

THE GOSPEL CANNOT BE CHAINED

SEARCHING FOR GRACE
IN PAUL'S PRISON LETTERS

- Colossians -

Mick Mooney

Copyright © Mick Mooney 2011

Published by Lightview Media

For more information visit:

<http://searchingforgrace.com>

All rights reserved.

Paraphrase by Mick Mooney www.searchingforgrace.com
This book is also available in paperback format on www.amazon.com

FOREWORD

This letter to the Colossians is one of four letters Paul wrote during his imprisonment in Rome, paraphrased, with a great deal of respect, in a way that highlights what I believe to be the heart of his message. I find it amazing that even in prison Paul still knew he was free; he still knew of a far greater reality that was his in Christ. The beauty of his message that lifts up and highlights God's love and grace in his prison letters touches my heart every time I read them. I hope it blesses your heart also. This letter has been taken from my book called: **'The Gospel Cannot Be Chained.'** It is a paraphrase and expression of my understanding of Paul's four prison letters.

Paul's letters reveal so much of his heart of love, his joy in God's grace, and his uncompromising faith in the redemptive work of Jesus. Paul has, in a spiritual way,

become one of my dearest friends; a wonderful brother in my own faith walk who has always encouraged me through his letters that I can truly live by the Spirit of God. Although I haven't yet met him personally, I certainly appreciate the letters he wrote to me, to you, and to all who are part of the body of Christ.

I didn't approach paraphrasing Paul's letters with the mindset that I was rewriting Scripture, but rather, respectfully attempting to clarify the heart of a dear friend who is no longer with us. The best way to read this book is in rest. Relax, and read it as if you are reading a few letters from a dear brother in Christ who is writing you a personal letter to remind you of the wonderful reality of God's grace.

As this is not a Bible, but rather a modern expression of four letters from a friend, I have not formatted it in the way modern Bibles format Paul's letters. There are no verses or chapters. The best way to read these letters is in one sitting, as you would with any letter you received from a friend today.

I hope that through reading my interpretation of Paul's letters it helps highlight for you his message of love and grace in whatever Bible translation you normally read.

Blue skies,
Mick Mooney

THE GOSPEL CANNOT BE CHAINED

Paraphrase by Mick Mooney www.searchingforgrace.com
This book is also available in paperback format on www.amazon.com

COLOSSIANS

Paul, singled out by God to proclaim the truth of his divine love for mankind that is now understood through the grace of his Son Jesus. Together with Timothy our brother. To my faith-filled brothers and sisters in Colossae, set apart and made alive in the endless love of Christ; grace and peace to you in abundance from our heavenly Father.

We are always thanking God, our eternal Father, for you all. Indeed, ever since we received news of your faith, and the love you have for each other, we have been filled with joy and continue to thank God over and over that you have received the light of life. What a blessing it is for all of us to finally understand the truth: that God considers us so valuable he allowed his Son to die for us, in order that we can now live eternally with him. We have such significance in the eyes of the Almighty.

I must say, it truly is a joy to hear of your faith, and how God is working powerfully within your community. A faith that has arisen through your understanding of God's love for you and the acceptance of your glorious inheritance, stored up for you in heaven. Oh, how 'good' the 'news' truly

is. God has established a covenant for us based on his nature, his love, and his divine grace.

We no longer need to live distant from him, scared of him, or ashamed before him. We no longer strive to relate with him based on our limited strength and faithfulness; rather, through a glorious act of his grace, our new covenant is based on his divine strength and his perfect ability to be faithful to us. We have entered into a covenant with God that isn't sealed with our imperfect sacrifices, but rather, with the perfect sacrifice of Christ. How incredible to know that the covenant we have now received was not sealed with the blood of men, nor the blood of animals, but with the blood of Christ. He did everything on our behalf, so that God could now freely give to us as a gift all the benefits of Christ's perfect finished work.

That gift, my friends, is the gospel: the good news that God has now established his very own nature in you. That is what his grace is my friends. It is the very nature of God. It's not just a nice word, or a theoretical doctrine - it's real. It's alive in you! Grace is God's divine, empowering nature of love. How wonderful to know that you have now been established in God's grace. Christ in you is the gift of God, and he lives passionately in you now. You freely and joyfully received him through the word of

truth: the gospel of unfailing love that has come to you.

God has made it possible for the whole world to be set free from spiritual slavery, and now desires to lead all of mankind into a whole new spiritual reality. All over the world people are being set free from lies, fear, pain, sin, hopelessness, shame, guilt and condemnation and entering into a reality of truth, love, hope, peace and joy. I know you can testify to this reality, for these very things have been happening in your community since the first day you heard the gospel and understood God's grace in all its truth.

How wise God is. How amazing his ways. That freedom from bondage would not come through man's determination and will power, but rather, through the understanding of his grace. You learned the good news from Epaphras, our fellow preacher, who, with a passion and joy, proclaimed the gospel of Christ to you just as we would have, had we been with you. He has just arrived to visit us and has told us of your love in the spirit.

We really have been blessed to hear of your faith; indeed, we have not stopped praying for you ever since the day we heard about you. We pray that God, our loving Father, would pour into your hearts such an abundant revelation of his love that it may

result in you having a clearer understanding of his will. As you know, it is because of the great promise you have in Christ that you no longer need a law, or any other written principles to understand God's will. What you need, my dear friends, is the very thing you have been given: his Holy Spirit living in you! And now, just as his Holy Spirit lives in you, we pray that he will continue to speak to you with all heavenly wisdom and understanding. For we desire to see in you the same results that you also desire: that you may be empowered through the Spirit of God to live a life that reflects God's love; for we know how much you identify with God's love, and we can testify how much this makes God smile.

As you enjoy the journey of walking with God, allow him the joy of revealing to your spirit more understanding regarding the finished work of Christ upon the cross. The more you understand this, the more you will experience faith growing in you. God's grace will enable you to trust more in his power, stay in his rest and live by his Spirit. It is through knowing the greatness of Christ, not a theory, but a living reality, and allowing our minds to also accept this wonderful reality that God himself gains more access to strengthen us according to his glorious might. We can assure you that it is God himself who will strengthen you to live a life

of great endurance and patience. What will the result of this blessed life be? It will surely result in all of us continually coming into the throne room of God and thanking him for all he has done for us. Jesus' life not only redeems us; his life also qualifies us to share in the inheritance of heaven. For it was God almighty, our great king, who rescued us from the world controlled by deception and darkness, and, by his power, brought us into the kingdom of light. That kingdom is founded in his Son Jesus Christ. It is in Christ that we have redemption, acceptance, an inheritance and the profound grace of having our sins forgiven forever!

We have everything because we belong to the One who truly is everything. I tell you the truth, and let us never grow tired of meditating on this wonderful truth: Jesus truly is everything! He is the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Light and the Day! He is the Peace of God, the Word of God and the Love of God. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning of eternity and the End of eternity. He is literally God himself: the very image of the invisible God. He is the DNA of God that brought to life all of creation and it is through his life that all things were created. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. In regards to our redemption, he has done it all. He is the eternal high priest and the eternal

sacrificial lamb; the God and the man. He both *made* the sacrifice for our redemption and *was* the sacrifice for our redemption. He has no limits in power, no limits in authority and no limits in his love for us! He is the Almighty, the glory of God, and the head of his body, the Church. He has made us one with him, just as a head is one with its body, so too are we now one with Christ. We have become one with '*the One*' in whom everything finds its purpose and origins.

The eternal Father was pleased that his Son would have all his fullness dwell in him. Jesus is the creator of all things, so that all created things may once more be reconciled to God through him. His majesty is beyond understanding, and yet it can be seen in its fullness when we look to the cross of Christ. It was upon the cross that this almighty, universe creating Son of God was killed by the hands of his own creation. It was upon the cross that his perfectly pure blood was shed for our sins. It was upon the cross that he proved the unlimited depths of his love for all of mankind. It is this cross that reveals the power of God to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven. When we remember who it was that died upon that cross, not just a good man, but the Son of God himself, we can see God as he truly is: the God

of all grace who has no limits in his love for us.

At one point in time, we all assumed we had to keep our distance from God; believing, in our minds, that our weaknesses and shameful behaviour made us an enemy of God. But how wrong our thinking was! For the very God we believed was against us actually journeyed from heaven to earth in order to reach out to us with the truth of his eternal love. Oh, what a wonderful revelation of truth: he loves us! For, although we felt a million miles away from God and stained with imperfections, God drew us near to himself through the physical body of his very own Son, who went so far as to die for us, in order that we could be made new in him, and presented before God in his holiness and perfection. We have been granted the privilege of being made completely new with the identity of Jesus before the throne of God, and for that reason we now stand in God's presence with freedom and confidence, without blemish and free from accusation. For we are not seen in our weaknesses and past mistakes, but forever in his grace, cleansed forever by his mercy, and adopted into his very own family as sons and daughters.

My brothers and sisters, it is the reality of God's grace that keeps us in this place of confidence, so don't fall back into believing grace is not

enough; for it is when we try to earn our right standing that we fall into all kinds of fear, weakness and unnecessary self-condemnation. Remain in the truth of his grace my friends, and enjoy the confidence that comes from being wrapped in his unfailing love. This is the good news you heard, and the divine reality that you have taken your stand upon. It is the gospel message that fills the whole world with hope, and indeed has already been proclaimed to the whole world, but now made clear through the death, resurrection and new creation life of Christ. God has already proclaimed to all of creation his covenant of peace; a testimony that has now come to fulfilment at its appointed time, for Scripture testifies:

“God said to Noah and his children: “I now establish my covenant with you, and all the generations that come after you; and indeed, I proclaim it to every part of my creation. Yes, I establish this covenant of peace with all of creation, with every living creature in the entire world. This is an everlasting covenant between me and every living creature on earth. Never again will I inflict judgement; never again will I judge the world. Rather, I make a covenant of

salvation; a covenant that will save the world. And I give you a sign to remind you that I will never revoke this covenant; a sign for the generations to come; a sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on earth.”

That sign, my fellow brothers and sisters, was a rainbow, a shadow that represented the eternal sign of Christ’s cross that now reminds God forever to shine his favour and grace to all of us. Indeed, Isaiah confirms that the covenant God established in the days of Noah was in the same pattern as his eternal covenant of grace now established by the finished work of Jesus; as it is written:

“To me, this new covenant I make now is like in the time of Noah, when I promised the punishment of Noah would never be repeated. So now I have made an eternal oath, a promise I will not turn back on. I promise never to be angry with you again, and never to rebuke you again. Although the strongest of things in the world may be shaken, and the stable foundations of the world may crumble, yet my unfailing love for you will never be shaken, nor will my covenant of peace ever be removed,’

says the King of heaven, the father of compassion and the God of all grace."

This is the good news that you heard, that indeed has already been divinely proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and the message I am called, and blessed, to continue proclaiming. I am honoured to serve mankind with the proclamation of this incredible good news: that God is not counting mankind's sins against them, but rather, he is freely reconciling all by his grace, mercy and love. Praise God for the reality of his good news to mankind. God has made a way to reconcile us all to himself, because the truth of our past rebellion was 'overruled' by the truth of Christ's physical body nailed upon the cross for all of us. He has taken away our shame and has now clothed us with his grace. Our hope is in the redemptive work of Jesus and we are not moved from this position for it is the very hope that is given to us in the gospel.

As you know, I'm in prison for the sake of the gospel. I face rejection and punishment for being bold enough to declare the truth of God's grace. Just as Jesus was rejected for such a proclamation, I freely follow him in both proclaiming the truth as well as suffering, like he did, the rejection of the

message and the beating of my body. I do this for the sake of Christ's body, which is the Church. Indeed, I have become a servant to all who are part of the body of Christ. My task is a glorious one that I love and rejoice in, for I consider it the highest honour to present to you the word of God in its fullness. God's word was revealed in a written format from the beginning, but there was still a mystery concealed within it that was kept hidden from all the generations that went before us, but now it has been disclosed to the saints!

It is to the saints, those who have been born-again into the life of Jesus, which God is pleased to make fully known this divine mystery. What is the mystery that past generations could not see in the word of God? It is the reality of Christ in you, the hope of glory. All the Scriptures are testifying about his life, his sufferings and the grace that would come to us through his resurrection. It has now been revealed to you that the word of God is not simply a written code, but it is alive and living in you! The glorious riches of God's word lives in you; Christ in you is the word of God, and he is your hope of glory.

It is Jesus, and the glorious riches of his life in us, that we proclaim, teaching everyone with the wisdom that comes through God's grace, so that

you don't put your trust in your imperfect works, but rather, in the perfect finished work of Jesus; and, in doing so, we can present you as truly perfect in Christ. Perfection in God's eyes is a gift to all who put their trust in the work of his Son. It is to this end I labour, sharing God's message with all Christ's energy, which works so powerfully in me.

I want to share with you, my dear family, just how much I am struggling for you all, and also for those in the cities close to you. Not only for those I've had the privilege of meeting personally, but also for those I have not met. My heart is full of love for all of you, for you are all my beloved siblings in Christ.

My struggle is not for my sake, but for yours, my dear family. It is because I'm so passionate about the good news from God that is rightly yours in Christ that I press forward, despite the obstacles and opposition, with the hope that you will be encouraged in heart and united in the abounding love of God. I labour for the sake of this goal, knowing that when we are encouraged in our hearts, and united in our love, a spiritual highway is created that opens up a way for us to travel together into the full riches of divine understanding, leading us in love to accept the mystery of God. That divine mystery is that God is not at all demanding, judgm-

ental or legalistic; he doesn't want to live in a 'temple' or be brought sacrifices. He is truly the divine God who does not desire a religion, but rather, an intimately united life with us all. This mystery has finally come to light now that we see Jesus, for he is the mystery of God made plain to us all.

It is not in God's written word that the full riches of complete understanding are found, but in the fullness of Jesus, who is God's word made alive to us - Christ in you. In him is the full understanding of God's nature and way of love. In Christ are hidden the abounding treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge. I'm reminding you of this so that you won't be easily misled by fine-sounding arguments. You can rest assured that if Christ is in you, and you are in him, then he will open up your heart and mind to walk in God's ways and bless you with the wisdom of God in every circumstance. Although I'm not with you now, my heart is with you and I am delighted to see that your stand is upon the reality of Jesus in your lives and how your faith rests in him.

Now, just as you accepted Jesus as your Lord, the one who has made you perfectly acceptable in every way before your heavenly Father, continue to live in him. He offers us a transformed life that is a

glorious and daily experience. Rest in his divine love for you, and, in that place of heavenly rest, allow the Spirit to work as he desires. Live in Christ; allow your life to be rooted in his life that you may also be built up in his grace, strengthened in your knowledge of all he has accomplished for you and abounding in joy and thankfulness that a united life with Christ brings forth.

Keep yourself grounded in this glorious reality, and be on your guard. Don't allow anyone to take you captive through hollow and deceptive ideas. They may sound impressive with their reasoning and philosophy which depends on human traditions, historical research and basic principles of the world, but none of it is based on the reality of Christ.

Christ in you is a mystery that can only be understood by the Spirit of God, and so those without the Spirit will naturally try to explain life, God and faith from a worldly perspective that does not depend on the reality of Christ in you, your hope of glory. Be aware of this, my brothers and sisters, that you may not be so easily enslaved by their worldly teaching. For it is in Jesus that the fullness of the almighty, divine God can be seen and understood, and you have been given Jesus in his fullness. What a blessing! What a glorious reality, that the one who is the fullness of God himself is

living in you.

Christ is above every power and authority, there is nothing above his rule, and he is the ruler of our hearts. This is our reality, and in him we understand the reality of all things. Take circumcision for example: the reality of circumcision is not about cutting away the flesh, but rather it is about the work Christ does in the heart of a believer. He is the one that cut away the sinful nature in you in order that the righteous nature could forever shine. You don't have to cut away the sinful nature, it has been done for you by the grace of Christ. What a gift, that we are now free to live for God. Our faith is not merely a theory; it is founded in a profound reality.

The truth is we were buried with Christ, choosing to die with him rather than live without him, and in that moment of unity in death, God raised Jesus to life, and we too, who had been united to Christ in his death, remained united with him in his life. We have been raised with Christ through the power of the almighty God and we now live with him and will continue to do so for eternity.

How graceful is Jesus? He didn't stand back and wait until we were pure before he offered to make himself one with us, rather he became impure like we were, he was without sin, but he became sin

so he could be like us in our likeness and we could be united together and be buried together in that identity. Now, by the grace of God, we have been made raised and made alive with Christ. No longer with an identity of sin, but with Christ's divine identity! Our identity is one that is holy, blameless, without blemish and righteous; for we are now children of God. It is through the grace of Christ that God has established a covenant based on his divine nature of love. Not only has he forgiven our sins freely, but he made us new in Christ with a heavenly nature and a divine relationship of sonship – just like Jesus. The cross of Christ has changed everything, for upon it everything was nailed. Jesus was nailed to the cross, so too were we, our sins and also the old covenant obligations. Jesus brought to an end all that was old: old nature, old sins, old life and old covenant, so that he could establish all that is gloriously new: new nature, new creation, new life and new covenant!

God, in his grace, has made a way for us to be in relationship with him based on the power of his love to guide us, that is Christ in us, and no longer a written code of rules and regulations. In fact, Christ died for this reality to come alive to us. He not only forgave us all our sin, but he also ensured that we would never again be enslaved by sin. He did this by

establishing for us a new covenant, not a mixed covenant of old and new, but a brand new covenant of the Spirit that now leads and empowers us to live as God desires. Jesus cancelled the written code, along with its regulations, by fulfilling it through his life and then nailing it to himself in his death. He took it away so he could give us something so much better: himself! He is now living in us, and he is 'the way' that we can follow in order to live and outwork God's plans and desires in our lives.

In doing this he not only set our hearts free, but he also disarmed the powers of all spiritual enemies that are opposed to God and his children. He did this by removing any tool that could be formed against us to condemn us and make us feel unworthy to be in God's presence. For so long as there was a written obligation, that those in the spiritual realm could point to in order to expose our weakness, their was an opportunity for them to yoke us under condemnation and push us, in our minds, into separation from God - but not any longer! God has made a public spectacle of all spiritual enemies by removing their ability to condemn and invoke fear into the hearts of believers by removing his written code, that could so easily be manipulated and used to instill condemnation, replacing it with what can never be manipulated: Christ in us, our

hope of glory!

Since we know this to be true, don't let anyone yoke you under condemnation because you are not fulfilling what they deem to be your 'holy obligation'. Don't let people judge you by what you eat or drink, or in regards to traditional ceremonies, religious services or 'holy' days, such as the Sabbath. All these things that are found in the old covenant were never meant to be continued in the new covenant; rather they were a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality of all these things, however, are found in Christ.

The Sabbath, in its reality, is not a day; rather, it is the resting place we receive in Christ. For just as God finished his work of creation in six days, resting on the seventh day and inviting mankind to participate in that rest, so too did Christ finish the work of reconciliation in its fullness, so that we could finally find our rest in his finished work. The Sabbath as a shadow was a 'day', but the reality is about finding our rest in Christ. So too is it with everything in the Scriptures. They are not the reality themselves, but a shadow of the reality: that reality is always found in Christ.

So, in light of this, let's be sure we don't listen to people who try to convince us to chase after shadows, but listen to those who proclaim the

reality of Christ in our lives. Don't let anyone who takes pride in false humility and who struggles endlessly to earn God's blessings by their works disqualify you from receiving God's blessings freely as a gift of his grace. Likewise, beware of those who try to gain credibility by going into great details about visions they have supposedly seen; those who are so easily overcome by their unspiritual minds that are quick to puff up all their fanciful notions.

Listen to those who are preaching Christ, his love and the power of his finished work, and not to those who have lost connection with the reality of Christ in their lives. For when someone wanders away from the reality of Christ they end up preaching about everything except Christ! Listening to such preachers won't cause you to grow in God's love and grace, because their teaching is not connected to the head from whom the whole body of Christ grows, but rather their teachings are connected merely to their own worldly ideas. Live in love together and share around the reality of Christ in your lives and in this way the body of Christ will be supported and held together in his love; growing as one body just as God desires us to grow.

Since we died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though they still have the possibility of imparting life to us, should

we give any credibility to such teaching? “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” Don’t listen to these kinds of teachers. They are only capable of teaching laws, worldly principles and obligations because they don’t understand the mystery of Christ in us, our hope of glory, and so they persist in preaching a message that has absolutely no power in it at all, because they are all based on human commands and teachings. Their message may indeed sound powerful with their hype and teaching techniques; and may even have the appearance of wisdom, with their focus on self-improvement, false humility and training of the flesh to perform religious obligations. The problem is that there is no power whatsoever in their message to actually empower their listeners to do the religious obligations that they have yoked upon them. If the old covenant law was powerless to help its hearers to do what it commanded, how much more can we be assured that worldly laws, philosophical ideas and ‘spiritual principles’ will be even more powerless to produce a transformed life? Only Christ in you can produce the transformed life that both you and God desire; and Christ in you will do it as an act of his glorious grace.

As you know, it is a living reality that we are now

raised with Christ. He is no longer in the grave and neither are we; rather, we are alive and seated with him at the right hand of God. Christ has truly made himself one with us. He is here with us in our body, and we too are with him in our Spirit. Because we are already with him in the heavens, let us set our hearts on things above also. We died with Jesus in his death, and now we are alive with him in his life. Our true life is hidden with Jesus in God. Although we can already rejoice that we have been united with Christ's glorified Spirit, we also eagerly expect that when Jesus returns, he will also bless us with a glorified body like his. We will appear with him and be like him in glory.

In light of this reality, allow the Spirit that is radically alive in you to live passionately through you. Give the heavenly nature in you the permission to shine and outwork God's divine plan through you. Don't seek the things that belong to your old, earthly nature. Things that arouse lust and greed and entice you to pursue evil desires. For we know that Christ carried the punishment for all these unloving acts and passions. Remember that Jesus loved not only us, but the entire world so much that he took the wrath of God's punishment for all these unloving and self gratifying actions so that we could be free from them.

Although it's true that we all, in the past, walked in these old ways, let us remind ourselves of the far greater truth of our new life in Christ. The corrupted desires and selfish ways attached to the old life were not raised with us into our new life. They died and remained in death. So then, why would we want to wear a corpse? Why would we desire to participate in the very things that we have died to: things such as anger, rage, slander and obscene language? Rather than ignorantly indulging in the darkness of the old creation, we knowingly rejoice in the light of our new creation.

We, as children of God, are not defined by lies; rather, we are children of truth, so let us walk in our reality and speak truthfully to one another with all love and grace. The old nature has passed away, so let us also allow our old mindset to pass away with it and in its place allow the mind of Christ to outwork a life that reflects our new self, which has been made one with God. Indeed, this has already fully taken place, we are gloriously one with Jesus, so let us gladly give the Spirit permission to renew us in the knowledge of this great reality in order that we can walk as we truly are, children who have been made in the image of our Father and creator; the image of love.

In Christ we can finally see all things clearly.

We see the freedom we have from all things attached to our old self, we see the freedom we have to live in the ways of God's love, and we see the freedom we have knowing we are all equal. In Christ there are no divisions. There is no ordinary or devout, no borders or nationalities, no educational divides or cultural differences, no employee or employer, but Christ is all, and he is in all.

Therefore, as God's beloved and chosen children, holy and radically loved, wear the life you were created to wear; a life clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Be graceful in the way you live and interact with one another, not demanding, but understanding of each others' weaknesses. If you find yourselves frustrated by one another, remember how loved you are. Remember how God does not get frustrated by your weaknesses, but rather embraces you in the midst of them and loves you all the more. Just as you have been made new like God, follow his wonderful example and let go of any grievances you may have with one another. May your life reflect God's heart and may his love, that is living and active in you, also bind together the fullness of God's nature, that abides within you, in perfect unity.

Rejoice that Christ lives in you; live with the knowledge that, despite the frustrations that people

can cause you by their flaws and weaknesses, you still have a greater force of peace within you. So then, let the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, and in doing so you can witness the peace of Christ rule supreme throughout his entire body. We are so privileged to live in Christ and partake in his love, grace and divine peace. So then, let us enjoy our inheritance as equal members of Christ's body with thankful and grace-filled hearts.

Let the reality of all Christ has done for us dwell richly in you, and freely share with one another regarding this glorious reality. In doing this you will, without even realising it, encourage and teach one another in your mutual walk of faith. Let the unfailing love and grace of Jesus be upon your lips; sing, speak and live with an overflow of gratitude in your hearts to God. In whatever way you find yourselves sharing God's wonderful nature with those around you, whether it is by words or by actions, do it all knowing that Jesus is glorified in your life and it is for his name's sake you are allowing God's nature to shine. In all you do, give thanks to your beloved Father through your united life with Jesus.

Likewise, let your marriages be marked by the grace of God, not doubting or judging one another, but rather showing compassion and love towards

each other. Wives, don't doubt your husbands love for you, but accept it, just as you accept Christ's love for you. Husbands, take hold of the gift God has given to you to be a living example of the love and grace of God towards your wives, not choosing to be harsh with them, but allowing the nature of God to flow through you with an abundance of love for them.

Children, though you are young, you too can live and enjoy seeing God's nature shine through you by listening and obeying your parents, for this is pleasing to your heavenly Father.

Fathers, look to the example of your heavenly Father and be reminded daily how kind, patient and graceful he has always been to you, and let that nature be what your own children receive from you. This way they will be greatly encouraged by the love of God that shines through you so powerfully.

Employees, fulfil the duties you have been employed to do with honesty and integrity, and do so not only while your boss' eye is on you, in order to win his favour, but because you desire to live by God's nature in every situation. Whatever you do, allow your heart to be involved, and in doing so you can be assured God will also be present and active. Whatever it is you do, let the grace and power of God work through you. You are one with Christ, and

everything you do is now a part of his divine life, so work knowing that what you do, however ordinary it may look to the world, is divinely significant to God. God is your very great reward, and as you allow him to shine in your workplace he will reward you also, for the truth is you are not serving man, but rather you are serving the Lord by being a light for him in your workplace. Let the love of God work through you and in turn you will also see the benefits and blessings that are born out of God's nature bear fruit.

Finally, to those who are employers, you too should allow the nature of God to shine in the way you treat your employees. Just as God is not boastful or harsh regarding his authority over you, but rather he comes alongside you with gentleness and respect, you too can follow God's good example. Be encouraging and fair to your employees, just as God is abundantly good to you.

Take advantage of your united life with Christ by sharing your thoughts and needs with him. He is always with you and you can always communicate with him, so pray freely and joyfully regarding every aspect of your lives, and pray for us too. Pray that God would open up a way for us to share his message, so that I may have the opportunity to

proclaim the glorious mystery of Christ. It is for this very reason I have been placed in chains, and I'm confident that God will nonetheless make a way for me to be free once more in order that I can continue to declare the radical truth of his grace for mankind. Pray for me also, that, as God gives me opportunity to preach, I may do so in a way that clearly presents the reality of Jesus, the truth of all that he accomplished for us upon the cross and the abounding grace that is now available to all of us through him. Pray that I may present this amazing truth clearly, as indeed every preacher, including myself, should.

You too can let the truth of God's message of love shine brightly and clearly in all your interactions with those around you. Let your conversations be full of grace, for grace is God's nature, and through sharing about God from this perspective you will be able to answer everyone's questions. Grace does not judge or make accusations; on the contrary it cares and covers up weaknesses. So let God's grace be what seasons everything you say and do, and in this way his grace will be poured into the lives of those around you also.

I have sent this letter with my dear brother Tychicus and he will share with you all the news

regarding my personal situation. He is a faithful preacher of God's gospel who I am thankful to work alongside as we serve God together. I asked him to deliver my letter and visit you, for I knew in advance that he would be an encouragement to you all during his stay with you, and he can also share about our current situation. I've also sent along Onesimus, who is also a faithful and grace-filled brother who can also testify to all that is happening here. I'm excited to say that there is so much going on in Rome at the moment. God is doing an incredible work. Both Luke and Mark are with me and are putting into writing an accurate account of the life of Jesus, with the express purpose of encouraging and building the Church up in the faith. I also have had incredible opportunity to share the good news to practically everyone in Rome. The brothers will give you a full report of all these good things and I'm confident that your hearts will be encouraged through hearing them.

Aristarchus, who is also in chains for the gospel, also sends his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. You're aware of my instructions to you, when Mark comes to you welcome him warmly, and accept the written account of the life of Jesus that he brings to you. He wrote it with the help of Peter, who is also here in Rome, and I have

also read it myself and can assure you it is in line with the truth of the gospel in every way. Justus also sends his greetings. These are my only Jewish companions among my fellow workers who are not confused about the message of God's kingdom, but understand it as it truly is: the message of God's grace. They are a blessing and a comfort to me.

Epaphras, who is one of your own, and a passionate servant of Jesus also sends his greetings. He has such a love for you all, and I can testify how much he pours out his heart in prayer to our beloved Father on your behalf. His prayer is that you would stand firm in your belief upon the good news of God's grace, and not fall victim to religion or philosophy, but rather stay grounded in the divine reality that is yours in Christ. His heart longs to see you all mature in your understanding of God's love and to walk fully assured of the unbreakable relationship of love that you now have with God through Jesus. I can testify that God is truly working powerfully in and through him, and all to your benefit, together also with those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

My dear friend Luke, the doctor, along with Demas, send you their love. Please greet all the brothers and sisters at Laodicea and also the local believers in the surrounding towns near you. After

you have read this letter, take the opportunity to share it with the other believers in Laodicea, and you in turn can also read the letter of encouragement I have recently written to them.

Please also pass on this message to Archippus: "The grace of God is at work in you, and God's empowerment is more than enough; so take heart in God's mighty strength and allow him to complete the work he has already begun in you. It is by grace you received this task, and it is by grace God will bring it to completion; only see to it that you place your confidence in the Lord through it all."

Finally, remember my chains, I'm chained for being bold enough to preach a message that no man can chain! Praise God for the freedom we have received in the gospel. Grace be with you.

(Paraphrased by Mick Mooney) Visit Mick's website:
www.searchingforgrace.com

This paraphrase of Colossians is part of the paraphrase book titled: "The Gospel Cannot Be Chained" that includes all of Paul's four prison letters (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians & Philemon) You can buy a paperback version at www.amazon.com.

Biblical Reference Text

The NIV (New International Version) is the translation I personally read, and it was the translation I used as my primary reference text for this body of work. As I stated in my foreword, this book is my own understanding and expression of what Paul originally meant in his letters. It is more of a commentary of Paul's letters that may help you see and understand his message in a fresh and positive way. Whatever Bible translation you choose to read, I hope this book has encouraged you to read the Bible more in order to search and discover the incomparable riches of Christ. I trust, and I am excited to know, that our good Lord is committed to leading you into greater revelations of his love and truth.