

Standing in All the Will of God



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Col. 4:7–18; Eph. 6:21; Acts 15:36–40; 2 Tim. 4:10, 11; 2 Pet. 3:10–14; Isa. 60:1–3.*

Memory Text: “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (*1 Thessalonians 5:18, NKJV*).

This final portion of Colossians reveals Paul's wider network of coworkers. Acts shows him teaming up first with Barnabas, then with Silas, and then gives an overview of his three missionary journeys.

This week we will look at Paul's mission strategy, which involved the very efficient use of time and resources in reaching the major centers of the Roman Empire, as well as training promising lay workers in order to reach the cities and towns that Paul would not visit, such as Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

Through personal visits during his travels and, especially as a prisoner, through his epistles, Paul was constantly linking people and churches. He recognized that the success of the gospel mission depended upon everyone working together—Jewish and Gentile Christians; men and women; such people as Tychicus, Aristarchus, Justus, Epaphras, Luke, and Nympha. Intriguingly, we also hear of a letter he wrote to Laodicea that has not been preserved for us. Paul packs a lot in these final verses, including a personal exhortation to a man named Archippus. He did everything possible to strengthen the churches while he still could.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 28.

Lessons on Outreach

We learn much from Paul about spreading the gospel. His travels covered an estimated 13,400 miles. This is astonishing, since much of it was on foot and some of the time he was also in prison.

Paul spent considerable time in centers of trade, such as Corinth and Ephesus, from which the message could then spread to inland towns. He also returned to churches that he had raised up in order to strengthen and encourage the new believers there. When he couldn't visit the churches personally, he sent letters. This way, the believers knew that he remembered them and cared about them.

Read Colossians 4:7–9; compare Ephesians 6:21. How is Tychicus described, and what reasons does Paul give for sending him and Onesimus to Colossae?

Some things are best communicated orally rather than in writing. It would be interesting to know what news the two men conveyed to the Colossians. Judging from Paul's intent that these things would "comfort" (*NKJV*) and "encourage" them (*Col. 4:7–9, ESV*), it probably included details about Paul's circumstances in prison. In any event, such communication was also important as a means of maintaining the personal ties that bind believers together.

Tychicus, whose name means "fortunate," was clearly a trusted emissary. Described as a "faithful minister" and "fellow servant," he was one of two men from Asia selected by Paul (*Acts 20:4*) to accompany him on his journey with the collection for needy believers in Jerusalem. He was also with Paul during his second imprisonment in Rome, whence he was sent to Ephesus to strengthen the work there (*2 Tim. 4:12*). Paul also thought about sending him to Titus, in Crete (*Titus 3:12*). Accompanying him was Onesimus, whom Paul had converted in Rome (*see Lesson 1*) and describes as "faithful."

It seems Paul also wanted to know about the circumstances of the believers in Colossae. It would not be difficult to send word back to him by someone, if not by Tychicus himself. This was another way Paul conveyed his love and concern for the believers there, even though he had not visited the church personally, and how he strengthened them in the faith so they could reach others.

How do these personal things in Paul's letters not only show his humanity but, in a small way, affirm the validity of his ministry?

Church Connectivity

In a world connected by the internet, social media, and countless devices, it is difficult to imagine the challenge that Paul faced in helping churches feel they were a part of something bigger than their own local congregations.

Read Colossians 4:10, 11. Besides sending news back and forth through emissaries (*Col. 4:7–9*), what other ways did Paul encourage connectivity? In view of some of the problems Paul has addressed in this epistle, what message might be conveyed through these greetings?

With these greetings, Paul creates and fosters connectivity among fellow believers. We learn here that Mark was Barnabas's cousin. Paul thus paves the way for Mark's probable visit to Colossae. Aristarchus is described literally as a "fellow prisoner-of-war"; that is, he was imprisoned with Paul. They were both soldiers with "the armour of God" (*Eph. 6:10, 11*), fighting to set Satan's captives free for service in the kingdom of God (*see 2 Tim. 2:1–4*). Jesus/Justus (Jewish and Roman names that sound very similar in Greek, like Saul/Paul) is also commended to them as a trustworthy fellow laborer in the gospel.

Paul makes a point of mentioning that Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus are Jewish believers ("of the circumcision"). He then goes on to mention three Gentiles: Epaphras, Luke, and Demas (*Col. 4:12–14*). It is significant that, despite some tensions in the church between Jews and Gentiles, these coworkers are able to labor effectively together, unitedly and harmoniously. By saying "only," though, Paul seems to imply a certain disappointment that more Jewish Christians have not stood by him in his sufferings. Nevertheless, it is significant that by this time, John Mark, who had some years before deserted Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey (*Acts 13:13*), proves not only loyal but a "comfort" to Paul (*Acts 15:36–40*).

Threats to unity are nothing new. In recent years, the Adventist Church has undergone profound changes as it has spread globally, and forces have hammered away at its unity. This stress on unity can be felt at every level of the church.

How can you, at your local church, work to lessen the things that threaten our unity? What are these tensions at the local level, and what can be done about them?

Standing Perfect and Complete

Books have been written about the purpose-driven life and the purpose-driven church. While “purpose-driven” may not be quite right, a clear “purpose focus” is vital for accomplishing any meaningful endeavor. Paul’s life and ministry, as well as that of his coworkers and the other apostles, exemplify this focus (*see Phil. 3:13, 14*). The results speak for themselves—the gospel spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire and beyond (*Col. 1:23*). The same focus is needed today.

Read Colossians 4:12, 13. What purpose is described, and how is it to be accomplished?

As we mentioned in an earlier lesson, Epaphras was probably instrumental in the spread of the gospel to Colossae and to the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis (*see Lesson 1*). His greetings and prayers for these churches were no doubt greatly encouraging to believers there. Epaphras’s prayers had a clear focus—that the Colossians would “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (*Col. 4:12*). Let’s consider more carefully the rich components of this prayer.

Stand. The word means to stand firm and unmoved, which is possible only by being “grounded and steadfast” in the faith and confident of the truth of the gospel (*Col. 1:23, NKJV*). The same word is used several times by Paul in reference to the battle against “the wiles of the devil” (*Eph. 6:11*) and withstanding the forces of darkness through divine power by putting on “the whole armour of God” (*Eph. 6:10–18; compare 2 Tim. 2:19*).

Perfect. The word refers to the perfection of character that finds its ultimate expression in sacrificial love (*Matt. 5:44, 48*) by those who will never claim to have “arrived” (*Phil. 3:12–15, NIV*).

Complete. This powerful word means to satisfy fully or bring something to full measure. It is used of Abraham’s being “fully convinced” that God would do what He promised, though humanly impossible (*Rom. 4:21, NKJV*), and Paul’s being strengthened by the Lord so that “the message might be preached fully” through him (*2 Tim. 4:17, NKJV*).

All the will of God. The word “all” is comprehensive. Paul himself prayed that the Colossians would be filled with a knowledge of God’s will, “live worthily of the Lord and please him in all respects” (*Col. 1:9, 10, NET*) through “His glorious power” (*Col. 1:11, NKJV*).

Living in This World but Not of It

Read Colossians 4:14, 15 and 2 Timothy 4:10, 11. How is Luke distinguished from Demas, and why?

The apostle John tells us, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). Luke’s love for Jesus and His kingdom led him to stand by Paul to the end, come what may, whereas Demas loved this world more than the world to come.

Read the following passages. What counsel is given for those awaiting the Second Advent?

1. *Mark 13:32–37* _____

2. *Titus 2:11–14* _____

3. *2 Pet. 3:10–14* _____

4. *Rev. 3:17–21* _____

Jesus and the apostles frequently warn us to “watch,” be vigilant, and be ready always for the Master’s coming so as not to be taken by surprise. Unfortunately, as did the disciples who failed to heed Jesus’ command to “watch and pray” (*Mark 14:38, NKJV*), many will not make the necessary preparations. It all comes down to who or what has our hearts, because we cannot serve two masters.

In the message to Laodicea, Jesus gives us a clear prescription. First, repent of our sins. Second, we are to open our hearts to Jesus and let Him be in control, which then (third) enables us to obtain the “gold” of faith and love tested by trial and victorious over temptation.

What specifics might Jesus be asking you to repent of in your life? What part of His prescription are you in need of most?

A Message for Laodicea

Read Colossians 4:16–18; compare Colossians 2:1–3. Thinking about Jesus' message to Laodicea (*see yesterday's study*), what correlations do you find with that of Colossians, which was to be read also in the Laodicean church of Paul's day?

Looking at the history of God's people through the ages, the same problems occur again and again. The prophets rebuked Israel for wanting to worship like the world and urged them to repent before it was too late. Isaiah even lamented, "How the faithful city has become a harlot!" (*Isa. 1:21, NKJV*) and urged the people to return to God for forgiveness and cleansing (*Isa. 1:16–20*). Both John the Baptist (*Matt. 3:2, 8–10*) and Jesus (*Matt. 4:17, Matt. 12:33–37*) called upon the Israelites to repent and bear fruit that would stand the test of the judgment in the last days. The apostles bore a similar message (*Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor. 7:9, 10*).

Compare the following passages: *Isaiah 60:1–3* with *Revelation 18:1–4*, and *Isaiah 62:1–5* with *Revelation 19:7, 8*. What similarities exist between the messages in the two books?

God *will* unite heaven and earth. But because of the great controversy, that must be done in stages:

1. At Calvary, Satan lost any affection left toward him among the heavenly beings (*John 12:31*).
2. Through the judgment ministry of Christ in the heavenly sanctuary, God's people are "complete in every good work to do His will" (*Heb. 13:21, NKJV*) and fitted for heaven.
3. Through the millennial judgment and the final judgment after the millennium, all remaining questions are forever settled, and sin and unrepentant sinners are destroyed in the lake of eternal fire, which also cleanses the earth (*Rev. 21:8*).
4. Only with the end of sin can heaven and earth finally be united (*Rev. 21:3*).

What can you yourself (not looking at anyone else) do in order to remain faithful to God and to the truth He has given us? That is, what choices are you making that reveal who truly has your heart?

Further Thought: “The soul that is yielded to Christ becomes His own fortress, which He holds in a revolted world, and He intends that no authority shall be known in it but His own. A soul thus kept in possession by the heavenly agencies is impregnable to the assaults of Satan. But unless we do yield ourselves to the control of Christ, we shall be dominated by the wicked one. We must inevitably be under the control of the one or the other of the two great powers that are contending for the supremacy of the world. It is not necessary for us deliberately to choose the service of the kingdom of darkness in order to come under its dominion. We have only to neglect to ally ourselves with the kingdom of light. If we do not co-operate with the heavenly agencies, Satan will take possession of the heart, and will make it his abiding place. The only defense against evil is the indwelling of Christ in the heart through faith in His righteousness. Unless we become vitally connected with God, we can never resist the unhallowed effects of self-love, self-indulgence, and temptation to sin. We may leave off many bad habits, for the time we may part company with Satan; but without a vital connection with God, through the surrender of ourselves to Him moment by moment, we shall be overcome. Without a personal acquaintance with Christ, and a continual communion, we are at the mercy of the enemy, and shall do his bidding in the end.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 324.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Look at the Ellen G. White quote above. There are, yes, only two sides in the great controversy, and unless we consciously choose Christ, we are on Satan’s side (*Luke 11:23*). However much that idea might bother our sensibilities, God is not under any obligation to make sure His truths don’t offend them. What does this reality tell you about how crucial the surrender of your will to Christ really is?
- ② Read Revelation 14:14–16. The early rain of Pentecost enabled the gospel seed to sprout and grow, while the latter rain prepares the earth for the final harvest. How does Revelation 14:12 relate to this prospect?
- ③ What are the various ways that we, as a church as a whole and as individual believers, are impacted by the culture and world around us? How can we be protected against the negative influences of the world, which have always been a problem for God’s people in every age?

Stolen Bible Plants a Church

By DAVID FLETCHER

Tribal fighting broke out between five villages in Papua New Guinea in 2021. Many houses were scorched, and property was looted in one of the villages, Kemefa. At least 16 people were killed.

Amid the conflict, a fighter entered the Kemefa Seventh-day Adventist Church and stole a Bible. The fighter, Abuni Ane, took the book to his home village, Orege.

After the clashes ended, Abuni began to read the stolen Bible. As he read, his heart was touched.

Several months passed, and an Adventist pastor visited Abuni's village. Abuni brought out the stolen Bible and explained to the pastor, Dicks Neheza, what had happened. Expressing remorse, he said he wanted to repent and commit his life to God.

The pastor and Abuni established a house church in Orege, and before long, Abuni decided to be baptized.

At his baptism, Abuni shared his story with attending members from the Kemefa church, where he had stolen the Bible. He asked for their forgiveness, and he handed the Bible over to the church's elder.

The elder, speaking on behalf of the church, forgave Abuni and asked him to keep the Bible. He also gave Abuni a church hymnal as a gift. The elder encouraged him to keep reading the Bible, to sing praises to God, and to plant a church in Orege.

Abuni went right to work. The next day, he and two friends went into the bush to collect timber for a semi-permanent church structure. Pastor Neheza brought carpentry tools. A church company with three founding members opened that day in Orege.

Since then, the church has grown to 18 members, including eight people who were baptized during "PNG for Christ" evangelistic meetings in 2024.

Pastor Neheza is amazed that tribal fighting and a stolen Bible resulted in a church. He said the first structure is now too small and that plans are in place to raise a larger, permanent building.



Your weekly mission offerings support church-planting in Papua New Guinea and around the world. This quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will go to the South Pacific Division, whose territory includes Papua New Guinea. Thank you for your generous offering this Sabbath.