would ultimately take the church into every sector of the world.*

*Given the scope of the mission, a method was needed, and Paul supplied it. The message of Jesus was for the entire world to embrace. All who believed would have eternal life. What a mission! What a Savior!*

*In this final chapter of Colossians, let's follow the outline below:*

- I. Our Mission: Reaching the World (vv. 2-6)**
- II. Our Method: Regular Witnesses (vv. 7-15)**
- III. Our Message: Revealing Jesus (vv. 16-18)**

## I. Our Mission: Reaching the World (vv. 1-6)

Paul pens his final thoughts to the Colossians. In doing so, he begins with the mission the church possesses until the end of this age. Our job is to get to those who are without the Gospel, share the good news of the Gospel, and reap the harvest before the end of time. A great mission requires not only a great amount of resources, but the resources themselves must be of the finest quality. What makes our resources so great? After completing his explanation of the revenue required for healthy Christian homes (v. 1), Paul lists three qualities about our resources to reach the world.

First, we have *prayerful* resources. The Apostle writes, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak" (vv. 2-4). Prayer is the first quality Paul lists when speaking of reaching the world. Praying Christians remain vital to the Christian mission. Elsewhere, Paul wrote, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1).

And, the prayer about which the Apostle speaks is not just any prayer. The prayer Paul urges is *continual* prayer—"continue in prayer." Paul's concern is to stay alert as we pray. We are to hold on in prayer

and not let go. Jesus spoke about the believer's continued praying. About one parable's purpose Luke wrote, "And he spake a parable unto them to *this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

In addition, prayer is also to be *watchful*. Paul exhorts us to "watch in the same" (i.e., prayer). The term means to stay awake. Soldiers were to keep a watch over the prisoners at night. Others were to keep watch over the city wall. Even so, our Lord also encouraged disciples to "watch and pray" (Matt. 26:41). The particular occasion was to avoid temptation in times of the enemies' strength and our latent weakness. Watching focuses our thoughts and keeps our minds engaged on God during prayer.

We are summoned to be *thankful* in prayer (v. 2c). Watch in prayer with "thanksgiving." In another place, Paul instructed us to always give thanks (Eph. 5:20; 2 Thess. 2:13). Of course, the Apostle had already informed the Colossians the importance of being thankful in prayer (1:3). And, praying with thanksgiving for others inevitably leads to praying for their salvation. Hence, we are to pray *evangelistically*.

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### Reflection Connection

*How careful are you about your testimony? What measures are in place to ensure your testimony remains untarnished? Are there any habits which can harm your testimony? Think deeply and contritely about your answers.*

Is evangelism not the thrust of Paul's words in verses 3-4? He writes, "Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak." Rather than being concerned about his imprisonment, Paul was concerned to free prisoners—spiritual prisoners—from the dungeon of sin. He looked for the "door of utterance" to be opened so others could hear the Gospel. Do our prayers produce the aura of evangelism? Are we concerned about the souls of others when we pray?

Second, we have *careful* resources. Note Paul's words, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" (v. 5). The Apostle's concern is the way Christians live their daily life. In other words, we need to take close watch on what we do.

For example, we must be careful about our *testimony*. We are to walk in wisdom, in guidance from the Lord. We conduct ourselves in a manner that non-believers will witness the power of Christ in our lives. Also, we are to be careful about our *time*. Wasting time is wasting life. Paul says we are to "redeem the time." That is, we are to buy up time and make the most of every opportunity to offer our testimony concerning the difference Christ makes. While God makes all our opportunities, He nevertheless expects us to take advantage of them to the fullest extent possible.

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Third, we have *graceful* resources. Here is how the Apostle puts it, "Let your speech *be* always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man (v. 6). Grace should saturate the life of every believer. Our speech cannot go forward successfully without a measure of grace. Being gracious is the *pungency* of our conversation. Like potatoes are seasoned with salt, so our words are seasoned with grace.

Even so, grace is not only the *pungency* of our conversation, but in the end, grace is the *purpose* of our conversation. People look for answers everywhere. Will they look to Christianity? Will they look to the church? Not if grace is not a part of our lifestyle, our message, and our practice.

## II. Our Method: Regular Witnesses (vv. 7-15)

Paul desires to make sure believers know what to do until Jesus returns. We first have been given a mission to reach the entire world. Now Paul tells us just who will be responsible for doing so. He knew it could not be the Apostles. From his perspective, he knew it was only a matter of a few years until, if Jesus tarried His coming, all the Apostles would be passed from the scene. Who then would take their place in taking the Gospel to the world?



### Reflection Connection

*What gifts do you possess which God can use for His glory in witness for Him? In what ways do you participate in global missions?*

Enter the church of Jesus Christ! Let us be clear at this juncture: pastors and teachers are not like the apostles nor their spiritual descendants. Evangelizing the world with the Gospel is the church's responsibility, not just the pastor's duty or any other church leader's for that matter. All Christians participate in Christ's great commission (Matt. 28:18-20). Hence, we must affirm that God's method of carrying out His mission is by all Christians—all regular witnesses in the church, witnesses who may never be noticed or recognized by the church at large.

To illustrate this principle, Paul writes, "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, *who is* a beloved brother, and a faithful minister.... With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is *one* of you. .. Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas... And Jesus, which is called Justus... Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (vv. 7-12). In this passage, Paul catalogs a list of Christian servants who may not be the most well-known in history, yet their service to Christ's Gospel bears fruit only eternity can reveal.

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Tychichus was a man with a message (cp. Eph. 6:21), while Onesimus was a man with a past who undoubtedly allowed his past to inspire others to turn to Christ (v. 9). Note also the greeters Paul mentions—Aristarchus (v. 10) who was a man with heart and Marcus, who returned to Christ after a brief period of cowardice. The names flow from Paul's memory, names of believers who labored and witnessed for the Lord Jesus. They were on mission for Him. And, they remain as inspiring examples to encourage us to be on mission with Christ as well. Christ employs every believer in His industry of building the Kingdom with souls. Are you among those who work for the Master? Who witnesses for the Master? God uses regular people. He does not need extraordinary believers. In fact, God will take ordinary men and women and make them extraordinary witnesses for Him.

### III. Our Message: Revealing Jesus (vv. 16-18)

In the final few verses Paul writes to the Colossian church, he takes the opportunity one final time to speak of the greatest privilege in the world a Christian possesses—revealing the Lord Jesus Christ. He sums up his letter like this, "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the *epistle* from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it. The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace *be* with you. Amen" (vv. 16-18).



In this brief conclusion, Paul reveals the *special message* we have in Jesus (v. 16). Not only was the letter Paul wrote to the Colossians to be read and digested among their church body, Paul instructed them to send the letter on to other church fellowships as well. This remains a subtle but solid signal the words of the Apostles were considered the Word of God. What was applicable in the Colossian church was applicable in Laodicea as well. Indeed the Word of God continues its transcendence of time and culture. God's Word then is God's Word now.

Recalling the full scope of the letter Paul wrote, the *supremacy of Christ* has been revealed (1:18). He is both Lord of creation (1:16-18) and Lord of the church (1:18). No country, continent, or church may truthfully claim Jesus Christ is not Lord. While some may claim such, their claim makes them false prophets, and therefore they stand condemned before a Holy God. Moreover, Jesus Christ's supremacy makes Him Lord of the individual Christian life (1:17). He guides His believers as sure as a shepherd guides but one sheep of his flock.

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### Reflection Connection

*Reflect upon the supremacy of Christ in your own life. What pulls your focus away from Christ? What protections do you have in place to keep your full attention on His Lordship?*

Alongside the *supremacy* of Christ is the *sufficiency* of Christ (2:3, 15). All the treasures of eternity are in Him. Even more, all the triumph of heaven is in Him (2:15). How often we go through life now even realizing Christ has already conquered Satan's realm. Finally, the *superintendence* of Christ is maintained throughout Paul's letter to the Colossians. We ought to live every day from heaven's viewpoint.

Just as we have a *special message* to proclaim, we have a *special ministry* to maintain. Paul writes of this ministry, "Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (v. 17). Believers have received an assignment from the Lord. The term "ministry" basically means service. All have a place of service in the name of the Lord. Every Christian is a minister (Eph. 4:12). Our challenge is to find out specifically where we fit in God's service. Furthermore, according to Paul, we have an obligation to "fulfill it." We are to carry out the ministry of the Lord. It is our responsibility. No one can fill the task assigned to us. It belongs to us, and we must fulfill it.

Finally, we have a *special mark* to wear. Believers wear only the brand of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul signed off his letter with his personal handwriting. While sounding strange, this was a custom in his day. A secretary wrote much of the Apostle's writings at his dictation. Chains were on Paul's hands, but grace was in Paul's heart as he penned this last letter. Grace was ever the mark of true ministry in Christ Jesus.



### Wrap Up

*Colossians is the great Christology Paul left for the church. From beginning to the end, Paul lifts up Jesus Christ as Lord supreme. The doctrinal focus, therefore, has proven to be indispensable for keeping the church's belief pure. Also, the practical principles he leaves us guides our lives each and every day.*

### Golden Greek Nugget

Paul exhorts the Colossian believers to offer perpetual prayer before heaven's throne, specifically requesting them to ask God on his behalf that a "door of utterance" be opened to speak "the mystery of Christ" even as he awaits trial in a Roman dungeon (v. 3; cp. 1:26-27). The Greek word translated as "mystery" is *mystērion*, which in turn comes from another Greek word literally meaning "one initiated." In the first century, there were religious groups known as "mystery religions" which counted secret knowledge about spiritual matters a trademark of faith.

Gnosticism was one such religion and in many sectors posed a grave danger to the Christian faith. Many scholars attribute 1 John as a direct response by the Apostle to the influence Gnosticism had gained among some of the churches. Even so, Paul did not use the term in Colossians as "secret knowledge." In fact, it is just the opposite (1:26-27). While God's salvation plan may have been hidden in the past, He has made it fully known through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence, Paul wanted the doors of opportunity swung wide open everywhere so he could share the good news.

