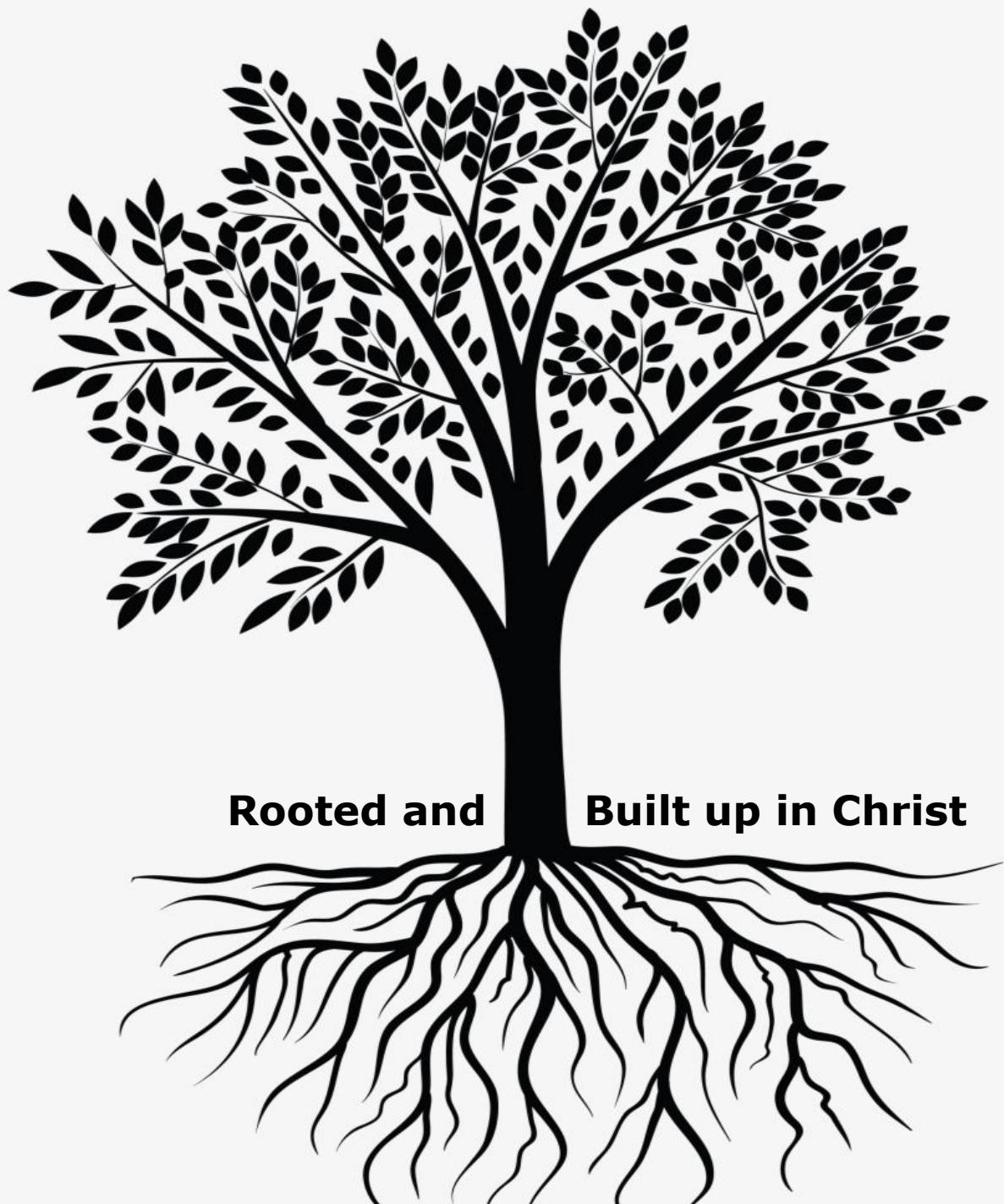


Colossians



**All Saints Homegroup Series
September – December 2019**

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Paul's letter to the Colossians

Where this letter was sent

Colossae was a large city in the valley of the Lycus River in modern Turkey, built on 2 major trade routes. It was about 100 miles east of Ephesus.

When it was written

Colossians is one of the 4 “prison” letters (with Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon). All were probably written at the same time and from the same place. Paul was imprisoned 3 times: Ephesus (c. AD 54), Caesarea (c. AD 59) and Rome (c. AD 60-62). Rome seems to be the most likely place of writing; although Ephesus is possible – as the most likely refuge for Onesimus (mentioned in Philemon) and closer to home for Epaphras. We cannot be totally certain.

We do know that it was written between AD 55-60.

Purpose for writing

False teaching was starting to infiltrate the young church at Colossae. Pagan and Jewish influences remained strong, and some new converts sought to combine elements of their old faith with their new one.

Emphasis

In the light of the influences from false teaching, Paul emphasizes the centrality and supremacy of Christ. In Jesus Christ, the believers have everything that they need both to start in the Christian faith and to continue in their faith. Nothing more needs to be added on.

Theologically, Paul defines who Jesus is and what He has done. Practically, he explains what it means to live as a Christian – using an image of taking off grubby clothing and putting on God’s own righteousness through Christ.

1. Colossians 1:1-14

Genuine Believers

Ice breaker : What non-essential items do you spend most money on?

Introduction

Paul wrote to the new church in Colossae to tell the believers that they have everything they need in Christ. He affirms the genuineness of their faith in Christ and reminds them how they heard the true gospel. He prays for them to grow in maturity as those who now belong to the kingdom of God.

Greetings (vs 1-2)

1. What big truths about God and his church does Paul mention in his opening greetings to these new believers?

Thanksgiving (vs 3-8)

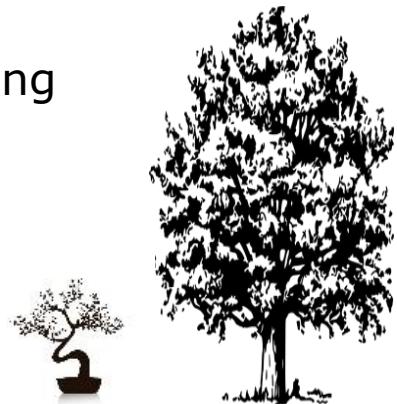
2. Paul begins with encouragement. List the things he has heard about the Colossian Christians which has resulted in his ongoing thankfulness for them.

3. These Christians learnt the true message of the gospel from Epaphras, whose character is described in verse 7.
 - Who told you about the gospel?
 - How did their message and character influence you?

4. "All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing.." (v6)

- Is your faith - constantly growing, or stunted, or stagnated?

On what do you base your answer?



- Collectively, how is the good news of Jesus growing and bearing fruit in our lives as a Christian community?

Prayer (vs 9-14)

After affirming their strengths, Paul tells the Colossians what he constantly prays for them. [You may find it helpful to read this prayer in different versions of the Bible, especially some modern ones.]

5. What is his key prayer request for them (v9)?

6. Several effects flow from this –

- What are they?
- What is their purpose?
- Which one of these would you most want to see develop in your life?

7. How are Paul's prayer requests different from those we often pray for ourselves in church or in small groups?

Discuss how you might change the way you pray, in the light of Paul's prayer here. As a practical exercise, mention a particular situation or dilemma. Then together, work out how to include elements of Paul's prayer and perspective into a prayer regarding this situation. *[For example – what kind of strength or power do you need to pray for? Are there others who are weak who need your prayers?]*

A key verse : 1:9 "So we have continued praying for you ever since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you a complete understanding of what he wants to do in your lives, and we ask him to make you wise with spiritual wisdom." (NLT)

Reminder (vs 12-14)

8. "giving thanks to the Father" (v12) On what grounds does Paul tell the Colossians to be thankful people?

9. Re-read these verses and instead of the word "us", insert your name (or "me") in each sentence. (What strikes you when you do this?)

Reflections - Mulling it over (Either together, or on your own after the study, reflect further on your response to this passage.)

A. In the routines of your daily life, consider:

- What does my use of money & time show about my priorities?
- Are my attitudes and actions pleasing to God;
- Are my attitudes and actions grieving God?

**"If God doesn't rule your mundane,
he doesn't rule you,
because that's where you live."**

- Paul David Tripp,
The power of Words & the Wonder of God.

Pray that you "may please him in every way.... in every good work." (v10)

B. Spend some time praying this passage – for yourself; for members of your small group; and for people on your prayer list.

2. Colossians 1:15 – 2:5 The Supremacy of Christ

Ice breaker : Have you ever been “the greatest” (or reigned supreme) in a particular skill? – the best chutney maker? the computing expert? the fastest knitter? the one who can get the baby to sleep? the barbecue supremo? the champion marrow grower?

Introduction

Paul presents Jesus as supreme over all creation and as an all-sufficient Saviour over his people, the church. Therefore, trusting in Jesus is all we need to be saved, and continuing to trust him is all we need to do to continue as Christians. We, as well as the Colossians, need reminding of this truth.

Jesus is Supreme (1: 15-23)

Note : v18 “firstborn from the dead” – is to do with rank, status and priority. It does not mean Jesus was created. The term is used in the Jewish sense of “heir” - the one to whom the family estate belongs.

1. Pick out all the universal statements about Jesus in these verses. How many times do the words “all” and “everything” occur?

2. What is said here about the relationship between

- Jesus and creation
- Jesus and His people, the church

3. When Paul portrays Jesus as “supreme” ('pre-eminent', 'first') in verse 18b, he is saying that Christ is superior to all and has the highest authority over all things – and that includes us.

- How did some recent choice you made about your use of time or money reflect Christ's supreme place in your life?
- What personal fears would subside if you had a better grasp of Christ's supremacy over the situations that seem to darken and dominate your life?

4. Verses 21- 23 describe a “before” and “after” situation.

- How are humans described - before knowing Jesus?
 - after knowing Jesus?
- What actions did God take to reconcile us to himself? (vs 19-22)

A model for ministry (1:24 – 2:5)

In 1:23 Paul introduces the idea of being a servant of the Gospel and demonstrates what true servanthood looks like.

Notes

v24 "**I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking..**" The sacrificial sufferings of Christ are over - salvation was won once for all on the cross. However, Christ's body, the church, experiences suffering because of its stand for the faith. Paul was taking his turn in sharing these afflictions, and others would follow in his footsteps.

Vs 26,27 "**mystery**" – In the New Testament this word refers not to something mysterious, but to something God had previously hinted at in one way or another, but now has clearly revealed. [In this case, it is that God's plan had always been to bring salvation to the whole world and not just to the Jews.]

5. List the words and phrases in this passage that speak of Paul's suffering and effort for the gospel.

6. According to this passage, what does a genuine servant of the gospel look like?

7. Paul summarises the privilege of being a Christian in seven words (1:27b)

“Christ in you – the hope of glory”

What excites you about this summary of the gospel message and its benefits?

(Note : the “you” here is plural – i.e. “you all”)

8. What is Paul’s desire and goal for every [Colossian] believer?

- What does he do in seeking to achieve it?
- How can we help each other to achieve a growing maturity in Christ?

Reflections - Mulling it over (Either together, or on your own after the study, reflect further on your response to this passage.)

A. Turn Colossians 2: 2-3 into a prayer for yourself; for other members of your small group and your church family.

A prayer to be – encouraged (instilled with courage},
- united (in love),
- enriched,
- enlightened ...

B. Reflect on the titles and descriptions given to Jesus in this passage (e.g. the exact image of God; creator; sustainer; head of the church; reconciler; pre-eminent & peerless in every realm) and use these to help you praise Him.

“If Jesus Christ is not Lord of all,
He cannot be Lord at all.”

Summary

Jesus is totally supreme (1:15-17) over all of creation and over his people. He is totally sufficient (1:19-23) as a Saviour. He is all that we need both to start a relationship with God and to continue in a relationship with God. Nothing is missing; all we need to do is to keep trusting in him.

Every church leader and member needs to remember that Christ alone is pre-eminent. Once this truth is marginalised, churches will tend towards authoritarian leadership, false teaching and spiritual chaos. Christ must always be supreme over His people.

Thus, the ‘job description’ of every spiritual leader is to proclaim the gospel, warn and teach His people, and to strive for the maturity of the church in Christ (1:24-29).

3. Colossians 2:6-15 Fullness and Freedom

Ice breaker :

Have you ever had a pot plant that simply didn't grow (yet didn't quite die)? What did you do about it?

Or –

Have you heard someone say in exasperation, "Grow up!" What was it about?

Introduction

In the last study we saw how Paul wanted the Colossians to keep going in Christ. He longed for them to grow to maturity in their knowledge of God, so he prayed hard and worked hard to achieve this.

He saw that their growth was in danger of being de-railed by false teaching that was creeping into their midst. This was the teaching which suggested that to be loved and accepted by God, they needed something more than simply believing in Jesus. In this section we see him act swiftly to oppose such error.

Continue in Christ (2:6-7)

1. What 3 things should characterise those who are living with Jesus as their Lord?

2. Note the pictures of growth and development that Paul uses.

In the chart below, use the plant image to draw what sort of plant you are now, and where you want to be.

| | | |
|---|-------------------------|--|
| Me - as a new Christian | Me – as a Christian now | Me – as I would like to be, in Christ. |
|  | | |

Protect your Freedom (2:8-15)

Notes

V11 – the mention of circumcision suggests that the believers were being pulled away by false Jewish teaching or traditions.

v14 "**the written code**" – could be a reference to the Law of Moses, which set out God's standard, which both Jews and Gentiles could not keep. It thus only highlighted their failures and condemned them by its accusing demands.

3. From Paul's warning in verse 8, what details do we learn about the false teaching that was infiltrating the church?

4. For the second time in this letter, Christ's supremacy is emphasized.

- Look for all the "in Christ" and "with Christ" statements. What is available "**in** Christ" ?
- What does this 'fullness in Christ' include? (11-15)

5. How would understanding fullness in Christ protect the Colossians, and us, from deceptive ideas?

6. What kinds of things are we tempted to "add" to faith in Christ in order to give us more assurance? (Do you have this assurance in Christ? How has this assurance been strengthened?)

Spiritual growth is not by addition, but by nutrition...

Nothing needs to be added to Christ

because he already is the very fullness of God.

(Warren Wiersbe, Be Complete, p 79)

Reflections - Mulling it over (Either together, or on your own after the study, reflect further on your response to this passage.)

A. Re-read verses 9-15, inserting your own name every time Paul says 'you' or 'us'. How do these facts affect your view of yourself?

Turn your response into thanksgiving and praise to God.

B. A thankful spirit is a mark of Christian maturity (7b). When a believer is overflowing with thanksgiving to God, they are really making progress.

- According to this benchmark, how do you measure up? What do you have to be thankful for?
- Spend some time expressing your overflowing thankfulness to God.

Summary

In 2:6-7 we have key verses that summarise the main teaching of Colossians. Paul's big point here is that the Christian life, as it is lived, isn't different from the Christian life as it is received. He wants the believers to remain rooted in Jesus Christ and not drift away to something else.

We don't start with Christ and then move on to "bigger and better things". Christ is always the bigger and better thing we need! We are tempted to add to Christ only if we feel that Christ is not very much to begin with. Therefore, it is crucial that we remind ourselves constantly of the greatness of Jesus Christ - all that He is for us and all that He's done for us. We need to look to being built up in the same Jesus Christ whom we have always known.

4. Colossians 2:16-23

Don't be deceived

- no additions needed

Ice breaker : Describe how you feel when you complete a project - (put the final piece of a jigsaw into place; the last lego brick into a build; sew the final piece of a quilt; write the last sentence of a report ...)

Introduction

After accepting Christ by faith and receiving His love and forgiveness, it is easy to step back into wanting to **earn** God's love and acceptance. The false teaching creeping into the Colossian church was a philosophy which had its roots in the Old Testament covenant laws and to which human traditions and ideas had been added.

Paul gives the Colossians two more warnings (the first was in 2:8) against false teachers who were urging them to observe certain religious practises as a way of progressing spiritually.

Don't let anyone judge you (vs 16-17)

1. What do you imagine the situation to be in the Colossian church from verse 16?

2. What should they say to themselves and to their accusers? (v17)

3. We are not troubled by Jewish laws and rituals as the Colossians were, but are there outward trappings of religion, or organisational details in our churches, that subtly imply that just having Jesus is not enough? (What is the appeal of such additions?)

Don't let anyone disqualify you (vs 18-19)

4. Paul talks about the reported experiences of self-important spiritual leaders. Why might the new believers feel threatened by these things?

5. What is Paul's conclusion about these people?

"False teaching attacks our heads, our hearts and hands. Wrong thinking leads to wrong feelings, or a wrong attitude towards the significance of what we do with our bodies."

(M Meynell, Colossians)

Free from legalistic rules (vs 20-23)

6. Paul is warning against religiously following rules.

- What rules does he seem to have in mind?
- What reasons does he give for rejecting these rules?

7. Have you ever sensed the message, however subtly conveyed, that “If you want to be really spiritual, you need to do this ... or that, or the other.” Explain.

Reflections - Mulling it over (Either together, or on your own after the study, reflect further on your response to this passage.)

Many practices and customs that build up around our expectations of what a Christian disciple looks like have their origins in scripture. The danger comes when we twist them into legalistic rules and begin to think that God’s love for us depends on our spiritual or moral performance.

- Are there subtle rules or regulations in our church/fellowship that threaten to become an addition to the gospel?
- Do we have tendency to seek a mystical or visionary experience of God part from, or beyond, Christ?

Summary

Paul’s denunciations in this section are against people who have elevated their ideas above Christ, and who claim ‘spiritual’ qualities to various practises. He warns of the danger in getting caught up in chasing spiritual experiences for their own sake.

Sometimes the trappings of outward religion (buildings, ceremonies, clothing, festivals) can make people feel spiritual. Then, instead of trusting in Christ alone, we begin to rely on our resources, rituals, spiritual experiences and even Christian service.

Paul emphasizes that Jesus is everything. There are no more pieces of the puzzle to be added.

5. Colossians 3:1-17

New Life, New Lifestyle

Ice breaker :

"Home is where the heart is". If so, where would you call home?

OR: "What shall I wear today?" When have you said this, and why?

Introduction

Paul wants believers, then and now, to live in the light of who we are 'in Christ'. He reminds us of the blessings which are ours 'in Christ' and then spells out what a life that is consistent with that will look like. It is a new lifestyle that needs to be worked out in terms of our personal holiness and our corporate relationships.

Seek the heavenly (vs 1-4)

1. The glorious status described in these verses is true of everyone who has put their faith in Jesus Christ and so Paul urges the believers to positively set their hearts and thoughts on the things of God.

- On what things are our minds (and hearts) often fixed?

- Are there any routines or habits you could develop that might help you to re-focus regularly on the life that you have in Christ?

Slay the earthly (vs 5-11) Paul spells out the practical ways this heavenly perspective is to be lived out.

2. What do the things we are to get rid of ["put to death"] have in common?

3. Our old ways of reacting are compared to clothing that we took off at conversion. Why is each type of behaviour mentioned inconsistent with our new life in Christ?

4. What do you find most striking in this section?

Live in Christ (vs 12-17)

5. What does it mean for you to know that you are "chosen", "holy" and "dearly loved" by God?
(How should knowing this affect how you relate to others?)

6. From the lists in this passage which give examples of behaviour and attitudes we need to 'take off' and 'put on', pick one from each category which you know you need to work on.

Write it down in the boxes on the following page.

Something I need to get rid of



Something I need to put on (become)



If appropriate, share these with one another for prayer and support.

7. In verses 15-17, all the “you”s are plural. Thus, in our life together as a church family,

- How do we let Christ’s peace rule in our hearts – (perhaps, when we disagree?)
- How do we let God’s message dwell richly
 - as we teach & admonish?
 - as we sing....?
- How do we stay thankful?

Reflections - Mulling it over (Either together, or on your own after the study, reflect further on your response to this passage.)

- What am I living for? Where is my true home?

- What shall I wear today?

"So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offence. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it." (3:12-14, The Message)

- Although we still struggle with sins, what resources for change and incentives for change do we have? How are these resources better than determination and "trying harder"?

Summary

Paul teaches that true heavenly mindedness has very down-to-earth results! The true spirituality that comes from knowing Christ, is in marked contrast to the hollow and deceptive spirituality that was being taught by the false teachers. True spirituality is shown in putting off all that belonged to our old selves and putting on the characteristics befitting God's holy, beloved children. It is a life in which everything is done in the name of the Lord Jesus.

It is not about abstract "mysteries" but about everyday relationships.

It is not about trying harder or being better, but about receiving what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, the One who is supreme over all.

6. Colossians 3:18 – 4:18 Living for Christ

- Love in action at home & in the world

Ice breaker : Think back to a time when you were 'people watching' in a public place. What did you notice?

Transformed Relationships

The Lordship of Christ (making Him supreme) in our lives changes every aspect of our lives, including all our daily relationships. The closing section of Colossians describes what this new life in Christ looks like in our families (3:18 – 4:1) and in the church (4:2-18) .

1. What is the common thread that runs through all the commands in 3:18-4:1?

2. How do Paul's commands to these different groups address our tendency to do the opposite?

3. How do the commands given (to husband-wife; children-parent; slave-master) complement each other?
How does Paul balance commands and responsibilities?

Prayer

4. What does 4:2-4 & 12 teach us about how we should pray, and what we should pray for?

5. What does it mean to “devote yourselves to prayer”?

Proclamation - Sharing the Gospel

6. What does this section teach us about sharing the gospel? (vs 3-6)

7. What does it mean for our conversation with unbelievers to be “full of grace, seasoned with salt”?

Partnership

In this final section, Paul introduces the bearers of this letter Tychicus and Onesimus (a runaway slave who has come to faith); conveys personal greetings to Colossae from 6 colleagues in ministry : Aristarchus, John Mark and Jesus Justus, who were Jews; and Epaphras, Luke and Demas, who were Gentiles. He then added special greetings to 2 church assemblies, with a special word to one of the pastors.

8. From these concluding greetings and personal messages, what glimpses & insights do we get about the lives and characters of people in this church?

- What is surprising?
- What is intriguing?
- What is inspiring?
- What is challenging?

How might Paul's words here make each one mentioned feel about themselves and about the others mentioned?

9. Which comment from this section is most challenging for you? Why?

Reflections - Mulling it over (Either together, or on your own after the study, reflect further on your response to this passage.)

Paul was grateful for the ministries of fellow believers who were a comfort to him. How does life in a Christian community bring you comfort, support and challenge?

Summary

In this section Paul has outlined the way that life in Christ shapes various relationships. The key question is always how we live for Christ in each relationship.

He also describes our relationship with God through prayer – and is very aware of how his ministry to share the gospel is dependent on the prayerfulness of the local church.

Paul concludes his letter with numerous personal messages and greetings to various people. From this list we get a glimpse of how ordinary people living out the Christian life, can have an extraordinary impact on those around them and even on the rest of the world.