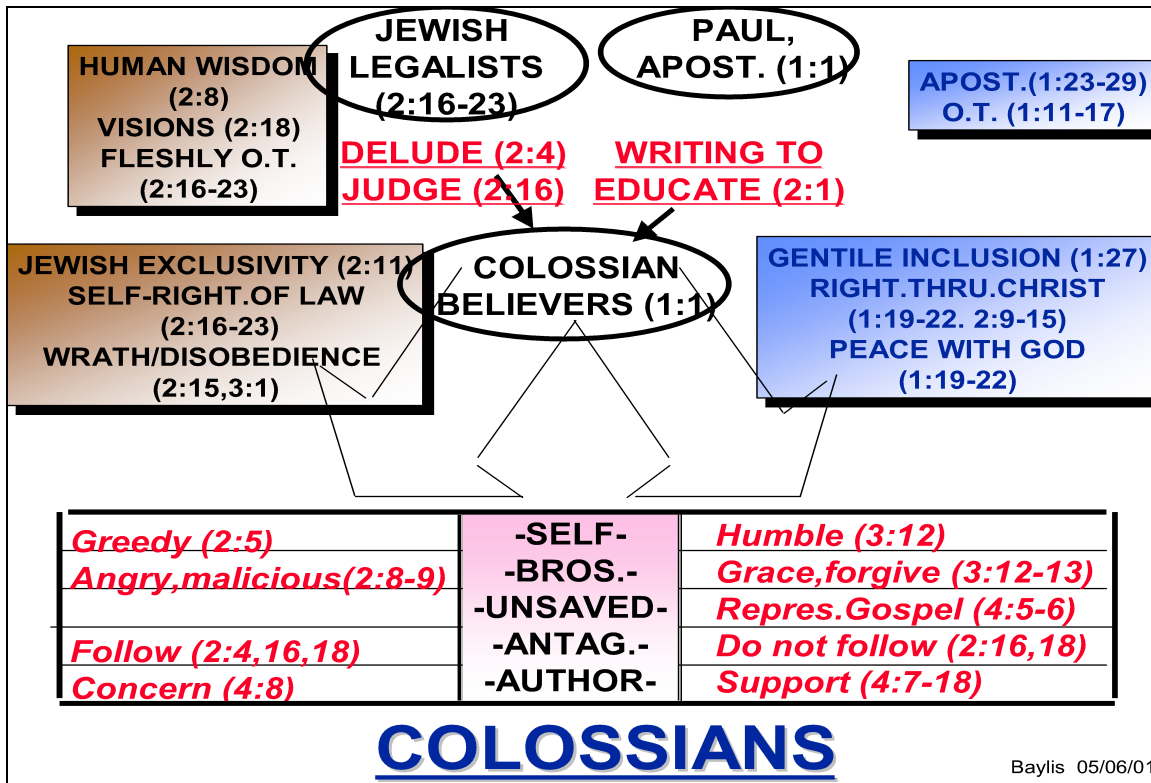


COLOSSIANS



Problem

**Physical**

Judaizers are deluding the Colossian believers to reject Paul’s gospel evidenced by his suffering under Gentile control, which will result in selfish actions as unholy living, selfishness toward brothers, and disunity in the church.

**Theological**

Based on human wisdom, visions and the fleshly interpretation of the Law, Judaizers have introduced Judaistic theology (keeping the Law for righteousness, non-inclusion of Gentiles) to the Colossian believers that will result in a rejection of Paul’s gospel causing a lack of holy living and disunity of Jew and Gentile believers.

## Solution

### **Physical**

Paul writes to educate the Colossian believers that they might embrace him and his theology resulting in holy living and unity of the body and support of him.

### **Theological**

Based on revelation from God to himself as an apostle Paul educates concerning the inclusion of Gentiles on an equal basis with Jews into the body of the church based righteousness through Christ who Himself suffered for the gospel and results in holy living, unity of the body in Christ's righteousness and support of Paul

## Argument

I. **The Setting:** Paul establishes the relationship between himself and the Colossians based on their past and present relationship to his gospel (1:1--2:5).

A. **Main Characters:** The author and the addressed are related by the gospel of grace and peace, revealed by Paul as an apostle, believed by the Colossians (1:1-2).

Paul defends himself as an apostle, and the people at the church of Colossae as those who have shared his gospel of grace and peace<sup>1</sup>.

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

B. **Their Theological Relationship:** Their theological relationship is based on the revelation of the gospel and its holy effects (1:3-23a).

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<sup>1</sup> "Grace and peace" are not simply greetings such as 'have a nice day'. Paul's gospel was marked by the theological doctrines of "grace and peace." Grace indicated that God through Christ had given man righteous standing as opposed to the Jewish legalists who held for righteousness only through works of the Law. "Peace" indicated the result of the grace of God through Christ, that is, that man was now at peace with God (as opposed to being his enemy) and was not under the wrath of God as the Judaizers would advocate for one who lacked the works of the Law.

1. **Result:** Their belief in the gospel of Paul<sup>2</sup> has resulted in a unity with others of the same gospel within the church and among other churches throughout the world (1:3-6).

The Colossian church was based on the gospel of Paul and it has resulted in their reputation being that of being strong in that faith as represented in their church and throughout other Pauline churches. The content of this gospel is that the reward is in heaven waiting for them as opposed to being here in material things on this earth.

- a. **Unity with Paul:** Paul is praying for them (1:3)

1:3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

- b. **Unity with others:** Since they continue in the gospel of Paul and love others who believe in that gospel (1:4)

1:4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

- c. **Delay of Reward:** The content of their belief is that their reward is in heaven waiting for them as opposed to having a reward that can be seen here on earth (1:5).

1:5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel,

- d. **Effect:** This gospel is continuing with them and with others who share it in the rest of the world (1:6).

1:6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth;

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<sup>2</sup> There is clearly a defense going on here of Paul's gospel as being true. First he is arguing here for unity in that gospel ("and the love which you have for all the saints", "just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing"), and secondly for the truth upon which the unity is based ("you previously heard in the word of truth", "and understood the grace of God in truth").

2. **Source:** Epaphras is affirmed as the one who brought the apostolic truth<sup>3</sup> which they received for he is an emissary of Paul's (1:7-8).

1:7 just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 1:8 and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

3. **Application and Content:** Based on their reception of this gospel of Paul's he continues to pray that the Colossians will continue in this gospel of grace and peace (1:9-23a).

- a. **Application:** Knowing their belief in the gospel Paul prays for their continued, increasing knowledge of the gospel (1:9).

1:9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

- b. **Application:** The purpose of the knowledge of the gospel is so that they might represent God and Jesus Christ in holy living (1:10-12a).

1:10 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness<sup>4</sup> and patience<sup>5</sup>; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father,

- c. **Content:** The knowledge of the gospel results in knowledge of the status that believers have gained peace

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<sup>3</sup> The 'Spirit' here (1:8) as well as throughout the Bible is the Holy Spirit whose purpose is to reveal the whole purpose of God in Jesus Christ, particularly in the reality of the atonement, which, of course, Paul reveals. Thus Paul is simply saying that the Colossians were continuing on in the supernatural revelation to them of Jesus which was given through him.

<sup>4</sup> In the gospel since it will not be seen until the future.

<sup>5</sup> Waiting for the fulfillment on earth physically with Christ.

from the wrath of God through the death of Jesus Christ gaining an inheritance (1:12b-20).

1:12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

- d. **Content and Application:** The purpose of the Lord's death was, not only to establish them positionally as being reconciled and thus at peace with God, but to insure their continued faith and representation of God in that belief and the resultant holy living (1:21-23a).

1:21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- 23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven,

- B. **Source and Content Theology: Explanation of Apostolic Suffering:** Paul's ministry as an apostle and the suffering was necessary to provide them this revelation (1:23b--2:5).

Immediately having established their foundational belief in the gospel of Paul, he now launches into a defense of his situation. Words like “I rejoice in my sufferings” (1:24), “how great a struggle” (2:1), indicate Paul’s defense of his difficult situation (he is in prison). Clearly Paul is discussing this since someone is attempting to delude them regarding the seeming paradox between his gospel and his suffering (success gospel of the Judaizers).<sup>6</sup>

1. **Content Theology: Suffering:** Paul’s suffering is necessary for them to receive the gospel and he follows Christ’s example of suffering for their sakes (1:23b-25).<sup>7</sup>

which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. 24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions. 25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,

2. **Content Theology: Gentile Inclusion in Christ:** Paul’s gospel of Christ includes the new revelation of Gentile inclusion through the grace of Christ (1:26-29).

1:26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 And for this purpose also I labor,

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<sup>6</sup> From the beginning of the nation they had made the theological error of determining their spirituality based on their material blessing (errant understanding of Deut. 28). It was especially apparent in the Pharisees who considered the poor and outcast as being unspiritual and themselves as prosperous and thus blessed (They missed the fact that they were under Gentile oppression). But since the beginning one’s spirituality is only based on his alignment with the Word of God regardless of what he sees.

<sup>7</sup> “What is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” is basically carrying forth the instructions and example (of suffering) of Christ in His absence (cf. John 14:12). Christ had given the apostles instructions to carry on His word and that word would only be carried through suffering persecution. Paul is doing that on Christ’s behalf.

striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

3. **Application: Warning against listening to deluders:** Paul educates them regarding godly suffering so that they might not be deluded by those that oppose him (2:1-5).

2:1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument. 5 For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

- II. **Application: Exhortation to continue in Paul's Gospel:** Paul exhorts them to continue on in proper holy living based on his gospel (2:6--4:18).

- A. **Application:** Act on the basis of the theology of Paul's gospel (2:6-7).

2:6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

- B. **Antagonist Theology and Application:** Proper application requires rejection of the heretical doctrine of the Judaizers (2:8-23).

1. **Antagonist Source Theology and Application:** Warning against following heretics. Men are trying to deceive the Colossians through human wisdom not revelation of God in Christ (2:8).

2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

2. **Content Theology:** It was through Christ's death that He triumphed over sin, removing any claim that it has on the believer as well as any claim any man has over a believer (2:9-15).

This section is very important in understanding the difficulty that Paul is attempting to explain. First of all there is the question of who is the head over the believer? It is clear that the opposition is advocating a return to the Law, since circumcision is the issue here in 2:12. But Paul argues that in dying with Christ, the believer has fulfilled his requirement of keeping the Law. Then there is the question of the victory over Gentiles (A Jew felt quite confident that blessing was related to the subjection of Gentiles; i.e., Deut. 28). Since Paul is in prison, he is obviously under fire for apparently under this curse. Yet Paul argues that Jesus had victory over the Gentiles when they put Him to death, yet He humiliated them when He was raised from the dead and they could not overcome that. His present position in heaven is beyond any Gentile power to reach, and thus the believer's position (and reward) is safe since it is with the victorious Jesus in heaven, kept there on behalf of the believer to be awarded at the return to earth for the restored rulership.

- a. **Content Theology: Christ above Gentile Powers:** The believer is complete in his new Head, Christ, who is over any Gentile authorities (i.e., Paul's Gentile oppressors) (2:9-10).

Paul will argue here for Jesus victory over Gentiles, not his own. Since Jesus is over Gentiles, and Paul's treasure is with Him, Paul's suffering is appropriate.

2:9 For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority<sup>8</sup>;

- b. **Content Theology: Circumcision:** The believer does not need circumcision since he has the circumcision of heart, which aligns him also above Gentile powers with Christ (2:11-12).

Paul refers here to Deuteronomy 30:6 where there is a clear prophecy of the circumcision of heart as being superior to the circumcision of the flesh.

2:11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of

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<sup>8</sup> This refers to all the Gentile authorities under which Paul is suffering.



the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 2:12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

- c. **Content Theology: The Law:** In Christ's death, the believer was relieved of all requirements of the Law, and being victorious over Gentile authorities (in Christ's resurrection) awaits the realization of that victory in joining Christ in the heavenlies (2:13-15).

Paul attacks now the inference of the problem of not keeping the Law and being suppressed under Gentiles. Again, in Christ, Paul has found his victory, not in his present situation.

2:13 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. 15 When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

3. **Application:** Reject the practices of Judaizers to gain righteousness based on worldly wisdom and false elevation of O.T. revelation and accept the fullness of Christ and His revelation (2:16-23).

- a. **Content Theology:** Reject the Law which regarded food and special days were symbolic O.T. items which pass away when their fullness appeared in the fullness of times (2:16).

2:16 Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day--2:17 things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

- b. **Content Theology:** Reject doctrines of self-works (false humility for self-righteousness), elevation of O.T.

revelation as full (“elevation of angels”<sup>9</sup>), or on self-revelation through human sources, which are wrong in light of the revelation through Christ who is the Head of the church (2:18-19).

2:18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

- c. **Source and Content Theology:** When one believes in Christ he has fulfilled the requirements of the Law in Christ’s life and death he does not follow those things which are sourced in human reasonings and glorify self (2:20-23).

2:20 If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 21 "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" 22 (which all refer to things destined to perish with the using)-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? 23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

- C. **Pauline Theology and Application:** Believers are not to live like the Judaizers based on temporal earthly things (Adamic self) but as Paul’s

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<sup>9</sup> “The worship of angels” here has caused some difficulty since it does not seem to go with the general nature of Jewish legalism which is present in these verses. It has been proposed that this was some sect that worshipped angels as part of their ritual. However, a similar problem arises in Hebrews where the argument regards the superior revelation through the Son (New Testament) as opposed to the partial revelation through angels (Old Testament). Compare Hebrews 1:1-2 with Colossians 2:2. The word for “worship” here in 2:18 (θρησκεία) would be more normally translated as “religion” and is translated thusly throughout the few uses in the New Testament. Thus, Paul appears to be speaking of a religion of angels (Old Testament) versus the religion of Christ (fuller revelation).

gospel based on life preserved in heaven for the final revelation (life in Christ) (3:1--4:6).

1. **Theology:** Following the desire to please Christ, one is to seek to please Him who will reveal it in His second coming to earth (3:1-4).

The Old Testament possibilities of Kingdom on earth brought about by a righteousness through the Law are gone. The Law has judged man as deserving of death. Now Christ has come and there will be no kingdom on earth until He returns. Thus the believer is to live on the basis that his reward is not here on earth, but in heaven with Christ, held securely.

3:1 If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

2. **Application: Holy Living:** The things of this earth have been judged as evil including one's self actions thus one must live on the basis of the future revelation (3:5--4:5).
  - a. **Application:** Remove selfish practices that glorify self and live to God's interests (3:5-10).

Gentiles particularly would have problems with their old lives of immorality. Yet the Judaizers' imposition of the Law would be the way to obligate the Gentile to change. Paul argues for a different motivation, that of love based on the grace of God in Christ.

3:5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self

who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him

- b. **Application: Unity with Jews/Gentiles:** Strive for a unity based on the gospel of inclusion of Gentiles (3:11-15).

The imposition of the Law here indicates the insistence by Jews that Gentiles only be included equally if they are circumcised and keep the Law. Paul argues that they treat each other as part of the same body, and forgive (as opposed to be self-righteous).

3:11 --a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. 12 And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

- c. **Theology:** Worship toward God and unity of the body is based on the relationship of peace through Christ (3:15-17).

3:15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

- d. **Application: Submission to authorities:** Recognize proper God-ordained authorities since God has established them and their reward is in heaven with Christ not on earth with the authority (3:18—4:1)

With Gentile influence (as well as Judaizers) Paul needed to demonstrate a respect for God ordained authority. Paul essentially argues that authority has been ordained by God, and the believer needs to submit as if the Lord was acting through that authority. Thus wives submit to husbands, children to parents and slaves to masters. On the other hand those in headship are to act as the Lord acts toward those who are under His authority. Husbands to be gracious to wives, fathers not to exasperate children and masters to be fair to slaves.

Of course, Paul, being in prison is submitting to his Gentile authority in suffering.

3:18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart. 22 Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. 25 For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. 4:1 Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

- e. **Application: Thankfulness for Pauline Gospel:** Pray to God, thanking God for one's position in Christ through the gospel and especially for the minister of the gospel, Paul as he spreads the revelation through suffering (4:2-4).

Here Paul begins to bring the immediate issue of his degrading imprisonment to their involvement. They are to pray for him (having understood his explanation in this letter) so that he may continue in suffering for the spread of the gospel.

4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; 3 praying at the

same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; 4 in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

- f. **Application: Representation to Unbelievers:** Represent yourselves to those who do not believe the gospel as one who represents it well (4:5-6).

The Jewish tendency was to reject Gentiles. Paul's urge is that they represent God and Christ admirably as a responsibility (cf. Exodus 19:6.)

4:5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.

3. **Application: Support Paul and gospel:** Support Paul and those associated with him and his gospel (4:7-18).

This, of course, is the main issue here. To turn from Paul was to turn from the gospel of Christ to a gospel of Judaistic success. Now Paul points out that not only should they honor him, but they should honor those who represent him personally. Part of their duty is to explain Paul's situation to the Colossians in case they need additional information beside the present letter.

- a. **Application:** Support those who represent Paul and his gospel as part of the body (4:7-14).

4:7 As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. 8 For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; 9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here. 10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas' cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him); 11 and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers

for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision; and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.

- b. **Application:** Support the unity of the body of other churches founded on Paul's gospel (4:15-16).

4:15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. 16 And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.

- c. **Application:** Exhortation to individuals to continue in the ministry of Paul's gospel (4:17)

4:17 And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

- d. **Application:** Participate in his suffering (4:18).

This is Paul's final exhortation to them. They have been involved in opposing (or questioning Paul's suffering) and now they are urged to participate in Paul's suffering. Paul is clearly confident that they will perceive the theology of the letter and will again turn to regard him and his gospel.

4:18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.