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PHILIPPIANS; COLOSSIANS

CHRIST'S DIVINITY & EXAMPLES OF SACRIFICE (CA. AD 62)

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Philippians: Grow in the Gospel of Love

Background

Paul first visited Philippi over a decade before writing this epistle during his second apostolic mission. He went in answer to a vision of someone calling him to Macedonia (northern Greece). He and his companions Silas and Timothy sailed to northeastern Macedonia and then traveled twelve miles to the foot of Mount Pegasus and the walled city of Philippi. The city was home to many Greeks and a few Jews. Most of the ten thousand inhabitants were Roman citizens, leading to the city's nickname Little Rome.¹

Philippi was the chief city in northeastern Greece (Act 16:12) and was named after Alexander the Great's father, Philip II of Macedon (382–336 BC). Its fertile plains housed gold mines.² The Romans expanded and beautified the city throughout the two centuries before the missionaries arrived. The city was next to the major Roman highway that connected the empire from east to west (the *Via Egnatia*).

In Philippi, Paul converted and stayed with Lydia, the seller of purple. Paul also cast out evil spirits from a woman who was used by local soothsayers for their income. Enraged at their financial loss, these men charged Paul and Silas with disturbing the peace. The court had the missionaries beaten and imprisoned. The Lord miraculously released them, and they converted the jailer and his family. Paul also received an apology from the magistrates before leaving the city (Act 16:14–30). Over the next decade, the young Church grew in quality and quantity there and produced multiple bishops and deacons. Generously, the Saints sent Paul a companion while imprisoned. He refers to the Philippians as his “joy and crown” (Php 4:1).

Purpose

Philippians is one of Paul’s four prison epistles that appear to come from the same time and share themes and mention the same people.³ Paul wrote to thank the Philippians for sending Epaphroditus as a co-worker to help him while in prison. Unfortunately, during that time, Epaphroditus became sick but had recovered enough to make the return trip to Philippi (Php 2:25–26; 4:18). This letter also gives insight into Paul’s background and spiritual life. This is one of the six letters scholars classify as truly Pauline.⁴

Themes

- Message of love and encouragement
- Jesus is the Messiah
- Obedience to Christ’s teachings
- Salvation requires sacrifice

Table 1. Outline of Philippians

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1:12–26	Paul’s imprisonment advances the gospel
1:27–30	Exhortation to stand worthy through suffering
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2:12–18	Christian obligations: Work for salvation, shine as a light
2:19–30	Coming of Timothy and Epaphroditus
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4:10–20	Thanks for the Philippians’ gifts
4:21–23	Salutations and final wishes

Philippians 1

Greeting and prayers of thanks—Php 1:1–2

Php 1:1–2. *“Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints . . . at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God.”* Paul opens with the standard introduction. His mention of the plural bishops and deacons is evidence that the Church in Philippi had grown since his first conversions there a dozen years earlier. The word *diakonos*, “deacon,” meant “a waiter, servant; then anyone who performs any service, an administrator.”⁵ In the New Testament it was used for upright men and women who helped (Rom 16:1; 1 Tim 3:8, 12). Here it refers to Christians who helped a bishop.

Prayer for growth of love, knowledge, and judgment—Php 1:3–11

Php 1:4–5 (BSB). *“In every prayer for all of you, I always pray with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”* Paul feels a great bond of friendship with the Philippians. Even though he was imprisoned, his opening and the entire letter are full of love and optimism.

Php 1:7 (BLB). *“in my chains.”* This reference to bonds (*halusis*, “chains”) helps us to date this letter to Paul’s first Roman imprisonment (Act 28), or possibly to an earlier incarceration.⁶ In Rome, house arrest allowed Paul some freedoms, but his right hand was chained to a guard’s left hand (Eph 6:19–20).

Php 1:7 (NIV). *“I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me.”* Paul’s love for the Saints is clear. The last phrase is translated “partakers of my grace” in the KJV, but because grace is the Lord’s to give, I prefer the NIV’s rendering.

Php 1:8. *“For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus.”* Paul calls on God to “witness” (RSV) or “testify” (NIV) of Paul’s love, as only God knows his heart (NEB). The ancients used the word *bowels* for the place where affection and tender mercies originate.⁷

Php 1:9, 11. *“I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; . . . Being filled with the fruits of righteousness.”* Paul expresses his greatest desire for the Philippians and the thesis for this letter: to grow in the gospel in love, knowledge, and judgment (or “discernment” or “insight” [BLB, BSB]). His instruction will focus on how to do this. He hopes they can discern between good, better, and best to “be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,” or Judgement Day (1:10 NIV).

Paul’s imprisonment advances the gospel—Php 1:12–26

Php 1:12 (NIV). *“I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.”* Early Christians called themselves brothers and sisters in the family of Christ. Even though the KJV does not specify this, the Greek includes Christian women in the communication with Church leaders. This radical departure from Paul’s Pharisaic upbringing

is an example of the Apostolic Church adopting Christ's inclusion of women. Notably, Paul observes that his imprisonment helped build the Church (KJV, "fallen out"), echoing the Lord in D&C 122:7.

Php 1:13 (BSB). *"As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ."* The word translated "palace" comes from the Latin word *praetorium* (NHEB) and probably referred to the military barracks. Another translation is "the imperial guard" (ESV) who protected the emperors in Rome.⁸ It sounds like Paul preached the gospel to his visitors and his Roman guards heard it and spread it among Caesar's staff (Php 4:22). Out of our small efforts the Lord can create great things (Alm 37:6–7; D&C 64:33). These little miracles demonstrate God's hand in our lives.

Php 1:14 (NIV). *"because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear."* Perhaps the Saints had been reticent to testify because Christianity was an illegal religion. Rome granted religious freedom to ten foreign religions, and the Israelite worship of Jehovah was one of those. Initially, Christianity received the same protection through its Jewish association. But when Christians were separated, they were legally unprotected. Paul's example of preaching, even while in prison, prompted other Saints to share Jesus's good news. Paul became the yeast that motivated the whole loaf to stretch and grow.

Php 1:15, 18 (NIV). *"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill . . . whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached."* Unfortunately, some distorted Christianity to compete with Paul, but others did so with honest hearts. Either way, the gospel was spread by those who could discern truth and error (see Moro 7:16, 18; D&C 84:45).

Php 1:19–20 (NIV). *"through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit . . . I eagerly expect and hope that . . . Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death."* The last phrase reads, "Christ shall be *magnified* in my body," in the KJV and, "Christ will be *honored* in my body," in the RSV (emphasis added). While Paul awaited his Roman trial, he did not care whether he was acquitted as long as he could testify of the Savior again.

Php 1:21. *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* Either way Paul looks at his future, he trusts God. He shares the attitude, "Come what may and love it."⁹ If he lives, he is Jesus's servant, and if he dies, he will gain eternal life through Christ. (The JST reverses the verse order of verses 21 and 22.)

Php 1:24, 26 (BSB). *"it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body . . . so that through my coming to you again your exultation in Christ Jesus will resound on account of me."* Paul is old and tired, so on one hand he longs to unite with Jesus in heaven, but on the other hand he knows that if God finds it more useful for him to continue to serve on earth, his life will be preserved. Even though no verdict has been made, he feels he will be acquitted to continue serving the new Christians. He also mentions his hope to visit the Philippian Saints, although no record of that visit remains.

Exhortation to stand worthy through suffering—Php 1:27–30

Php 1:27 (NIV). “*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel.*”

The KJV used the archaic “conversation,” meaning “conduct” or everything in one’s life, both word and deed.

Php 1:28 (JST). “*in nothing terrified by your adversaries; ~~which is to them an evident token of perdition, who reject the gospel, which bringeth on them destruction; but to you of who receive the gospel, salvation.~~*” Paul’s faith casts out fear. The JST made a doctrinal change by cutting “perdition,” thereby denouncing the limited view of heaven and hell. Moral agency offers multiple options (D&C 76).

Php 1:29–30 (BSB). “*it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for Him.*” Ambassadors of Christ must sacrifice and suffer for Him. Part of discipleship includes serving at all costs. God will reward all persecution for His sake (D&C 138:1–3).

Philippians 2

Unite with Christ’s nature by selfless service—Php 2:1–11

Php 2:1–2 (NIV). “*if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, . . . then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.*” Paul pleads for unity and love through the Holy Spirit. He asks questions fully assuming positive answers.

Php 2:3–4 (NASB 1995). “*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; . . . look out . . . for the interests of others.*” In this letter of joy and thanks, these few verses are Paul’s only counsel for improvement. The Philippians already lived most of the commandments, but Paul warns against “empty pride” (BSB), or “vainglory” (KJV). He discourages self-centered behaviors and asks for selfless acts of service. Without prejudice, Saints value each other more highly than they value themselves. Selfless service begins with our desires and thoughts. Saints strive for charity—to esteem each person as a child of God with enormous potential.

Hymns. Paul lays out the next six verses like a poetic hymn.¹⁰ The hymn plays with opposites: Jesus’s lowliness as a servant versus His exaltation as our Creator and God. Paul’s poem beautifully testifies of Jesus as the Creator and Savior of the World. This kind of language is known as high Christology—hence these verses are called a Christological hymn.¹¹

Php 2:6. “*Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.*” Different doctrinal interpretations of this verse have stimulated diverse translations.¹² For example, those reflecting the doctrine of the Trinity read, “Did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (RSV) or “Did not cling to his equality with God” (JB). Consistent with John 1:1–4, the Greek text speaks the of Word

as a God before He came to earth.¹³ From the Restoration lens, we read Paul referring to Jesus's premortal existence by describing His divine nature of intelligence, righteousness, submission, and majesty.¹⁴

Php 2:7. But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant.

Paul contrasts Jesus's premortal glory with His human role as a suffering servant. Jesus' servitude is even more impactful in His culture, whose social strata was strictly enforced. Servants and slaves made up a third of the Roman Empire and half of the population of large cities. Servants acted as teachers, healers, and preachers too. Jesus's example of service becomes an archetype for all Christians. Those who humble themselves—emptying all pride and egoism—to serve God and His creations walk where Jesus, the greatest servant of all, walked.

Php 2:8. "being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." When Jesus became a "being as all men are" (JB), He did not forget His Father's will. His obedience extended through His crucifixion. Isaiah described Him as a suffering servant.¹⁵

Php 2:9–10 (BSB). "God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name above all names . . . every knee should bow." Paul describes two separate divine beings with distinct roles. The reference to Jesus's name means more than the pronunciation but includes that God gave Him authority and power. When He returns in glory, everyone in heaven and earth will reverence and worship the great Creator. This promise will be fulfilled when every voice will confess that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Anointed One.

Php 2:11. "Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Paul's prophecy teaches that when disciples confess Jesus as their Lord, they also glorify God the Father. The movement of the hymn "exhorts the addressees for their own salvation to follow the exalted Christ, rather than looking out for their own interests and seeking to better themselves."¹⁶ Christians become Christlike with humility, obediently serving God and their fellow mortals.

Christian obligations: Work for salvation, shine as a light—Php 2:12–18

Php 2:12. "my beloved, . . . work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." Paul praises the Philippian Saints as his dear friends and his most valiant branch (NIV). Yet he still points out how they can improve. Christ set the pattern by working out His salvation, opening the possibility for all individuals to work out their own exaltation with Christ. The next verse mentions God's saving grace: "God . . . works in you to will and to act on behalf of His good purpose" (Php 2:13 BSB). God's grace provides immortality and eternal life. The latter requires becoming Christlike through a process of changing our mortal nature to become holy through effort, sacrifice, ordinances, and sanctification.

Php 2:14–15 (NIV). "Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God' . . . Then you will shine among them." Our generation can learn from this commandment to not complain. God gave it to Moses and the children of Israel in Deu

32:5. The title *children of God* is given to those who develop a Christlike nature. In Greek, the word *children* was interpreted literally, but later Christians defined it as those born again and adopted through Christ.

Php 2:17 (BSB). *“if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.”* Paul describes his years of sacrifice as an offering on God’s temple altar. Even in times of hunger and need, the obedient Israelites first offered their firstfruits, meat, and drink offerings to God. A priest poured the drink onto the altar and burned it as a selfless gift to God.

Coming of Timothy and Epaphroditus—Php 2:19–30

Php 2:19–20. *“I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you.”* Paul sends Timothy in his place to share a more accurate and detailed report with the Philippians. Paul spends three sentences assuring them of Timothy’s kind nature. Timothy probably accompanied Epaphroditus to Philippi (2:25).

Php 2:21–22 (NIV). *“For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”* Paul contrasts Timothy’s sincere selfless care with the self-centered interests that plague nearly every generation. Paul described Timothy as a loving “son with the father, he hath served with me” (KJV).

Php 2:23–24 (NIV). *“I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.”* In all four of his prison epistles, Paul mentions sending a colleague to visit each congregation.¹⁷

Php 2:25–27 (BSB). *“I thought it necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier.”* Connecting the verses on Epaphroditus, it sounds as though he went to Philippi to serve with Paul as a companion in prison. Unfortunately, Epaphroditus became deathly ill. Paul thanks the Saints for sending him and assures them that he is has healed enough to return home to them now.

Php 2:28–29 (BSB). *“when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less anxious. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him.”* Paul asks the Saints to welcome Epaphroditus home joyfully. Even though his mission did not go as hoped, he made the effort, which makes it an honorable return.

Php 2:30 (BSB). *“he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for your deficit of service to me.”* God asks disciples to valiantly sacrifice their lives for Him. This develops faith, as described in the Lectures on Faith: “A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation.”¹⁸

Philippians 3

Blessings and sacrifices come with discipleship—Php 3:1–14

Php 3:1 (NIV). *“Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord!”* Earlier the Lord told Paul, “Be of good cheer” (Act 23:11; 27:22, 25). One way that Saints fulfill that command is to rejoice. The

Greek root translated “rejoice” is found seventy-four times in the New Testament. Paul repeats this with more fervor in Php 4:4. Rejoicing in trials requires an eternal perspective; one can always rejoice in Christ.

Php 3:2. “Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers.” The word *dogs* had a double meaning. Under the law of Moses, dogs were unclean and thus unholy (Lev 11:27; Mt 15:26). The word also described cynical or skeptical Greek leaders. Peter also warns against dogs in 2 Pet 2:22, but he referred to unworthy or unclean people, perhaps the Judaizers. Also in this verse, evil workers include those who thought they were righteous but were not, and concision refers to those who mutilate the flesh.

Php 3:3–4. “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.” Paul defines *circumcision* as those who joined Christ’s covenant (which is extended to Christians who have not been physically circumcised) and *flesh* as the unclean lusts of the world. The Greek *sarx*, “flesh,” can also mean “body, human nature, materiality, or kindred.” Most of the time Paul uses it to describe “lusts of the flesh” or “the natural man.”¹⁹ Prior to his conversion, Paul as a Pharisee believed he was saved through living the law of Moses. Now he realizes that it was not the outward ordinances like circumcision or sacrifices that brought salvation but faith in the Redeemer.

Php 3:5–6. “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, . . . touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” Paul describes his strict observance of the law of Moses during his younger years. As a Benjaminite, his parents named him after King Saul, the star of their tribe. As a youth Paul was a shining example of orthodox Jewish zealotry. His claim that he was blameless in first-century Judaism was remarkable. It meant that he lived all 613 written and 10,000 oral laws of Moses.²⁰

Php 3:7–8 (BSB). “compared to the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” By accepting Jesus as the Messiah, Paul lost everything the rising Pharisaic leader valued—education, influence, and possibly even family and friends. Instead, he allowed God to realign his education. All his years of study and living the law meticulously were *skubalon*, “rubbish, or dung, dregs.”²¹ The Apostle Paul saw his Jewish learning as garbage thrown to dogs compared to the “surpassing worth of knowing” Christ (RSV). Giving up his remarkable past was worth a future of serving the more remarkable Jesus.

Php 3:9. “not having mine own righteousness, . . . but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” Disciples of all generations must learn that salvation was not through laws but “through the faith of Christ.” In our generation, several ideologies fall into a similar camp—whether they be religious, health-related, environmental, or political. Paul’s warning is against everything that takes one away from Christ.

Php 3:10–11 (BSB). “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to Him in His death, and so, somehow, to

attain to the resurrection.” Death is not frightening to Paul thanks to the glorious truths of the Resurrection. Paul speaks for all disciples as he looks forward to knowing Christ intimately to understand His sufferings and Resurrection.

Pressing toward the heavenly goal—Php 3:12–21

Php 3:12 (NIV). “**Not that I have already obtained . . . my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.**” Paul humbly acknowledges that he is not finished or perfected, yet he presses forward diligently. *Press* connotes the image of an olive press crushing and squeezing for each drop of oil. He wants to grasp or “apprehend” (KJV) Jesus. The image of holding the iron rod through mists of darkness is similar (1 Ne 8:19–24).

Php 3:13–14 (NIV). “**straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ.**” The process is part of the goal as disciples strive, reach, learn, and become more like Christ. Learning through the journey to distinguish good from evil is part of the goal. Paul does not promote push-button salvation but a vigilant effort to daily do all God asks.

Php 3:15–16 (KJV). “**Let us therefore, as many as would be perfect, be thus minded: . . . [that] whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule.**” The Greek word for “perfect” here is also translated “mature” (NIV, RSV, ESV, BSB). This gives a different twist to the verse. Paul asks disciples to become spiritually mature in the gospel and continue to serve God with all their strength.

Php 3:17–19 (NIV). “**Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters . . . as I have often told you before . . . many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction.**” Paul warns disciples to carefully choose whom they follow. Some Christians have left their faith and turned to fight against Christianity. By doing so they follow the devil and feed their self-centered appetites, not God.

Php 3:20–21 (NIV). “**But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, . . . [to] transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**” Paul knew that Roman citizenship was a prize, but he emphasizes the greater prize of celestial citizenship. Most translations use “citizenship” from the Greek *politeuma*, “a form of government,” which is clearer than the KJV’s “conversation is in heaven.”

Last advice: Appeal to rejoice in the Lord—Php 4:1–9

Php 4:1 (NIV). “**my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!**” Paul dearly loved the Philippian Saints. He admired them enough that it appears he had his wife stay with them (4:3).

Php 4:2 (NASB). “**I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.**” Paul begins his concluding notes with several personal messages to specific individuals. He must have

heard about two sisters in the Philippian branch who had some sort of disagreement, and he asks them to be reconciled.

Php 4:3. “I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which labored with me in the gospel.” For centuries, Bible readers have wondered who Paul’s yokefellow was. The Greek word *suzugos* means “those united by the bond of marriage, relationship, office, labor, study, business, or the like, . . . consort, comrade, colleague, partner.”²² An early Church writer claimed that it referred to Paul’s wife.²³ The yokefellow’s assignment to work with other women suggests that person was a woman. Other guesses as to their identity extend from Luke to Lydia. Whoever Paul meant, he includes men and women as ministers or laborers.

Php 4:3. “with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers.” Clement was a common name at the time. We do not know if this refers to the third bishop in Rome who wrote 1 Clement in AD 96.²⁴

Php 4:3. whose names are in the book of life.” This is the only time Paul refers to this book, but the book of Revelation has seven references that attach the book to Heavenly Father and His angels.²⁵ This book is mentioned once each in the Old Testament and Book of Mormon and three times in the Doctrine and Covenants.²⁶ Alma teaches that the “names of the righteous shall be written in the book” (Alm 5:58).

Php 4:5–6 (NIV). “Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Different translations of the Greek for “gentleness” communicate different messages. The KJV uses “moderation,” the ASV “forbearance,” and the ABPE “humility.”

Php 4:6 (NIV). “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” If the Saints focus on the Lord through prayer and gratitude they can overcome worry. The KJV used “careful,” missing the meaning of the word *merimnaó*, “anxious, to care for.” It is most often used to express, “I am over-anxious; distracted.” Figuratively it means “to go to pieces.” The word was used in Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount and ten other times in the New Testament (Mt 6:25, 27, 28, 31, 34). The Lord and Paul called on disciples to not fret but to treat their distractions and extreme worry with the healing power of the Lord. Some mental illnesses fall into the category of “this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” (Mt 17:21; Mk 9:29).

Php 4:7. “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Peace becomes the guardian for Christians as it guards one’s heart and mind (NIV, ASB, BSB). We find *eiréné*, “peace,” ninety-two times in the New Testament, with half of those coming from Paul. This favorite fruit or sign of the Spirit is not a political statement but always an attribute of the Godhead (see also D&C 6:23). Paul claims peace even while facing a death sentence.

Php 4:8. “whatsoever things are true.” These verses were incorporated into part of Joseph Smith’s thirteenth article of faith. The Prophet Joseph loved the writings of Paul and often recited or referenced them. They appear approximately 140 times in his sermons recorded in Nauvoo.²⁷ Even more

Table 2. Comparison of Php 4:8 in the KJV and NIV with the thirteenth article of faith

KJV	NIV	Articles of Faith 1:13
Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.	Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.	We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul—We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.

telling, these sermons were spontaneous, not written out or researched ahead of time. When he was speaking from his heart and head, phrases from the Pauline Epistles often came from memory.

The definitions of two words have changed since the KJV was translated:

1. *Honest* in Greek meant “reverent, venerable, serious, dignified,” and in the eighteenth century it meant “decent, honorable, suitable.”
2. *Virtue* in Greek meant “goodness, a gracious act, uprightness.” Initially it was used for prowess on the battlefield or skill in living. Modern translations use “excellence” (RSV) or “admirable” (NIV, BLB, BSB).

Semantics aside, when Christians internalize godly virtues, they become true disciples of our Savior.

Php 4:9 (NIV). “*Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*” Paul calls for action behind belief with his verb choice: “Saw in me, these do” (NKJV). When he refers to freedom from the Jewish traditions and laws of Moses, he is not dismissing living the higher law of obedience to Jesus’s commandments.²⁸

Thanks for the Philippians’ gifts—Php 4:10–19

Php 4:10 (BSB). “*I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it.*” In addition

to the Philippians sending Epaphroditus to assist Paul, they may have sent something else. The second sentence clarifies the first.

Php 4:11 (BSB). *“I have learned to be content regardless of my circumstances.”* Paul’s message is even more powerful coming from his current condition in prison. Notwithstanding their circumstances, disciples find joy and contentment in serving Christ. Paul’s life was filled with the contrasts of plenty and poverty (Php 4:12). The Saints knew that a decade earlier, Paul was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi, which opened the way for the conversion of the jailor and his household.

Php 4:13. *“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”* This empowering hope applies not only to Paul but also to all repentant seeking disciples (also see 1 Ne 3:7).

Php 4:14–17 (BSB). *“you have done well to share in my affliction . . . no church but you partnered with me in the matter of giving and receiving.”* Over a dozen years, Paul opened several branches of Christianity, but only generous Philippi sent funds to him (2 Cor 11:7–9). Generosity is a matter of one’s desires and habits, not of one’s means. Paul appreciated the Philippians’ faithfulness and gratitude (Php 4:18).

Php 4:18 (ESV). *“the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”* Paul likens the Philippians’ gifts and willing, contrite, purified hearts to temple incense or a sacrificial offering to the Lord (Ex 29:18, 25). This meaningful image bridged the old and new covenants.

Php 4:19. *“my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”* Paul blesses the Saints with the Lord’s promise to provide for their needs. The same promise is given with the law of tithing: “I will . . . open . . . the windows of heaven” (Mal 3:10).

Salutations and final wishes—Php 4:21–23

Php 4:21–23 (NIV). *“The brothers and sisters who are with me send greetings . . . especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.”* Nero’s household included his building, goods, property, and means. As mentioned in Php 1:13, it may refer to the Roman Praetorian Guard, servants, or possibly Caesar’s staff—but probably not Nero’s family.

Colossians: Evidences of Jesus’s Divinity

Background

Colossae was built in the Lycus River Valley in Asia Minor, 110 miles east of Ephesus in modern-day western Turkey. An east-west trade route connected Colossae with two larger cities: Laodicea, ten miles west (a famous textile center), and Hierapolis, eleven miles north (famous for medicinal hot springs and a temple to Apollo). The Roman philosopher and statesman Cicero (106–43 BC) estimated that ten thousand Jews lived in those three cities in his day. Colossae lay on a beautiful volcanic mountain range with arid grazing valleys. The small town raised sheep with black and red wool that produced wool for Laodicean’s

cloth-dyeing industries (the dark red wool was known as *colossinum*). This is the smallest town that we have records of Paul's communication with.

Audience

The epistle's audience includes both Jewish and gentile converts. In other epistles, we find three Saints from this area with Phrygian and Greek names (Epaphras, Philemon, and Onesimus [Phm 1:1, 10, 23]). However, it sounds as if Paul did not know many Saints in Colossae, and we have no record he visited them.

Dating the letter

The epistle falls in the latter half of Paul's writing (between AD 60 and 63). All Colossae and the two nearby cities experienced a major earthquake in AD 63–64, and since no earthquake is mentioned in the epistle, we know the letter predates that event. The third-century Christian historian Eusebius reported that Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were destroyed and rebuilt later.

Purpose

Colossians was written to fortify the early Saints with evidence of Jesus's divinity. Paul and Timothy list several heretical ideas and provide evidence on how to clear them out from the branch. Paul asked them to circulate the letter to three neighboring towns (Col 4:15–16). It appears that the letter also arrived with Onesimus, the returning runaway slave described in the Epistle to Philemon.

Themes

Colossians is Paul's most philosophical epistle. He discusses the Creation, cosmology, wisdom, and a new order for social duties. These topics were all debated in the Hellenistic world, and the region was filled with students of science and philosophy. The letter can be broken down into the following focuses:

- Testimony of Jesus Christ
- Warnings against falsehoods
- Christlike principles

Colossians 1

Opening greetings—Col 1:1–2

Col 1:1 (NIV). “*Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother.*” To open a letter with mentioning coauthors was usual for Greek letters—yet these two are also connected in two other prison epistles: Philippians and Philemon.²⁹

Col 1:2. “*Grace be unto you, and peace, from God.*” We find Paul beginning thirteen of the fourteen letters attributed to him with this standard greeting. (The one exception is the Epistle to the Hebrews.)

Table 3. Outline of Colossians

1:1–2	Opening greetings
1:3–14	Thanksgiving and prayer for redemption
1:15–23	Hymn: Christ, the Creator and Redeemer
1:24–29	Paul’s labor for the Church
2:1–3	Being built up in Christ
2:4–8	Walk in Christ and beware of traditions of mortals
2:9–23	We are made complete in Christ
3:1–4	Desire heavenly things
3:5–17	Develop Christlike qualities
3:18–4:1	Household relationships
4:2–6	Concluding exhortation: Pray, live wisely, and speak graciously
4:7–18	Final personal greeting

Col 1:2 (NIV). *“To God’s holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.”* Paul greets his audience as “faithful brethren” (KJV), which includes all faithful believers, *adelphoi*, or men and women who are “united to another by the bond of affection.”

Thanksgiving and prayer for redemption—Col 1:3–14

Col 1:3–5. *“We give thanks to God . . . For the hope which is laid up for you.”* Hope is internalized faith.

Col 1:5–6 (JST). *“the gospel; which is come unto you, as **it is in all generations of the world; and bringeth forth fruit.**”* Just as the Gentiles can be adopted into Christ’s fold, so too all generations may hear and learn the gospel at some point. This is made possible through vicarious work for the dead and missionary work in the spirit world, which Peter describes in his epistles (1 Pet 3:19; see also D&C 138). A similar passage in D&C 84:17 changes the word “gospel” to “priesthood”: “Which priesthood continueth in the church of God in all generations, and is without beginning of days or end of years.” Yet the scriptures also say that priesthood keys have been taken from the world at times. However, even without priesthood keys for ordinances, God’s power has been available to righteous individuals (D&C 107; 110:12).

Col 1:7. *“Epaphras our dear fellowservant.”* Paul refers to Epaphras, who opened the city of Colossae to the gospel and served as a fellow missionary with Paul during his three years in Ephesus (Col 4:12–13). These verses are consistent with Acts 19:10, where Luke records, “All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord” during Paul’s mission. Epaphras’s name is shortened from the common Greek

name Epaphroditus, meaning “lovely, fascinating, charming.” At one point he visited Paul in prison and is mentioned in Phm 1:23. Epaphras likely reported to Paul on the Colossian Saints (Col 1:4–5).

Col 1:8. *“also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.”* The Spirit’s role is to declare God’s love.

Col 1:9 (NIV). *“We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.”* Note that Paul and Timothy pray that the Colossians will have spiritual understanding, which comes through the Holy Spirit. Giving preeminence to what is most important in our prayers can more fully open the windows of heaven.

Col 1:10. *“walk worthy of the Lord . . . being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.”* Paul and Timothy pray to and live in a manner pleasing the Lord in every way. When Saints prioritize increasing knowledge of the Lord, they are thinking celestial as the prophet asked.³⁰

Col 1:11–12 (NIV). *“[You] being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, . . . to share in the inheritance.”* The sanctification of the Spirit “qualifies” (RSV) disciples for the Father’s inheritance. Receiving strength from the Savior’s Atonement makes one “fit” (NEB) to walk worthy of the Lord.

Col 1:13–14 (NIV). *“he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* Jesus’s mission is to create and redeem. It began with His Father’s plan to bring exaltation through the sacrifice of His Son (also Heb 1:1–3, 6). These verses are some of the clearest on the separate beings within the Godhead in Paul’s epistles.

Hymn: Christ, the Creator and Redeemer—Col 1:15–23

Most biblical scholars suggest this was a known Christian hymn quoted or adapted by Paul.³¹

Col 1:15 (NIV). *“The Son is the image of the invisible God.”* This is also translated “who cannot be seen” (CEV) and “the image of The Unseen God” (ABPE). This refers to Jesus sharing a visible likeness with His Father, which Jesus alluded to in Mt 22:20 and Jn 14:9. The first Creation story also states, “God created man in his own image” (Gen 1:27). Paul identifies Jesus’s premortal position as the spiritual firstborn of every human on earth. This idea confuses most biblical scholars who have no understanding of the first estate, yet Paul often references a pre-earth life. The Restoration’s perspective is very helpful.

Col 1:16 (BSB). *“visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through Him and for Him.”* Jesus created not only the physical world but also unseen elements and other worlds (Mose 1:33). He has prepared for our postmortal life with “thrones, or dominations.” The last phrase, “for Him,” can be interpreted through the perspective that Jesus’s glory is enhanced by children of God being exalted too (see Mose 1:39).

Col 1:18. *“he is the head of . . . the church.”* God gave Christ authority as the head of His kingdom and Church. Peter is not the head, nor Paul, nor Joseph Smith, only the Savior.

Col 1:18. “the firstborn from the dead.” Paul refers to Jesus as the firstborn in three different ways: (1) He is the firstborn as the literal Son of God in mortality (1:3), (2) He is the firstborn of the Father in the premortal existence (1:15), and (3) He is the firstborn of the dead, or the first to be resurrected.

Col 1:19. “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.” Christ carried out the Father’s plan, so the Father gave Jesus of His fullness (Mt 28:18). However, we learn in D&C 93 that Jesus did not receive that fullness at first but progressed from grace to grace.³² The same revelation taught how fulness is inherited: “If you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness. . . . And no man receiveth a fulness unless he keepeth his commandments. He that keepeth his commandments receiveth truth and light, until he is glorified in truth and knoweth all things.”³³

Col 1:20. “having made peace through the blood of his cross . . . to reconcile all things unto himself.” Jesus’s atoning sacrifice was the way and means for reconciliation with God the Father. Jesus reconciles us on earth and in heaven. Modern revelation adds more detail on Jesus’s Atonement than we find in the Bible,³⁴ including the only firsthand account of the Savior’s suffering (D&C 19:16–19). Also, we learn that missionary work goes on after mortal life—including to those who rejected it (D&C 138).

Col 1:21–22 (BSB). “Once you were alienated from God . . . engaging in evil deeds. But now He has reconciled you by Christ.” We estrange ourselves from God by sinning (Col 1:27). If Saints are repentant, willing to change, and firm in their faith, then Christ will cleanse, rectify, and sanctify them.

Col 1:23. “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven.” Paul teaches that everyone has already heard the gospel; a literal translation reads, “Having been proclaimed in all creation under heaven” (BLB). Without understanding our premortal state, biblical commentaries interpret Paul’s words as “hyperbole . . . insist[ing] on the universality of its proclamation.”³⁵ Restored scripture gives a second witness to this premortal teaching in the book of Abraham: “Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was. . . . And we will prove them herewith, to see if they will do all things whatsoever the Lord their God shall command them; and they who keep their first estate shall be added upon” (Abr 3:22, 25–26).

The phrase “every creature heard the gospel preaching” may refer to the premortal councils when all heard God’s plan and chose to follow Jesus with their own agency.³⁶

Paul’s labor for the Church—Col 1:24–29

Col 1:24 (NIV). “I rejoice in what I am suffering for you.” While Paul was imprisoned, his right hand was probably chained to his guard’s left hand. Paul listed his major physical sufferings over the past two decades in 2 Cor 11:23–26.

Col 1:25 (NIV). “I have become [the church’s] servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.” Paul refers to himself as *diakonos*, “a servant

or minister,” which literally means “to kick up dust,’ as one running an errand.”³⁷ As discussed in the Gospels, Jesus set an example to the Apostles to choose to serve and not be served.

Col 1:26 (NKJV). *“the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.”* The early Church knew many mysteries. The Apostles knew the Lord’s plan of salvation, the mystery that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and the temple initiation, endowment, and sealing ordinances. Joseph Smith taught that “Paul . . . knew . . . all the ordinances, and blessings that were in the Church.”³⁸

Col 1:28–29 (NIV). *“He is the one we proclaim. . . . To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.”* Paul leaves us a valiant example of consecrating his time, talents, money, physical stamina, and energy to building the kingdom. It is those who are “valiant in the testimony of Jesus” who will receive a celestial reward (D&C 76:79). He “contended,” or “labored and fought” (ABPE) because the powers of the adversary fought against him. In addition to sharing the good news of Jesus and his testimony, Paul and Timothy also warned against the powers of Satan.

Colossians 2

Being built up in Christ—Col 2:1–3

Col 2:1–2. *“I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, . . . That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches . . . of the Father, and of Christ.”* Paul assures these Saints, even those whom he does not know personally, that he worries about them and hopes for the best for them. The congregations are unified, or “knit together,” when they understand and share the same values.

Walk in Christ and beware the traditions of mortals—Col 2:4–8

Col 2:4 (NIV). *“I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.”* False teachers intentionally perverted Christ’s doctrines early on. Paul’s letters are filled with examples of deceptive arguments that led the Saints astray. His warning to be on guard is needed in our generation, as Satan’s refined and marketed falsehoods inundate our minds at the click of a button (Mt 7:15). Paul calls on the Saints to combat satanic deceptions by trusting in Christ and His Spirit.

Col 2:6–7. *“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith.”* The best way to avoid falling away is to be anxiously engaged and building one’s faith with hearts “overflowing with thankfulness” (NIV). When disciples focus on growing faith and serving others, they can seek answers with faith and humbly hear God’s direction.

Col 2:8 (DBT). *“there be no one who shall lead you away as a prey through philosophy and vain deceit.”* This is variously translated “do not let your minds be captured” (NEB) and

“takes you captive” (NIV). The source of information was crucial, and Paul repeatedly warns against false teachings (Gal 4:17; Php 3:2). He wants the Saints to carefully guard their faith and rationally discern between truth and falsehoods. Paul warns all Christians to beware of philosophy and traditions of men who beguile “after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ,” no matter how enticing they may be.³⁹

We are made complete in Christ—Col 2:9–15

Col 2:9. “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” We now come to the first specific heresy addressed in the letter: the physical nature of God’s body. Many commentators avoid the word “bodily” in this verse. Richard Anderson observed, “Paul used *somatikos*, formed from *soma*, the Greek word for ‘body,’ which Paul uses equally for both man’s earthly body and Christ’s resurrected body. Thus, Paul testifies that Christ possesses godhood physically.”⁴⁰ The word translated here as “Godhead” (*theotés*) is only used once in the KJV, and it also means “deity.” Paul described what he meant by the Godhead earlier in this same letter (Col 1:14–15). Christ’s crucified, mortal body was a revolting concept to the Greeks. His death and resurrection conflicted with their philosophy of the nature of gods.

Col 2:10 (NIV). “In Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.” Paul and Timothy correct the second misunderstanding by explaining that Christ is the head of all authority and principalities. Only through unifying our desires with Christ, not the laws of mortals, can we find complete fulfillment or perfection (Col 2:14–16).

Col 2:11. “The circumcision made without hands.” Paul describes the covenant to follow Christ as a symbolic circumcision; God’s covenant becomes cut into our hearts. Paul knew that circumcision was the ideal application of the law, as the Old Testament repeats: “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.”⁴¹ Paul also taught this in Rom 2:18.⁴²

Col 2:12. “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God.” Christian baptism represents the burial of our old self and sins, and thus it is best enacted by immersion. Early Christians saw baptism as a dramatic reenactment of Christ’s death and Resurrection: they walked into the water, a symbolic grave, and rose as a symbolically resurrected being following Jesus’s example.⁴³ The sinful life is buried and a new life in Christ is begun. Rather than circumcision, the ordinance of baptism is now the sign of the covenant.

Col 2:13–14 (BSB). “When you were dead in your trespasses . . . God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our trespasses, . . . He took it away, nailing it to the cross!” When Jesus suffered for humanity’s sins, He redeemed us from the Fall (Gal 3:13). Consistent with the image of Jesus nailing our sins to His cross, “one ancient mode of cancelling bonds was by striking a nail through the writing: this seems to have existed in Asia at that time.”⁴⁴

Col 2:16–17. *“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come.”*

The next falsehood Paul denounces is combining Jewish holidays as part of Christianity. Mosaic rituals were to foreshadow the promised Messiah (Gal 3:24). For over a decade, Christians were no longer required to follow the Mosaic dietary laws of clean and unclean food (*meat* meant “food” in Early Modern English). After Paul’s first mission to the Gentiles, the Jerusalem Council was held to determine how much of the old law was needed. Peter and James agreed that Christians only needed to “abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled” (Act 15:29).

The reference to the new moon and holy days could point to Jewish celebrations that Christians do not have to follow.⁴⁵ The day that a new moon rose, Jewish priests gave an additional animal sacrifice of two bullocks, a ram, and seven sheep (Num 10:10; 28:11–14). When a new moon fell during the fall month of Tisri, they celebrated their new year (Lev 23:24–25). Christians still honored a Sabbath but without the thousands of restrictions. It was also moved from Saturday to Sunday to honor the Resurrection.

Col 2:18 (NIV). *“Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you.”* Paul warns the Saints of those who will “beguile you of your reward” (KJV) or “disqualify you” (RSV). There were some who worshipped angels in conjunction with fasting. Paul may have referred to this practice when he mentioned “ascetic practices” (CSB).⁴⁶ Paul admires humility but warns about false humility that is used to entrap the disciples. These practices of asceticism and angel worship were also seen in some pagan practices that Paul and Timothy denounce next.

The false teachers had beguiled Christians by combining Jewish and pagan ideas into a hierarchical system of heavenly beings. Even Christ was supposedly subordinate to these angelic powers. Some of the problems sound similar to the Gnostic beliefs of inflated mind, visions, and angels.⁴⁷

Col 2:21–22 (JST). *“Which are after the doctrines and commandments of men, who teach you to touch not, . . . all those things which ~~all~~ are to perish with the using; ~~after the commandments and doctrines of men?~~ Which things have indeed a ~~shew show~~ of wisdom . . . neglecting ~~of~~ the body as to the satisfying the flesh, not in any ~~honour~~ honor to ~~the satisfying of the flesh~~ God.”* These verses suggest that the opponents were falsely teaching for worldly appreciation.

Col 2:23 (NIV). *“Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.”* Paul denounces those who act out of pretense and who manufacture their own worship. The last phrase is also translated “no use at all in combating sensuality” (NEB) and “no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh” (RSV). Neglecting the body was a tendency of the Gnostics, who believed the physical body was evil. This led to two extreme behaviors: complete denial of marriage and sexual relations or complete indulgence of physical urges. Both negated the purpose and value of the human body.

Colossians 3

Desire heavenly things—Col 3:1–4

Col 3:1 (BSB). “*since you have been raised with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*” This is another verse that distinguishes God the Father as a separate being from His Son.⁴⁸ Disciples have been raised to holier things: focusing on seeking and serving Christ.

Col 3:3. “*For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*” Disciples who are sanctified through Christ are dead to the the natural man. Those raised in Christ become more like Him. The description of the Saints becoming “hid with Christ” comes from the Greek word *kruptó*, “to hide, conceal, lay up.” It is used eighteen times in the New Testament.⁴⁹ However, the three-word phrase “hidden with Christ” (NAS) is unique to this verse. Similar words are also found in D&C 86:9: “For ye are lawful heirs, according to the flesh, and have been hid from the world with Christ in God.” Joseph Smith also included the biblical phrase and interpretation in a journal entry now printed in *The Joseph Smith Papers*. I have compared Joseph’s interpretation with the standard Christian perspective below.

Bible commentaries

“As we are hidden with Christ in God in heaven with Christ according to the letter to the Colossians, we will appear in glory together with Christ.”⁵⁰

“The spiritual life in man is a ‘hidden life,’ having its source in God; the full conviction of it, as distinct from the mere instinctive consciousness of it in the mind itself.”⁵¹

Joseph Smith’s usage

“Putting my hand on the knee of William [Clayton] I said, ‘*Your life is hid with Christ in God,*’ and so are many others. Nothing but the unpardonable sin can prevent him from inheriting eternal glory, for he is sealed up by the power of the Priesthood, unto eternal life, having taken the step which is necessary for that purpose.”⁵²

We can find in scripture and in the Prophet Joseph Smith’s writings and sermons at least four other phrases used to describe some aspects of this sealing:

- “Calling and election sure” (2 Pet 1:10; D&C 53:1)
- “Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13; D&C 76:53; 88:3; 132:7, 18–19, 26)
- “More sure word of prophecy” (2 Pet 1:19; D&C 131:5)
- “Rest of the Lord” (Moro 7:3; D&C 101:31–32)

The sacred doctrine will be discussed in more detail in 2 Pet 1:10.

Col 3:4 (NKJV). “*When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*” Paul encourages readers to focus on meeting Christ again—either in the afterlife or, as the early Christians thought they would, at His return. To become like Christ, the Saints must be transformed through the power of His Atonement. Like Paul, John also taught that disciples will become like Him (1 Jn 3:2).

Develop Christlike qualities—Col 3:5–17

Col 3:5 (BSB). “*Put to death, therefore, the components of your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.*” Paul lists five vices. The KJV uses “fornication” (from *porneia*) to encompass all sexual sins. Each vice in this verse destroys our relationship with each other and God. Paul asks the Saints to deaden their carnal desires through a change of heart and repentance. The scripture teaches that idolatry is covetousness and grows when we “[walk] some time” in our own evil desires or when our will supersedes God’s will (Col 3:7). This explanation of idolatry extends to praying or acting in vain. Furthermore, it may apply to taking the Lord’s name in vain (Ex 20:7). Many sins are a form of idolatry as they signify idolizing the ungodly.

Col 3:8–9. “*put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another.*” The archaic KJV words in this passage are also translated “rage . . . slander, and filthy language from your lips” (NIV) and “hateful, and evil . . . insulting or cruel things about other” (CEV). The KJV’s “put off” is actually stripping off the old sinful ways and implies baptism.

Col 3:10 (NIV). “*put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*” By putting on a new self, Christians are not only born again but are clothed in Christ’s Atonement. The Hebrew word for “atone” (*kaphar*) implies a covering or God’s protection.⁵³ For more, see Hugh Nibley’s explanation of the etymology in his book *Approaching Zion*.⁵⁴ Becoming a new person connotes dressing in the image of the Lord by covering ourselves in His Atonement. It is through the cleansing power of the Atonement that we are thus clothed and covered.

Col 3:11. “*Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.*” The Judeo-Greco-Roman society was divided in distinct social classes. The Scythian tribe were locals around the Black Sea and were socially considered the lowest barbarians. Josephus refers to the Scythians as “little more than wild beasts.”⁵⁵ Paul referenced them to make his contrast more extreme. God is absolutely no respecter of persons by race, gender, education, impairments, wealth, beauty, or profession. In Christ, all are the same.

Col 3:12–13 (NIV). “*as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another . . . as the Lord forgave you.*” Paul asks us to clothe ourselves in seven virtues (the symbolism of his numerology is probably intentional). Roman dress codes communicated one’s station and privilege or lack thereof. Paul asks Christians to adorn their internal thoughts with Christ’s covering, the Atonement. He admonishes his readers to put on or internalize the teachings of Jesus—to develop Christlike attitudes of meekness, kindness, humility, and forgiveness. “Bowels of mercy” means “compassion” (RSV, NIV, JB).⁵⁶ These verses sound a lot like the D&C 121:41–45.

Col 3:14 (HCSB). “*Above all, put on love—the perfect bond of unity.*” The Greek *agape*, “love, charity,” is chosen by the New Testament authors to describe Christlike love. Disciples strive to

have a loving attitude as the underlying motivation of all actions. The KJV connects a powerful idea: love is the bond of perfection (*teleiotes*, which can also mean “completion, maturity, *combination* of truths or stages of spiritual growth”). Many things can bring us together, but nothing can truly bind us in unity like love.

Col 3:15. “*let the peace of God rule in your hearts, . . . and be ye thankful.*” Peace is a witness and fruit of the Spirit (D&C 6:23). When disciples internalize Christ’s teachings they may also be blessed with His peace. Paul reminds the Saints to be thankful. Gratitude leads to meekness and humility. Paul then describes how disciples can express our gratitude to God.

Col 3:16 (NIV). “*Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.*” Pondering the words of Christ blesses Christians with wisdom. Good music can edify and uplift us. Throughout the letter, Paul and Timothy repeat different approaches to encourage the Saints to sing uplifting music. In this case, Paul uses music as part of his threefold means of giving thanks.

Col 3:17 (NIV). “*whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.*” Baptized disciples who have taken on the name of the Lord, and especially those called to serve Him as missionaries, need to do everything in His name. This includes sanctifying our daily actions in the name of the Lord. Nephi taught, “Ye must not perform any thing unto the Lord save in the first place ye shall pray unto the Father in the name of Christ, that he will consecrate thy performance unto thee, that thy performance may be for the welfare of thy soul” (2 Ne 32:9). If we hold God at the center of our lives, then everything we do and say is in the name of the Lord; we will be fulfilling our covenant to always remember Him (Moro 4:3). This will cause us to be filled with gratitude and give thanks to God the Father.

Household relationships—Col 3:18–4:1

Col 3:18–19 (NIV). *Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.*” Submission indicates cooperation, sharing a burden, or willingness to give oneself over to the guidance of another. Again, wives only submit to their husbands if it is congruent with the Lord, or “fit in the Lord.” This should not interfere with the principle of agency or the ability to act and not “to be acted upon” (2 Ne 2:26). It is best if our submission to God and each other is voluntary, filled with love, and following Christ’s example (1 Pet 3:5–6; Jn 13:6–9).

Husbands should love (*agapao*) their wives. *Agapao* indicates in a social or moral sense the highest form of love. This is completely unlike the Judeo-Greco-Roman discussions of a husband’s household duties. Love was not conventional counsel then. If Christian husbands loved their wives and were not harsh or bitter, it would be easier for their wives to unite in their counsel. This is added right after Paul described love as the culmination of virtues (Col 3:12–14). One commentary described:

The exhortation to sacrifice one's own interests for the welfare of others, which was so necessary for the harmony of the community, now finds a more specific application in the husband's role in contribution to marital harmony. Husbands are asked to exercise the self-giving love that has as its goal only their wives' good and that they will care for their wives without expectation of reward.⁵⁷

Col 3:20–21. “Children, obey your parents . . . Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.” The cultural place of children was often equated to a slave or servant. They often shared the same responsibilities. The father or guardian had complete control over the child and held the rights to sell them into slavery and, legally or not, even to kill them.⁵⁸ However, in Christianity the cultural norm was dramatically changed. Fathers are to control their tempers and not “exasperate” or “embitter” their children (NASB, NIV). The writer exhorts children to obey their parents in all things (although Eph 6:1 added, “In the Lord”). There is also no distinction for the age of a child—no matter how old we are, we must honor and obey our parents as long as they are in line with the Lord's teachings. Paul sets bounds for this authoritative use, though, and directs fathers not to aggravate their precious children.

Col 3:22 (BSB). “Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only to please them while they are watching, but with sincerity of heart and fear of the Lord.” All three New Testament household codes include servants or slaves. Roman servitude was more like the indentured servitude of the Middle Ages. Average “middle class citizens often owned eight slaves.”⁵⁹ As mentioned earlier, servants and enslaved persons worked for a few years before they received their freedom. Paul's statement is almost verbatim to his admonition in Eph 6:5–6.

Col 3:23–24 (BSB). “Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being, for the Lord and not for men, because you know that you will receive an inheritance . . . It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” Whatever circumstance disciples are in, they adopt “singleness of heart” unto God (KJV). Similar counsel was given at least twice before: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Mt 25:40) and “When ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosi 2:17).

Col 3:25 (BSB). “Whoever does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.” The Judgment Day will be unbiased. All will have to be accountable for their thoughts and actions.

Colossians 4

Col 4:1. “Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.” Paul encouraged masters to be “right and fair” (NIV) or, literally, to be “righteous” (BLB) in the care of servants. Likewise, Christianity called for love and cooperation in relationships—especially in familial relationships. We see the same call to care for those in our stewardship in the

modern dispensation. Philemon was likely one of the masters in Paul's immediate audience. This counsel may have been directed toward him, as Paul sent his runaway slave, Onesimus, back to him (Col 4:9).

Concluding exhortation: Pray, live wisely, and speak graciously—Col 4:2–6

Col 4:2–3 (NIV). *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, . . . for which I am in chains.*” When disciples watch, they are alert to the Spirit's promptings and aware of the devil's deceptions. Prayers focus their watchfulness and sincere expressions of gratitude to God.

Paul also asks the Saints to pray for his mission efforts while in prison. Significantly, Paul does not ask them to pray that he be released but that he be about the Father's business while imprisoned. It can be interpreted that a date had been set for his trial, and he solicits their prayers to testify as God would have him. For more on Paul in chains, see my commentary on Eph 6:19–20.

Col 4:5 (NASB). *“Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.”* Paul continues to encourage Saints to share Christ's message of redemption by “walk[ing] with wisdom” and taking every opportunity to discuss the good news with neighbors.

Col 4:6 (BSB). *“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”* Jesus admonished His disciples to be the salt of the earth (Mt 5:13). In addition to preserving food and enhancing flavor, salt was also a symbol of the covenant in ancient temple sacrifices. When we remember our Savior and live our covenants, we know what to say because the Holy Spirit directs our lives.

Final personal greetings—Col 4:7–18

Col 4:7 (NIV). *“Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant.”* Tychicus and Onesimus probably carried Paul's letter to Colossae. Tychicus is also mentioned in Act 20:4 as one of the nine men who traveled with Paul to carry the offerings from the Ephesians to Jerusalem (about six years earlier). His name is found again in 2 Tim 4:12 and Eph 6:21–22. The word “servant” here is the same word as “slave” (NET) or “bondservant” (NASB). The gospel of Jesus Christ rejects any dehumanizing practice that terrorizes individuals and calls them property rather than divine daughters and sons. The relationship between God, our Master, and us, His servants, works because God is a perfect Master who willingly gave His Son as an example of a perfect servant. The image of fellow servants adds a powerful dimension to our discipleship by inspiring humility and duty.

Col 4:8 (NIV). *“I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances.”* The KJV reverses the meaning of the last phrase. Rather than “he might know your estate,” all other English Bibles end this verse with the direction that the audience will learn about Paul or “know the things concerning us” (BLB).

Col 4:9 (BSB). *“With him I am sending Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.”* Onesimus was a runaway slave who joined the Church and helped Paul. His master, Philemon, was likely in the branch of Colossae. Paul carefully points out that Onesimus has become “a faithful and beloved brother.” See the letter to Philemon for more.

Col 4:10 (NIV). *“My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.”* Aristarchus is Paul’s fellow prisoner who was dragged into the theater in Ephesus when the silver smiths became outraged (Act 19:29). Aristarchus also traveled with Paul to Jerusalem to carry the Saints’ offerings and later sailed to Rome (Act 20:4).

Marcus, or Mark the scribe of the Gospel, is traditionally thought to be John Mark, who joined Paul as a junior companion on his first apostolic mission.⁶⁰ Mark was a cousin or nephew (*anepsios*) of Barnabas. It sounds as if Mark were visiting Paul at the time, which implies that Paul and Mark’s relationship had been healed.⁶¹

Col 4:11 (NIV). *“Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.”* The name Jesus, or Joshua, was a common Jewish name. Paul named at least five men named Jesus who had ministered to him in prison.

Col 4:12–13 (NIV). *“Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, . . . I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.”* Epaphras is also mentioned at the beginning of the letter as Paul’s source of information on the Colossian Saints (Col 1:7). He was a devoted Church worker laboring on their behalf.

Col 4:14 (BSB). *“Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas send you greetings.”* Luke, the Greek author of the Gospel and Acts, was also Paul’s missionary companion and physician. Both Luke and Demas are mentioned in three epistles written from Rome (Phm 1:24; 2 Tim 4:9–11).

Col 4:15 (NIV). *“Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.”* Paul sends personal greetings to the Laodicean Saints. Nympha is a woman’s name, and the Greek reads “her house.” This is one of five women who are mentioned as serving the Church by providing their home as a house church for a meeting place. The others are

- Mary the mother of John Mark (Act 12:12)
- Chloe (1 Cor 1:11)
- Lydia (Act 16:14, 40)
- Priscilla, or Prisca (Act 18:2–3, 18–19, 26; Rom 16:3–5; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19)
- Nympha (Col 4:15)

Col 4:16 (NKJV). *“see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.”* Paul mentions yet another lost letter—giving more

evidence that the canon of sacred writings is not complete. These extra letters opened a way for forgeries over the centuries.⁶²

Col 4:17 (BSB). “**Tell Archippus: ‘See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.’**” When we have a call to serve in God’s kingdom, we too can apply Paul’s advice to “fulfill it.”

Col 4:18. “**The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen.**” Paul’s personal, handwritten note at the end of most letters gives evidence that he used a scribe.

Notes

- 1 John Reumann, *Philippians* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 3.
- 2 Richard N. Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2006), 241.
- 3 The prison epistles include Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Paul was also imprisoned when he wrote 2 Timothy and possibly other letters, but those epistles fall into different categories. For the imprisonment information, see my commentary on the background of Ephesians.
- 4 Thirteen letters claim Pauline authorship, but only six are undisputed as either written or dictated by the Apostle: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon. The others have slight differences in style, vocabulary, messages, and theology that have made scholars question whether the letters were only directed, outlined, or signed by Paul. There are also those who see no Pauline attachment to some letters (for example, Hebrews) and question if the letter had his name and style only to claim apostolic authority.
- 5 “*Diakonos*,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/1249.htm>.
- 6 John Reumann, *Philippians* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 171–172. Paul’s imprisonment may have been in Rome, Caesarea, or Ephesus. See earlier notes on Eph 3:1 and the background to Ephesians. The details about Paul’s prison in 2 Timothy are much harsher, so many assume that it was a second Roman imprisonment. However, without the book of Acts corroborating that theory, we have no clear knowledge of it.
- 7 See Php 2:1; 2 Cor 6:12, 7:15; Col 3:12; Phm 1:7.
- 8 John Reumann, *Philippians* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 171–172. The praetorium may also have referred to military barracks or possibly the imperial guard in Caesarea or Ephesus.
- 9 Joseph B. Wirthlin, “Come What May and Love it,” October 2008 general conference, online at churchofjesuschrist.org.
- 10 John W. Welch and John F. Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 13-1. This hymn is one of many witnesses that Christian worship included singing. Worship through music followed Jesus’s practice with His Apostles (see Mt 26:30). We assume early Christians had many hymns since we find traces of hymns throughout the New Testament (for example, at Jn 1:1–5, 11–14). We

learn in letters dated between 110 and 120 AD that early Christian hymns were typically sung antiphonally by two choirs facing each other. In another account from about AD 98, when Trajan became Caesar, the governor Pliny wrote some judicial proceedings about Christians. In the letter he said that the Christians met early in the morning and “sang hymns to Christ as though he were a God.” Richard N. Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2006), 132.

11 Other examples of hymns tucked into the New Testament can be found in 1 Cor 13; Eph 1:3–14; 5:14; Col 1:15–20; 1 Tim 3:16; 2:11–13.

12 Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, Old and New Testaments* (Hartford, CT: S. S. Scranton, 1878), Php 2:6, online at <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/philippians/2-6.htm>.

13 3 Ne 9:18; 22:1; D&C 19:1; Mose 2:26.

14 Abr 3:21–28; Col 1:17; Jn 1:1–13; 5:58; D&C 76; 88:47; Ex 24:10, 11.

15 Isa 49:1–6; 50:4–11; 52:1–3:12.

16 Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 493.

17 Php 1:7–22; 2:19–30; 4:18; Eph 6:19–24; Col 4:7–18; Phm 1:19–22. The travel to these four locations across modern Turkey and Greece would have been more problematic from Rome or Caesarea than from Ephesus. This is one of the reasons why scholars suggest Ephesus as a possible location of Paul’s imprisonment. However, in the book of Acts and the Epistles, we have no evidence that Paul was ever imprisoned in Ephesus.

18 *Lectures on Faith* VI:7.

19 Rom 8:1–13; 1 Cor 2:14; Gal 5:17. The natural man is mentioned once in the New Testament (1 Cor 2:14) and many more times in restored scripture (Mosi 3:19; Alm 26:19–22; 41:11; 42:7–24; D&C 20:20; 29:41; Mose 5:13, 6:49). It is another example of the Prophet Joseph Smith taking a word or phrase from the Bible and expounding on it through revelation in beautiful clarity.

20 After the time of Paul, rabbis counted each commandment in the five books of Moses and claimed 613 laws.

21 “Skubalon,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/4657.htm>: “Properly, *waste* thrown to dogs, like filthy scraps of garbage (table-scraps, dung, muck, sweepings); (figuratively) *refuse*, what is good-for-nothing except to be discarded (used only in Php 3:8).”

22 “Suzugos,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/4805.htm>. The word is only used once in the New Testament.

23 John Reumann, *Philippians* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 608–609. The Anchor Bible translates the word for “yokefellow” as “faithful partner,” though the early church fathers Clement and Origin record that the phrase referred to Paul’s lawful wife. We assume as a Pharisee of the Pharisees Paul would have obeyed the law of marriage.

24 The letter from Clement written either in AD 95 or 96 focused on peace and concord among the Saints. He was influenced by popular Greek and Roman philosophies.

25 Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19.

26 Ps 69:28; Alm 5:58; D&C 76:68; 128:7; 132:19.

27 Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 423–424.

28 See, for example, Gal 3:13; 4:5; 5:1.

29 Marcus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 117–122. Some biblical scholars doubt complete Pauline authorship. Others find plenty of early authentication by the church fathers and stylistic vocabulary. Joint authorship allows for many differences between this letter and Paul's others. Timothy and Paul may have worked out the writing, with Paul adding his personal handwritten greeting at the end (see Col 4:18).

30 Russell M. Nelson, “Think Celestial!,” October 2023 general conference, online at [churchofjesuschrist.org](https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org).

31 Richard N. Holzapfel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment, *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2006), 132. Marcus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 229.

32 D&C 93:3–5, 12–14, 16–20.

33 D&C 93:20, 27–28; see also 3 Ne 28:10; D&C 76:71, 76–77.

34 2 Ne 2:7, 10; 9:7, 26; 10:25; 11:5–6; Jac 4:11; 7:12; Mosi 3:11–15; 4:6–7; Alm 7:11; 13:5, 28; 34:9; 42:15; Moro 7:41; 8:20; 10:33.

35 H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1893), Col 1:23; John Gills, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 3 vols. (London, UK: Aaron Ward, 1746–1748), Col 1:23: “This must be understood not of every individual creature, even human and rational, that was then, or had been in, the world; but that it had been, and was preached far and near, in all places all over the world, to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews; who are sometimes styled “every creature.” Both commentaries are available online at <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/colossians/1-23.htm>.

36 Mose 3:5; 4:2–4; also see Jud 1:6.

37 “*Diakonos*,” *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/1249.htm>.

38 Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 10; see also pages 9, 42, 110, 210, 327–331.

39 Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 606. Rudiments included astrological bodies that people thought controlled human affairs. In this scenario, it may refer to devils.

40 Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2007), 254.

41 Deu 10:16; see Deu 30:6; Jer 4:4; 9:25.

42 Marcus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1994), 319.

43 Col 1:19–23; David Bercot, ed., *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 54–57. Immersion was also clearly referenced in Tertullian’s statement that “it makes no difference whether a man I swashed in the sea or a pool, a stream, or a fountain, a lake or a trough . . . we are plunged in water. . . . He commands them to baptize into the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—not into a unipersonal God. . . . [We] are immersed into the three Persons, at the mention of each individual name” (page 57).

44 Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, Old and New Testaments* (Hartford, CT: S. S. Scranton, 1878), Col 2:14, online at <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/colossians/2-14.htm>.

45 Isa 1:13–14; Ezk 45:17; Hos 2:13.

46 Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 314.

47 Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 607.

48 See also Col 1:14–15; Heb 1:3; Rom 8:34.

49 See the parable of a man hiding his talent, in Mt 25:25; see also Rev 6:16; Mt 11:25; 13:35.

50 Hans Burge, *Being in Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Investigation in a Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 220.

51 Charles J. Ellicott, *Ellicott’s Commentary for English Reader* (Harrington, DE: Delmarva, 2015), Col 3:3.

52 “History, 1838–1856, volume D-1 [1 August 1842–1 July 1843],” p. 1551, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-d-1-1-august-1842-1-july-1843/194>; capitalization and punctuation silently modernized.

53 “*Kaphar*,” *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, available online at <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/3722.htm>.

54 Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, ed. Don E. Norton (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1989), 558–559. “The basic word for atonement is *kaphar*, which has the same basic meaning in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, that being ‘to bend, arch over, cover; . . . to deny, . . . to forgive, . . . to be expiated, . . . renounce.’ The Arabic *kafara* puts the emphasis on a tight squeeze, such as tucking in the skirts, drawing a thing close to one’s self. Closely related are Aramaic and Arabic *kafat*, meaning a close embrace, which are certainly related to the Egyptian *hpet*, the common ritual embrace written with the ideogram of embracing arms. It may be cognate with the Latin *capto*, and from it comes the Persian kaftan, a monk’s robe and hood completely embracing the body. Most interesting is the Arabic *kafata*, as it is the key to a dramatic situation. It was the custom for one fleeing for his life in the desert to seek protection in the tent of a great sheik, crying out, ‘*Ana dakhiluka*,’ meaning ‘I am thy suppliant,’ whereupon the Lord would place the hem of his robe over the guest’s shoulder and declare him under his protection.” We see this image in the Book of Mormon too. See 2 Ne 1:15; 4:33; Alm 5:24.

55 Josephus, *Against Apion*, trans. John M.G. Barclay (Boston, MA: Brill, 2011), 321.

56 John Durham Peters, “Bowels of Mercy,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1999): 27–41.

57 Leander Keck, ed., *New Interpreters Bible*, 12 vols. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 11:655.

58 Brent D. Shaw, “Raising and Killing Children: Two Roman Myths,” *Mnemosyne* 54, fasc. 1 (2001): 31–77.

59 Heshey Zelcher, *A Guide to the Jerusalem Talmud* (Irvine, CA: Universal Publishers, 2002), 92. “The middle class citizens often owned eight slaves, the rich from five hundred to a thousand, and an emperor as many as twenty thousand.”

60 See Act 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37–38.

61 Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 21–22. The early Christian Papias claimed that John Mark was Peter’s companion and scribe while in prison in Rome: “Mark became Peter’s interpreter and wrote accurately all that he remembered, not, indeed, in order, of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had not heard the Lord, nor had he followed him, but later on, and I said, followed Peter, who used to give teaching as necessity demanded . . . he gave attention, to leave out nothing of what he had heard and to make no false statements in him.” This may help us with understanding the location and timing of the prison letters.

62 Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 600. Early church fathers debated whether 2 Corinthians was this letter to the Laodiceans, but the Marcionites thought it was Ephesians (remember that letter had no addresses or names mentioned). Other early Christians mention a letter to the Laodiceans that the Marcionites forged. In the fourth century, the eastern church challenged apocryphal letters to Laodiceans. Catholics circulated a Latin apocryphon, “To the Laodiceans,” between the sixth and fifteenth centuries, but the Council of Trent rejected it. John the Revelator wrote of the Laodiceans as well (Rev 1:11; 3:14).