

English: Translation Notes for Colossians

Formatted for Translators

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Notes: English ULB Translation Notes

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Colossians 1 General Notes

Structure and formatting

As in a typical letter, Paul begins his letter in verses 1-2 by introducing Timothy and himself to the Christians in Colossae. Paul writes much of this chapter around two subjects: who Christ is, and what Christ has done for the Christian.

Special concepts in this chapter

Secret truth

Paul refers to a "secret truth" in this chapter. The role of the church in the plans of God was once unknown. But God has now revealed it. Part of this involves the Gentiles having equal standing with the Jews in the plans of God. (See: reveal)

Important figures of speech in this chapter

Images for Christian living

Paul uses many different images to describe Christian living. In this chapter, he uses the images of "walking" and "bearing fruit." (See: fruit)

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Paradox

A paradox is a true statement that appears to describe something impossible. Verse 24 is a paradox: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you." People do not usually rejoice when they suffer. But in verses 25-29 Paul explains why his suffering is good. ([Colossians 1:24](#))

Links:

[Colossians 1:1 Notes](#) [Colossians intro](#)

Colossians 1:1

General Information:

Though this letter is from Paul and Timothy to the Colossian believers, later in the letter Paul makes it clear that he is the writer. Most likely Timothy was with him and wrote the words down as Paul spoke. Throughout this letter the words "we," "our," and "ours" include the Colossians unless noted otherwise. The words "you," "your," and "yours" refer to the Colossian believers and so are plural unless noted otherwise.

an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God

"whom God chose to be an apostle of Christ Jesus"

Colossians 1:2

General Information:

This page has intentionally been left blank.

Colossians 1:3

We give ... our Lord ... we always

These words do not include the Colossians.

Colossians 1:4

We have heard

Paul is excluding his audience.

your faith in Christ Jesus

"your belief in Christ Jesus"

Colossians 1:5

because of the hope reserved for you in heaven

Here "hope" stands for what the believer can confidently expect, that is, the things that God has promised to do for all believers. These things are spoken of as if they were physical objects that God was keeping in heaven for the believers to possess later. Alternate translation: "because of what you hope for that is reserved for you in heaven" or "because you are confident that God, who is in heaven, will do the many good things that he has promised you"

the word of truth, the gospel

Possible meanings are 1) "the message about the truth, the

gospel" or 2) "the true message, the gospel."

Colossians 1:6

this gospel is bearing fruit and is growing

"Fruit" here is a metaphor for "result" or "outcome."

Alternate translation: "This gospel is having good results, more and more" or "This gospel is having increasing results"

in all the world

This is a generalization referring to the part of the world that they knew about. Alternate translation: "throughout the world"

the grace of God in truth

"the true grace of God"

Colossians 1:7

our beloved ... our behalf

The word "our" does not include the Colossians.

gospel as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant, who

"gospel. It is exactly what you learned from Epaphras, who is our beloved fellow servant and who" or "gospel. It is exactly what Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant, taught you. He"

Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf

Here "on our behalf" means that Epaphras was doing work for Christ that Paul himself would have done if he were not in prison.

Epaphras

the man who preached the gospel to the people in Colossae

Colossians 1:8

to us

The word "us" does not include the Colossians.

your love in the Spirit

Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit as if he were a place in which the believers were located. Alternate translation: "how the

Holy Spirit has enabled you to love believers"

Colossians 1:9

Connecting Statement:

Because the Spirit has enabled them to love others, Paul prays for them and tells them here how he prays for them.

Because of this love

"Because the Holy Spirit has enabled you to love other believers"

we heard ... we have not stopped ... We pray

The word "we" does not include the Colossians.

from the day we heard this

"from the day Epaphras told us these things"

that you will be filled with the knowledge of his will

Paul speaks of the Colossian believers as though they were containers. Alternate translation: "that God will fill you with what you need to know so that you can do his will"

in all wisdom and spiritual understanding

"so that the Holy Spirit will make you wise and able to understand what God wants you to do"

Colossians 1:10

that you will walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord and that pleases him

Walking here signifies behavior in life. Alternate

translation: "that you will live as God expects you to and so please him"

by bearing fruit in every good work and growing

Paul is speaking of the Colossian believers as if they were trees or plants that grow and bear fruit. Alternate

translation: "by making sure that all of your good works please God and people and growing"

growing in the knowledge of God

"always getting to know God better" or "always learning more about God"

Colossians 1:11

General Information:

This page has intentionally been left blank.

Colossians 1:12

made you able to have a share

"allowed you to share"

made you able

Here Paul is focusing on his readers as receivers of God's blessings. But he does not mean that he himself has no share in those blessings.

inheritance

Receiving what God has promised believers is spoken of as if it were inheriting property and wealth from a family member.

in light

This idea is opposite to the idea of the dominion of darkness in the next verse. Alternate translation: "in the glory of his presence"

Colossians 1:13

Connecting Statement:

Paul talks about the ways in which Christ is excellent.

He has rescued us

"God has rescued us"

the dominion of darkness

"Darkness" here is a metaphor for evil. Alternate

translation: "the evil forces that controlled us"

his beloved Son

"Son" is an important title for Jesus, the Son of God.

Colossians 1:14

General Information:

This page has intentionally been left blank.

Colossians 1:15

He is the image of the invisible God

"His Son is the image of the invisible God." Here "image"

does not mean a representation of something that is visible.

Instead, "image" here means that by knowing the Son, we learn what God the Father is like.

the firstborn of all creation

The expression "firstborn" does not refer to when Jesus was born. Instead, it refers to his position as the eternal Son of God the Father. In this sense, "firstborn" is a metaphor meaning "most important." Jesus is the most important and the unique Son of God. Alternate translation: "God's Son, the most important one over all creation"

of all creation

The noun "creation" can be translated with a verb.

Alternate translation: "over all that God created"

Colossians 1:16

For in him all things were created

Here "him" refers to the Son. This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "For in him God created all things"

all things were created through him and for him

Here "him" refers to the Son. This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "God created all things through him and for him"

Colossians 1:17

He himself is before all things

"It is he who existed before all things"

in him all things hold together

Paul is speaking here of the Son controlling all things as if he were physically holding them together. "he holds

everything together"

Colossians 1:18

He is the head

"Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the head"

He is the head of the body, the church

Paul speaks of Jesus's position over the church as if he were the head on the human body. As the head rules the body, so does Jesus rule the church.

the beginning

"the originating authority." He is the first chief or founder.

firstborn from among the dead

Jesus is the first person to die and come back to life, never to die again.

Colossians 1:19

General Information:

This page has intentionally been left blank.

Colossians 1:20

the Son

This is an important title for Jesus, the Son of God.

through the blood of his cross

"by means of the blood Jesus shed on the cross"

the blood of his cross

Here "blood" stands for the death of Christ on the cross.

whether things on earth or things in heaven

This phrase explains what "all things" means. Some languages might prefer to put it closer to "all things."

Colossians 1:21

Connecting Statement:

Paul makes it clear that God has now revealed that Christ exchanges the sin of Gentile believers for his holiness.

At one time you also

"There was a time when you Colossian believers also" were alienated

were no longer living in loving relationship with God
Colossians 1:22

blameless, and above accusation

Paul uses two concepts, "blameless" and "above accusation," that mean almost the same thing to emphasize the idea of perfection. Alternate translation: "holy and perfect"

before him

This expression of location stands for "in God's view" or "in God's mind"

Colossians 1:23

not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you heard

To be moved away from the hope of the gospel is a metaphor meaning to stop hoping in what God promised in the gospel. Alternate translation: "continuing in the hope of the gospel that you heard" or "continuing to hope in the promises of God that you heard about in the gospel"

not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you heard

The hope of the gospel is the confident expectation that God will do what the gospel teaches he will do. Alternate translation: "continuing to confidently expect what is promised in the gospel"

which was proclaimed

This can be translated with an active phrase. Alternate translation: "which believers proclaimed"

to every person created under heaven

God created everyone. The phrase "under heaven" is a metonym for in the world. Alternate translation: "to every person in the world"

the gospel of which I, Paul, became a servant

Paul was a servant of God. Alternate translation: "the gospel that I, Paul, serve God by proclaiming"

Colossians 1:24

I fill up in my flesh what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ

Paul speaks about the suffering that he continues to experience. He may be acknowledging here that there is much suffering that he and all other Christians must endure before Christ comes again, and that Christ in a spiritual sense joins with them in experiencing these hardships. Paul certainly does not mean that Christ's sufferings alone were not enough to provide salvation for the believers.

I fill up in my flesh

Paul speaks of his body as if it were a container that could hold suffering.

for the sake of his body, which is the church

Paul often speaks of the church, the group of all Christian believers, as if it were Christ's body.

Colossians 1:25

to fulfill the word of God

This means to bring about the purpose of God's gospel message, which is that it be preached and believed. "Word of God" here is a metonym for the message from God.

Alternate translation: "to be obedient to what God has instructed"

Colossians 1:26

This is the mystery that was hidden

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation:

"This is the mystery that God had hidden"

for ages and for generations

The words "ages" and "generations" refer to the time period from the creation of the world until the time when the gospel was preached.

now has been revealed to God's holy people

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation:

"now God has revealed it to his holy people"

Colossians 1:27

the riches of the glory of this mystery

Paul speaks of the value of this mystery about God as if it were a treasure of material wealth. Alternate translation: "the greatness of the glory of this mystery"

which is Christ in you

The mystery that God has made known is "Christ in you."

Paul speaks of believers as if they were containers in which Christ is present. This is one of his ways of expressing the union of the believers with Christ. Alternate translation: "which is that Christ is in you" or "which is that Christ is united to you"

the hope of glory

The fact that Christ is in believers gives believers hope that they will share in God's glory. Alternate translation: "so you can confidently expect to share in God's glory" or "so you can confidently wait for God's glory"

Colossians 1:28

We proclaim ... we may present

These instances of "we" include Paul and his companions but do not include the Colossians.

so that we may present every person

You may need to make explicit to whom they will present every person. Alternate translation: "so that we may present to God every person"

Colossians 1:29

General Information:

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Chapter 2

Colossians 2 General Notes

Special concepts in this chapter

Circumcision and baptism

In verses 11-12, Paul uses both the old covenant sign of circumcision and the new covenant sign of baptism to show how

Christians are united with Christ and freed from sin.

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Flesh

This is a complex issue. "Flesh" is possibly a metaphor for our sinful nature. Paul is not teaching that the physical part of man is sinful. Paul appears to be teaching that, while Christians are alive ("in the flesh"), we will continue to sin. But our new nature will be fighting against our old nature. Paul also uses "flesh" in this chapter to refer to the physical body.

Implicit information

Paul mentions several issues in this chapter that imply information about the context of the church in Colossae. It is best to allow the text to remain uncertain over the actual details.

Links:

[Colossians 2:1 Notes](#)

Colossians 2:1

Connecting Statement:

Paul continues to encourage the believers in Colossae and Laodicea to understand that Christ is God and that he lives in believers, so they should live in the same way they received him.

how great a struggle I have had for you

Paul has exerted much effort in developing their purity and their understanding of the gospel.

Laodicea

This was a city very close to Colossae where there was another church for which Paul was praying.

as many as have not seen my face in the flesh

Here "face in the flesh" represents the person as a whole.

Alternate translation: "all those who have never seen me personally" or "all those whom I have never met face to face"

Colossians 2:2

so that their hearts

Paul includes the Colossians even though he uses a different pronoun. Alternate translation: "so that their hearts and yours"

brought together

This means brought together in a close relationship.

all the riches of full assurance of understanding

Paul speaks of a person who is completely sure that the good news is true as though that person were rich in physical things.

the mystery of God

This is knowledge that can be revealed only by God.

that is, Christ

Jesus Christ is the mystery revealed by God.

Colossians 2:3

In him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden

Only Christ can reveal God's true wisdom and knowledge.

This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation:

"God has hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in Christ"

the treasures of wisdom and knowledge

Paul speaks of God's wisdom and knowledge as if they were material wealth. Alternate translation: "the very precious wisdom and knowledge"

wisdom and knowledge

These words mean basically the same thing here. Paul uses them together to emphasize that all spiritual understanding comes from Christ.

Colossians 2:4

trick

This means to cause someone to believe something that is not true, so he acts on that belief, and suffers harm as a result.

persuasive speech

speech that will make people change what they believe

Colossians 2:5

not with you in the flesh

The person's flesh, or physical body, is a metonym for the person. Alternate translation: "not physically present with you"

I am with you in spirit

Being with someone in spirit is a metaphor for thinking continually about that person. Alternate translation: "I continually think about you"

good order

the proper way of doing things

the strength of your faith

"how nothing and no one can cause you to stop believing"

Colossians 2:6

walk in him

Walking on a path is a metaphor for how a person lives his life. The words "in him" refer to being in close relationship with Christ and so doing what pleases him. Alternate translation: "live your lives the way he wants you to" or "live so that people can see that you belong to him"

Colossians 2:7

Be rooted ... be built ... be established ... abound

These words explain what it means to "walk in him."

Be rooted in him

Paul speaks of a person with true faith in Christ as if that person were a tree growing in solid ground with deep roots.

be built on him

Paul speaks of a person with true faith in Christ as if that person were a building that has a strong foundation.

be established in faith

"trust in Jesus for everything"

just as you were taught

This is best stated without naming or otherwise calling attention to the teacher, who was Epaphras (Colossians 1:7). Alternate translation: "just as you learned" or "just as they taught you" or "just as he taught you"

abound in thanksgiving

Paul speaks of thanksgiving as if it were objects that a

person could obtain more of. Alternate translation: "be very thankful to God"

Colossians 2:8

Connecting Statement:

Paul urges the believers to be careful not to turn to the words and rules of others because nothing can add to the fullness of God that believers have in Christ.

See that

"Make sure that"

captures you

Paul speaks of the way a person can believe false teachings philosophy religious doctrines and beliefs that are not from God's word but are based on man's thoughts about God and life empty deceit

Paul speaks of false ideas that produce nothing and so are without value as though they are containers with nothing in them.

the tradition of men ... the elemental spirits of the world

The "tradition of men" may refer to Jewish traditions, while "the elemental spirits of the world" refers to pagan (Gentile) belief systems. Both of these are worthless.

the elemental spirits of the world

Possible meanings are 1) spiritual powers that some people thought control what happens on earth, or 2) the laws or moral principles of the world.

Colossians 2:9

in him all the fullness of God lives in bodily form

"God's total nature lives in physical form in Christ"

Colossians 2:10

You have been filled in him

Paul speaks of people as though they were containers into which God has placed Christ. Alternate translation: "You are made complete in Christ"

who is the head over every ruler and authority

Christ is the ruler over every other ruler

Colossians 2:11

In him you were also circumcised

Paul is speaking of those who belong to Christ as if they were inside Christ's body. This can also be made active. Alternate translation: "When you joined the church in baptism, God circumcised you"

a circumcision not done by humans

With this metaphor, Paul says that God has made Christian believers acceptable to himself in a way that reminded him of circumcision, the ceremony through which Hebrew male babies were added to the community of Israel.

Colossians 2:12

You were buried with him in baptism

Paul speaks of being baptized and joining the assembly of believers as if it were being buried with Christ. This can be made active. Alternate translation: "God buried you with Christ when you joined the church in baptism"

in him you were raised up

With this metaphor, Paul speaks of the new spiritual life of believers that God made possible by making Christ come alive again. This can be made active. Alternate translation: "because you have joined yourself to Christ, God raised you up" or "in him God caused you to live again"

you were raised up

Here to raise up is an idiom for causing someone who has died to become alive again. This can be stated in active form. Alternate translation: "God raised you up" or "God caused you to live again"

Colossians 2:13

When you were dead

Paul speaks of unresponsiveness to God as if it were death. Alternate translation: "When you Colossian believers were unable to respond to God"

you were dead ... he made you alive

With this metaphor Paul speaks of coming into new spiritual life as if it were coming back to life physically. dead in your trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh

You were dead on two accounts: 1) you were spiritually dead, living a life of sin against Christ and 2) you were not circumcised according to the law of Moses.

forgave us all of our trespasses

"he forgave us, both us Jews and you Gentiles, of all our trespasses"

Colossians 2:14

He blotted out the written record of debts that was hostile to us

Paul speaks of God forgiving our sins as if God were forgiving a debt that we owe him.

blotted out the written record

When someone blots out words, they cover the words with ink so that no one can read them.

that was hostile to us

"that was opposed to us"

Colossians 2:15

made a public spectacle of them

In Roman times, it was common practice for the Roman armies to have a victory parade when they returned home, displaying all the prisoners they had captured and goods they had obtained. God was victorious over the evil powers and authorities.

by the cross

Here "the cross" stands for Christ's death on the cross.

Colossians 2:16

in eating or in drinking

The law of Moses included what one could eat and drink. "for what you eat or what you drink"

about a festival or a new moon, or about Sabbath days

The law of Moses specified the days to celebrate, to worship, and to offer sacrifice. "for the way you celebrate festivals or new moons or the Sabbath"

Colossians 2:17

These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance is Christ

A shadow shows the shape of an object, but it is not the object itself. In a similar way, the festivals, celebrations, and Sabbaths show us something about how God would save people, but those things do not save people. The savior is Christ. Alternate translation: "These are like a shadow of what would happen, but the reality is Christ" or "These are like a shadow of the savior who would come, but the savior is Christ"

Colossians 2:18

Let no one ... judge you out of your prize

Here Paul refers to false teachers as if they were corrupt

judges at an athletic contest who would unjustly disqualify the believers from winning the prizes they deserve, and he speaks of Christ saving a person as if Christ were giving a prize to the winner of such a contest. Alternate translation: "Let no one ... disqualify you from winning a prize"

who wants humility

The word "humility" is a metonym for actions one does to make others think that one is humble. Alternate translation: "who wants you to do things to show that you are humble"

enters into the things he has seen

Here Paul speaks about people who claim to have dreams and visions from God and who talk proudly about them.

becomes puffed up for no reason by his fleshly thinking

Here Paul says that sinful ways of thinking make a person arrogant. Alternate translation: "puffs himself up for no reason by means of his fleshly thinking"

puffed up

Here a person who boasts is spoken of as if he were an object into which someone had blown air to make it larger than it should be.

his fleshly thinking

Here the idea of flesh stands for the sinful human nature. "the sinful thoughts he naturally thinks"

Colossians 2:19

He does not hold on to the head

A person not trusting in Christ is spoken of as if they do not hold firmly to the head. Christ is spoken of as if he were the head of a body. Alternate translation: "He does not firmly grasp Christ, who is like the head of a body" or "He does not cling to Christ, who is like the head of a body"

It is from the head that the whole body throughout its joints and ligaments is supplied and held together

Paul speaks of the church, which is ruled and empowered by Christ, as if it were a human body. Alternate translation:

"It is from the head that God supplies the whole body throughout its joints and ligaments and holds it together"

Colossians 2:20

If you died together with Christ to the elemental spirits of the world
A believer is spiritually united with Christ. As Christ died,

the believer has died to the elemental spirits of the world. This is a metaphor for no longer responding to the elemental spirits of the world. The believer is no longer controlled by them.

the elemental spirits of the world

Possible meanings are 1) spiritual powers that some people thought control what happens on earth, or 2) the laws or moral principles of the world. See how you translated this in Colossians 2:8.

live as obligated to the world

"think you must obey the desires of the world"

the world

the thoughts, desires, and assumptions of the sinful majority of the world's people

Colossians 2:21

"Do ... touch?"

The rhetorical question that begins with the words "why do you live as obligated to the world" in verse 20 ends here.

Paul uses this question to rebuke the Colossians for following the false beliefs of the world. "you should not live as obligated to the world: 'Do ... touch!'"

"Do not handle, nor taste, nor touch"

Paul is quoting what other people have been telling the Colossians and using a rhetorical question to challenge them. Alternate translation: "why do you believe them when they say, 'Do not handle, nor taste, nor touch'?" or "you should not obey them when they say, 'Do not handle, nor taste, nor touch'"

Colossians 2:22

General Information:

This page has intentionally been left blank.

Colossians 2:23

These rules have the appearance of wisdom, with their self-made religion and humility and severe treatment of the body

"These rules seem wise to unbelieving people because they allow those who follow them to appear humble because they hurt their own bodies"

have no value against the indulgence of the flesh

"do not help you stop following your human desires"

Chapter 3

Colossians 3 General Notes

Structure and formatting

The second part of this chapter parallels Ephesians 5 and 6.

Special concepts in this chapter

Old and new self

The old and new self mean the same as the old and new man. The term "old man" probably refers to the sinful nature with which a person is born. The "new man" is the new nature or new life that God gives a person after they come to believe in Christ. (See: sin and faith)

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Character

Many of the things Paul encourages his readers to pursue or avoid are not actions but character qualities. Because of this, they may be difficult to translate.

"The things above"

Where God dwells is often pictured as being located "above." Paul says to "seek the things above" and to "think about the things above." He is implying Christians should seek and think about heavenly and godly things.

Links:

[Colossians 3:1 Notes](#)

Colossians 3:1

Connecting Statement:

Paul warns the believers that because they are one with Christ, they ought not do certain things.

If then

This is an idiom that means "because."

God has raised you with Christ

Here to raise up is an idiom for causing someone who has died to become alive again. Possible meanings are 1) because God has caused Christ to come alive again, God has already given the believers in Colossae new spiritual life. Alternate translation: "God has given you new life because you belong to Christ" or 2) because God has caused Christ to come alive again, the believers in Colossae can know that after they die they will live with Christ, and Paul can speak of the believers living again as if it has already happened. Alternate translation: "you can be sure that God will give you life as he has caused Christ to come alive again"

things above

"things in heaven"

where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God

To sit at the "right hand of God" is a symbolic action of receiving great honor and authority from God. Alternate translation: "where Christ is sitting in the place of honor beside God" or "where Christ is sitting in the place of honor at God's right side"

Colossians 3:2

General Information:

This page has intentionally been left blank.

Colossians 3:3

For you have died

As Christ actually died, so God counts the Colossian believers as having died with Christ.

your life is hidden with Christ in God

Paul speaks of people's lives as if they were objects that can be hidden in containers and speaks of God as if he were a container. Alternate translation: Possible meanings are 1) "it is as though God has taken your life and concealed it with Christ in God's presence" or 2) "only God knows what your true life really is, and he will reveal it when he reveals Christ"

Colossians 3:4

Christ appears ... you will also appear

Another possible meaning is "Christ is revealed ... you will also be revealed," which can be translated in active form. Alternate translation: "God reveals Christ ... he will also reveal you"

who is your life

Christ is the one who gives spiritual life to the believer.

Colossians 3:5

the members that are on earth

The word "members" here refers to parts of a person's nature. Being "on earth" or being worldly is a metaphor for being sinful. The rest of the verse is a list of sinful "members" or behaviors. Alternate translation: "the earthly

parts of your nature" or "the parts of your nature that are worldly"

uncleanness

"impure behavior"

passion

"lust" or "extremely strong desires"

greed, which is idolatry

"greed, which is the same thing as idolatry" or "do not be greedy because that is the same as worshiping idols"

Colossians 3:6

wrath of God

God's anger against those who do evil as shown by what he does to punish them.

the sons of disobedience

This is an idiom that means they were characterized by disobedience. The abstract noun "disobedience" can be stated as a verb. Alternate translation: "disobedient people" or "people who disobey him"

Colossians 3:7

It is in these things that you also once walked

Paul speaks of the way a person behaves as if it were a road or path a person walks on. Alternate translation: "These are the things you used to do"

when you lived in them

Possible meanings are 1) "when you practiced these things" or 2) "when you lived among the people who disobey God"

Colossians 3:8

evil intentions

"desire to do wicked deeds"

slander

speech used to hurt others by saying untrue things about them

obscene speech

words that do not belong in polite conversation

from your mouth

Here "mouth" is a metonym for talk. "in your talk"

Colossians 3:9

Connecting Statement:

Paul continues to tell the believers how to live and reminds them that Christians should treat everyone according to the same standard.

you have taken off the old man with its practices

Here Paul is speaking of a Christian's rejecting his old sinful life as if it were an old garment that he takes off in order to put on a new garment. It was very common for Israelites such as Paul to speak of moral qualities as if they were pieces of clothing.

Colossians 3:10

and you have put on the new man

Here Paul is speaking of a Christian's rejecting his old sinful life as if it were an old garment that he takes off

the image

This refers to Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:11

there is no Greek or Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian,

Scythian, slave, freeman

These terms are examples of the categories of people that Paul says do not matter for God. God sees every person alike, not by race, religion, nationality, or social status. Alternate translation: "race, religion, culture, and social status do not matter"

barbarian

a foreigner who does not know local customs

Scythian

This is someone from the land of Scythia, which was outside the Roman Empire. Greeks and Romans used this word for someone who grew up in a place where everyone did wicked things all the time.

Christ is all, and is in all

Nothing is excluded or left out of the rule of Christ.

Alternate translation: "Christ is all important and lives in all his people"

Colossians 3:12

as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved

This can be made active. Alternate translation: "as those whom God has chosen for himself, whom he desires to see live for him alone, and whom he loves"

put on a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience

The "heart" is a metaphor for feelings and attitudes. Here it is spoken of as if it had certain feelings and attitudes, and as if it were clothing to wear. Alternate translation: "have a merciful, kind, humble, gentle, and patient heart" or "be merciful, kind, humble, gentle, and patient"

Colossians 3:13

Bear with one another

"Be patient with one another" or "Accept each other even when you disappoint each other"

Be gracious to each other

"Treat others better than they deserve to have you to treat them"

has a complaint against

The abstract noun "complaint" can be stated as "complain."

Alternate translation: "has a reason to complain against"

Colossians 3:14

have love, which is the bond of perfection

Here "bond of perfection" is a metaphor for something that causes perfect unity among people. Alternate translation: "love one another because doing so will unite you perfectly together."

Colossians 3:15

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts

Paul speaks of the peace that Christ gives as if it were a ruler. Possible meanings are 1) "Do everything so that you can have peaceful relationships with each other" or 2) "Allow God to give you peace in your heart"

in your hearts

Here "hearts" is a metonym for a people's minds or inner beings. Alternate translation: "in your minds" or "inside of you"

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ live in you richly

Paul speaks of Christ's word as if it were a person capable of living inside other people. "Word of Christ" here is a metonym for the teachings of Christ. Alternate translation:

"Be obedient to the instructions of Christ" or "Always trust Christ's promises"

singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs

"singing all sorts of songs to praise God." Some interpreters believe that "psalms," "hymns," and "spiritual songs" all refer to different psalms in the book of Psalms.

psalms

These are probably songs from the Old Testament book of Psalms that Christians sang.

with thankfulness in your hearts

Here "hearts" is a metonym for people's minds or inner beings. Alternate translation: "with thankfulness in your minds" or "being thankful"

Colossians 3:17

in word or in deed

"in speaking or in acting"

in the name of the Lord Jesus

Acting in the name of a person here is a metonym for acting to help other people think well of that person. Alternate translation: "to honor the Lord Jesus" or "so that others will know you belong to the Lord Jesus and will think well of him" or "as if the Lord Jesus himself were doing it"

through him

Possible meanings are 1) because he has done great deeds or 2) because he has made it possible for people to speak to God and so give him thanks.

Colossians 3:18

Connecting Statement:

Paul begins to give special instructions to wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, and masters.

Wives, submit to

"Wives, obey"

it is appropriate

"it is proper" or "it is right"

Colossians 3:19

do not be bitter against

"do not be harsh with" or "do not be angry at"

Colossians 3:20

General Information:

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Colossians 3:21

do not provoke your children

"do not needlessly make your children angry"

Colossians 3:22

obey your masters according to the flesh

"obey your human masters"

things, not with eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with a sincere heart "things. Do not obey only when your master is watching, as though you need only to please people, but be sincere" with a sincere heart

"Heart" here is a metonym for a person's thoughts or intentions. Alternate translation: "with all honest intentions" or "with sincerity"

Colossians 3:23

as to the Lord

"as you would work for the Lord"

Colossians 3:24

the reward of the inheritance

"the inheritance as your reward"

inheritance

Receiving what God has promised believers is spoken of as if it were inheriting property and wealth from a family member.

Colossians 3:25

anyone who does unrighteousness will receive the penalty

The phrase "receive the penalty" means to be punished.

Alternate translation: "anyone who does unrighteousness will be punished" or "God will punish anyone who does what is unrighteous"

who does unrighteousness

who actively does wrong of any kind

there is no partiality

The abstract noun "partiality" can be expressed with the verb "favor." To favor some people is to judge them by

different standards so the result is better for them than for others who do the same actions. Alternate translation: "God does not favor anyone" or "God judges everyone by the same standard"

Chapter 4

Colossians 4 General Notes

Structure and formatting

[Colossians 4:1](#) appears to belong with the topics of Chapter 3 instead of Chapter 4.

Special concepts in this chapter

"In my own hand"

It was common in the ancient Near East for the author to speak and someone else to write down the words. Many of the New Testament letters were written this way. Paul wrote the final greeting himself.

Other possible translation difficulties in this chapter

Secret truth

Paul refers to a "secret truth" in this chapter. The role of the church in the plans of God was once unknown. But God has now revealed it. Part of this involves the Gentiles having equal standing with the Jews in the plans of God. (See: reveal)

Links:

[Colossians 4:1 Notes](#)

Colossians 4:1

Connecting Statement:

After speaking to masters, Paul ends his special instructions to the different kinds of believers in the church at Colossae.

right and fair

These words mean almost the same thing and are used to emphasize the things that are morally correct.

you also have a Master in heaven

Paul implies that God, as the Master in heaven, will give his servants what is right and fair. This could be blessing for the earthly master who treats his servants kindly or punishment for the earthly master who treats his servants unkindly. Alternate translation: "you also have a Master, who is God in heaven"

Colossians 4:2

Connecting Statement:

Paul continues to give instructions to believers on how to live and speak.

Continue steadfastly in prayer

"Keep praying faithfully" or "Keep praying consistently"

Colossians 4:3

General Information:

Here the word "us" refers to Paul and Timothy but not the Colossians.

God would open a door to us

Opening a door for someone is a metaphor for giving that person the opportunity to do something. Alternate translation: "God would provide opportunities for us"

open a door to us for the word

"make an opportunity for us to preach his message"

the mystery of Christ

This refers to the gospel of Jesus Christ, which was not understood before Christ came.

for which also I have been in chains

Here "in chains" is a metonym for being in prison, though Paul probably also was physically attached to a chain. Paul was in chains because he told people about the mystery of Christ. Alternate translation: "It is for proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ that I am now in prison"

Colossians 4:4

Pray that I may make it clear

"Pray that I might be able to speak the message of Jesus Christ clearly"

Colossians 4:5

Walk in wisdom toward those outside

The idea of walking is often used for the idea of conducting one's life. Alternate translation: "Live in such a way that those who are not believers will see that you are wise"

redeem the time

To "redeem" something means to restore it to its rightful owner. Here time is spoken of as something that can be restored and used to serve God. Alternate translation: "do the best things you can with your time" or "put the time to its best use"

Colossians 4:6

Let your words always be with grace. Let them be seasoned with salt Food with salt is a metaphor for words that teach others and that others enjoy hearing. Alternate translation: "Let your conversation always be gracious and attractive"

so that you may know how you should answer

"so that you may know how to answer questions from anyone about Jesus Christ" or "so that you may be able to

treat every person well"

Colossians 4:7

Connecting Statement:

Paul closes with special instructions about certain people as well as greetings to and from individual believers.

all the things concerning me

"everything that has been happening to me"

fellow slave

"fellow servant." Though Paul is a free man, he sees himself as a servant of Christ and sees Tychicus as a fellow servant.

Colossians 4:8

about us

These words do not include the Colossians.

may encourage your hearts

The heart was thought to be the center of many emotions.

Alternate translation: "may encourage you"

Colossians 4:9

General Information:

Onesimus was a slave of Philemon in Colossae. He had stolen money from Philemon and run away to Rome where he became a Christian through the ministry of Paul. Now Tychicus and Onesimus are the ones bringing Paul's letter to Colossae along with a letter from Paul to Philemon asking him to send Onesimus back to Paul.

the faithful and beloved brother

Paul calls Onesimus a fellow Christian and servant of Christ.

They will make known

"Tychicus and Onesimus will make known"

everything that has happened here

All that is taking place where Paul is currently living.

Tradition says Paul was in Rome under house arrest or in prison at this time.

Colossians 4:10

Aristarchus

He was in prison with Paul in Ephesus when Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians.

if he comes

"if Mark comes"

Colossians 4:11

Jesus who is called Justus

This is a man who also worked with Paul.

These alone of the circumcision are my fellow workers for the kingdom of God

Paul uses "circumcision" here to refer to Jews because, under the Old Testament law, all male Jews had to be circumcised. Alternate translation: "These three men are the only Jewish believers working with me to proclaim God as king through Christ Jesus"

These alone of the circumcision

"These men—Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus—alone of the circumcision"

Colossians 4:12

Epaphras

Epaphras was the man who had preached the good news to the people in Colossae (Colossians 1:7).

one of you

"from your city" or "your fellow townsman"

a slave of Christ Jesus

"a committed disciple of Christ Jesus"

always strives for you in prayer

"earnestly prays for you"

you may stand complete and fully assured

"you may stand mature and confident"

Colossians 4:13

General Information:

Laodicea and Hierapolis were towns close to Colossae.

Colossians 4:14

Demas

This man was one of Paul's co-workers.

Colossians 4:15

brothers

Here this means fellow Christians, including both men and women.

in Laodicea

a city very close to Colossae where there was also a church

Nympha, and the church that is in her house

A woman named Nympha hosted a house church. Alternate translation: "Nympha and the group of believers that meets in her house"

Colossians 4:16

General Information:

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Colossians 4:17

Say to Archippus, "Look to the ministry that you have received in the Lord, that you should fulfill it

Paul reminds Archippus of the task God had given him and that he, Archippus, was under obligation to the Lord to fulfill it. The words "Look," "you have received," and "you should fulfill" all refer to Archippus and should be singular.

Colossians 4:18

Connecting Statement:

Paul closes his letter with a greeting written in his own handwriting.

Remember my chains

The word "chains" is a metaphor that Paul uses to indicate that he is in prison, but it is also likely that he was literally attached to a chain. Alternate translation: "Remember me and pray for me while I am in prison"

May grace be with you

Here "grace" stands for God, who shows grace or acts kindly to believers. Alternate translation: "I pray that our Lord Jesus Christ would continue to act graciously toward you all"