

GREETINGS AND THANKSGIVINGS

Colossians 1:1-8

Intro: As we begin the exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, I would remind you that this is one of four Epistles which Paul wrote during his first imprisonment in Rome. Those Epistles are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Although those who have studied the chronology of the NT, and of the life of the Apostle Paul, differ a few years in the dates they give to this imprisonment, we can say that it came in the late 50's A.D., and extended into the early 60's A.D. This would place Colossians and the other Prison Epistles around 61 or 62 A.D. We cannot be sure of the order in which they were written, but that does not seem to matter.

We do not know when Paul was born. We know that he was born in Tarsus which was north of Israel in Cilicia. But A. T. Robertson, a devout student of the NT who lived in the early years of this century makes this interesting comment in his book, Epochs in the Life of Paul, p. 11:

There is no straining of the facts if we imagine the boy John (i.e., the Baptist) in the hill country of Judea, the boy Jesus in Nazareth, and the child Saul at Tarsus at the same time.

And then he went on to say that the Apostle Paul was some five years younger than our Lord.

So Paul would have been in his middle 50's when he wrote his Prison Epistles.

The Epistles of Paul (or for that matter, any Biblical Book written by any person) are important for many reasons, but I will mention two that are important as far as the Colossian Epistle is concerned:

- 1) They give us some insights as to where Paul was spiritually.
- 2) They give us an important record of the spiritual condition of the churches or the individuals to whom Paul was writing.

We want to pay particular attention to both of those points as we go through this Epistle.

One thing is distinctive about Paul's relationship with the Colossian church: He had never been there--at least not to be with the church. He did not have a part in establishing it like he did the Ephesian and Philippian churches. But he showed the same love, the same concern, for them that he did the churches he had been with and had a part in their

beginnings. This is very important for us in this day when communication is world-wide, and it is very common for us to hear about Christians in far-distant lands from missionaries who have worked with them, or even from the Christians themselves who may correspond with us. A good question for all of us to ask ourselves is, What do we do when we hear about Christians we have not known, and may never meet in this life? Do we pray for them? Do we write to them? The Apostle Paul has much to teach us about ways in which we can be a blessing to people we have never met, and may never meet, but who know the Lord.

Now, before we begin with the Epistle, I want to ask a special favor of each one of you: I would like for each one of you to read the Epistle to the Colossians at least three times each week. You can read it aloud in fifteen to seventeen minutes. You can read it more than three times a week, if you like. The more, the better. But if you are reading it throughout the week, you will profit so much more from our Sunday morning services because I will be speaking about what you have been reading about all through the week. Keep up with your other Bible reading, but add this to it. You will be greatly blessed by the Lord if you do. I can assure you of that.

Let me give you an important suggestion to help with your reading.

This church was a church that had problems. We have some indications as to what those problems were in the latter part of chapter 2, beginning with verse 8. We may not be able to determine all that we would like to know about their problems, but we do know that the thing that alarmed Paul about them was that they were being turned away from Christ by the false teachers who had come among them. Therefore, as you read, be sure to notice the special emphasis that Paul places upon our Lord Jesus Christ throughout this Epistle. This emphasis is to be seen in all of Paul's writings, but it is even stronger in this Epistle.

To illustrate what I mean, notice that Paul mentioned our Lord by Name six times in the first eight verses. (Point them out.)

Coming to the first eight verses of the Epistle, we have Paul's GREETINGS AND THANKSGIVINGS.

Note how long Paul had been praying for them. See verses 3 and 4a.

And Epaphras who was with Paul had conveyed to Paul their "love in the Spirit," i.e., their love for Paul.

So we can see that there was a real bond of love between Paul and the Colossians. This would have made them very receptive to the message that he had for them, a message which, according to 4:16, was intended for the Laodicean church as well.

Let us now look at:

I. PAUL'S GREETINGS (Col. 1:1, 2).

Paul began this letter to the Colossians in almost exactly the same way that he did his letter to the Ephesians. (Compare the two.) He spoke of himself in the same way--as "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." He called both groups "saints," and said that they were both "faithful." He recognized that the Lord's people in both places were "in Christ." And then he gave them both his familiar greeting:

Grace be unto you, and peace,

from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have spoken previously about the meaning of this greeting, and so I am not going to go into that today. But one thing that I do want you to note that has to do with the special emphasis in this Epistle is that the only place that they could find "grace" and "peace" was in their heavenly Father **"and the Lord Jesus Christ."** People can received nothing from the Father unless at the same time they seek it from THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Note that Paul used our Lord's full Name and Title here!

One other word about the greeting.

Paul mentioned in both of these Epistles, Ephesians and Colossians, that he was "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." He was sovereignly commissioned by God as one sent from Jesus Christ to do the will of God in proclaiming Christ and seeking His glory. But the Epistles show that he was "an apostle" to each church in his Epistles for two different reasons:

- 1) He spoke with the authority of an apostle in the Ephesian Epistle because there he was telling them about a special revelation that had been given to him concerning the Church, the body of Christ.
- 2) He spoke with the authority of an apostle in the Colossians Epistle because he was warning them about the false teachers and calling them back to Christ as the Head of the Church.

For him to identify himself as "an apostle" was not, therefore, an expression of pride, but an expression of his authority, and to call attention to the special importance of what he was writing. He was coming to them not just as a brother, but as an apostle. And what was

intended to be important to them should also carry the same message of importance for us today!

But let us go on to:

II. PAUL'S THANKSGIVINGS (Col. 1:3-8).

Before we note what Paul was thankful for, let us observe:

A. The One to Whom he gave thanks.

He gave "thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Keep this in mind as we look at the remainder of this passage because Paul was indicating when he wrote this that God was responsible, totally responsible, for the good things that had happened to "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which were at Colosse."

As we have seen from reading our text, Paul was thankful that they were saved. He was giving God all of the glory for their salvation because God is the One Who planned it. He is the One Who had chosen them. He is the One Who sent the Lord Jesus to be the Savior. He is the One Who sent the Holy Spirit to convict them of their sin. And He was the One Who had drawn them to Himself through Christ.

So he gave God the thanks. No one else deserves it. When I say "God," I realize that all three Persons of the Godhead deserve the praise equally, but the Scriptures teach us to give thanks to God, the Father.

B. How did Paul give thanks to God?

By prayer. And he was speaking of continuous prayer. It was not something that he thanked God for, and then forgot about it. He gave thanks to the Lord constantly--"always."

Prayer consists of words expressed to God. It is good to feel thankful, but feeling thankful is not giving thanks. We give thanks when we come to the Lord with words. This is what pleases Him, and this is what glorifies Him.

C. For what did Paul give thanks to God?

To select one statement from all that Paul wrote here we would have to say that he was thankful that they had

come to know "the grace of God in truth" (v. 6b).

Do you remember when we were studying 1 Peter some time ago in our Sunday School that we came to that expression in 1 Pet. 5:12, " . . . the true grace of God . . . "?

These expressions remind us of two things:

- 1) That there is teaching which professes to be the Gospel, but it is not!
- 2) That it is one thing to know what the Gospel of the grace of God is; but it is much more to have experienced the transforming power of the Gospel in one's life.

Paul was thankful for both of these as he thought about the Colossian believers. The true Gospel had come to them, and they had received it, and through the Gospel their lives had been changed.

This meant that they had believed in Christ. They were trusting Him to save them. They believed that His death was sufficient for the forgiveness of all of their sins, and that Christ alone had provided perfect acceptance with God for them.

But how did he know that they had been saved? After all, it is impossible to tell that a person is a Christian just by looking at him.

The evidence that they were saved was that the loved the saints, they loved the Lord's people. This is one of the evidences the Apostle John has given us as proof that we are saved. Cf. 1 John 3:14. Paul touched on this again in verse 8 of our text. So it was not a passing thing, but it was a love that was abiding, and it was evidence of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

But then he mentioned their "hope."

This is another word that we have discussed recently. This is the purpose of our salvation, not only that we will be in heaven, but that we will be there with the Lord, transformed into His very likeness.

And will you note that Paul said here that it is "laid up for you in heaven." "Laid up" means that it is "in safe keeping" (Moule, p. 31). This is a sure and certain hope. No other religion, no system of philosophy, no political party, no insurance company can guarantee you anything, let alone make such a

glorious promise as this!

The Gospel is a message in which we see the grace of God toward unworthy sinners who have faith in Christ, and so become a part of that host of believers who love God and each other, and who are heaven-bound, destined to be there forever, conformed to Christ Himself.

Two more things.

The Apostle was thankful also that what had been accomplished in Colossae through the Gospel had been duplicated all over the Roman world, and we know that to the present day the Gospel is still going forth, is still bearing fruit, is still preparing people for heaven and for glory.

It is no wonder that Paul said what he did about the Gospel to the Roman believers. Cf. Rom. 1:16. The Gospel has been opposed. Many who have preached it have been martyred. Bibles have been burned. To this day the Gospel is ridiculed by the masses. It has become harder and harder to find places where the true grace of God is proclaimed. And yet it continues to be proclaimed, and is still bearing fruit.

But how did the Colossians here about the Lord Jesus Christ?

Verse 7 seems to indicate that Epaphras brought the Gospel to them. He had been Paul's "dear fellowservant," preaching what Paul preached, and one who had come to Colossae preaching nothing but the grace of God—and the rest of the story is a matter of history. Epaphras preached, God worked, and Colossians began to be saved.

It seems that the work in Colossae had not been going on very long. Bishop Moule translated the words in verse 4, "Since we heard . . ." as meaning since we just heard. But what a miraculous job had been done. God had been pleased to work in a most amazing way.

Concl: The same could be written about Trinity Bible Church. We, too, are trophies of God's grace. What God did in Colossae, he has done right here, in many places throughout our cities, our states, and the whole world. And this has been going on generation after generation since time began! And it will continue to go on until time is no more! It is the same Gospel, the same Savior, the same salvation that

produces the same evidence, the same hope. This is the greatest of all miracles. This is the solution to all of the problems we are facing in our country today. Criminals who come to Christ can no longer be criminals. Homosexuals who come to Christ can no longer be homosexuals. Prostitutes who come to Christ can no longer be prostitutes. Christ can not only save the drug addict, but he can deliver him from his addiction.

What Paul wrote to the Corinthian saints and about the Corinthian saints could probably have been written about the people of God in Ephesus and Colossae and Philippi and Rome and Thessalonica. Listen to these words found in 1 Cor. 6:9-11:

Know ye not that the unrighteous
shall not inherit the kingdom of God?
Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters,
nor adulterers, nor effeminate,
nor abusers of themselves with mankind,
Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers,
nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.
And such were some of you:
but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified,
but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus,
and by the Spirit of our God.

Where could we go to find what we have in Christ? Nowhere! Salvation is only through Christ. There is no other Savior. Come to Him with your load of sin, and trust Him to forgive you and to make you a new creature in Christ. You will die in your sins and spend eternity in hell if Christ is not your Savior. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." "Neither is there salvation . . ."

For those of us who know the Lord, let us thank God that we have faith in Christ, that He has given us the love that we have for each other, that in Christ we have hope. And let us praise Him that the Gospel is still transforming lives. So let us go to tell our friends, our neighbors, people everywhere that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and that God will save all who come to Him through Christ.

CONTINUING REQUESTS FOR UNCEASING PRAYER
Colossians 1:9, 10

Intro: I have no doubt but that, although the timing of this message was not deliberately planned by me, there is no doubt in my mind but that it has providentially arranged by God. Wednesday is our Day of Prayer. It certainly is not the only day of prayer we have. We pray every day. But it is a day which the elders have set aside for special prayer. We are hopeful that all of us will be able to give more time to prayer on that day than we normally do. We are having three times of prayer here in this auditorium which is not what we usually do every week. These three sessions are in addition to the praying that each of us does privately, and the praying that we do with the members of our families. To all of us who are part of this ministry, Trinity Bible Church, prayer is very, very important! Each week one whole side of our Tableau is devoted to "Prayer Requests," and most of us have our own lists, either written down or in our minds, or both, of people and needs which we remember in prayer. One important part of our Wednesday night gathering is the time that we give to prayer. We come to God in prayer because God has commanded us in His Word to pray. We pray because we need to pray, and we want to pray. We pray because we know that God is the source of all of our blessings, and God's blessings are what we need individually, what our families and friends need, and what Trinity Bible Church needs. By prayer we are able to have a very real part in the lives of people who are far-removed from us here where we are today. But with all that I have said about prayer, we all know that we do not pray as much as we should. More prayer will inevitably be blessed by God with even greater manifestations of His goodness upon us.

However, it is not only important to pray, but we need to be praying in the right manner and for the right things. Every child of God needs to be taught how to pray. The Holy Spirit is our Teacher. In teaching us how to pray the main instrument He uses is the Word of God. And one of the main places to which we must turn in the Scriptures to learn how to pray is the prayers of the Bible.

That is what we are doing today. This prayer in Colossians chapter 1 is, to be sure, a prayer that Paul prayed for the believers at Colossae--~~MANY TIMES!~~ It is of great importance to us from an historical standpoint. But it is also here for our learning. It is here to teach us to pray. If this were the way that Paul prayed for the Colossians, then the Holy Spirit would have us know that this is a good way for us to pray for each other. But we do not simply memorize it, and pray it. We seek to find out what the various requests mean so that when we do pray this prayer, or use words like what

we have here, we will know what we are praying for, and be able to pray these requests from the depths of our hearts.

Finding out what this prayer means is why we are here today. I do not expect to cover the whole prayer in one service. There is much too much for me to do that in the time that I have. But we are going to get started with it. And I hope that what we learn this morning, or what we are reminded of that we have known before, will enable us to profit even more from our Day of Prayer this coming Wednesday.

So let me direct your attention to the first verse of this prayer: Col. 1:9. (Read.)

Paul had just completed his introductory remarks. He had "heard" of their faith. He rejoiced in their salvation, and in the love that they had for each other, as well as in "the hope" that was theirs in Christ. Those of you who have been reading Colossians may remember that in chapter 2, verse 5, Paul wrote,

For though I be absent in the flesh,
yet am I with you in the spirit,
joying and beholding your order,
and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

Reading Colossians, or any of the other Epistles of Paul, makes you realize that there were two things which gave Paul the greatest joys that he had here on earth:

- 1) The salvation of sinners.
- 2) The spiritual growth of believers.

Things looked good in Colossae as far as the work of the Lord was concerned, even though we will find in chapter 2 that they were facing some serious possibilities for trouble. But we will deal with those when we get to chapter 2.

Let us look now at verse 9 where, first of all, we are told about:

I. THE PRAYING OF THE APOSTLE PAUL (Col. 1:9a).

A. What caused him to pray for the Colossian believers?

Perhaps to bring out what we have here I should ask, What causes us to pray for other Christians? I think that the answer most of us would have to give is that we pray for people when we are made aware that they have some special need. We may pray for our family members, and perhaps most of our church friends, because of our love for them, but even then it may take some special need--an illness, or some departure from the Lord--to make us pray faithfully for them.

But what caused Paul to pray for the Colossians?

Read verses 3-8 and you will find out. He began praying for them (as he said here in verse 9) from the very first day that he was told about the work of the Lord in Colossae. And he had been praying for them without interruption down to the very day he was writing to them. And it was not because they had problems, but because things were going so well in the Church at Colossae.

Do you get the point I am trying to make? And I think that Paul was making this point, too! Do not wait for things to go wrong before you start to pray. Pray when you see that things are going well. Your prayers may be used of God to keep them going well and to hold back the problems.

This is a very important point which we all need to learn.

The second thing I want you to note about the praying that the Apostle Paul did is this:

B. The sameness of his prayer requests.

I do not mean to say that Paul always used the same words when he prayed, but I mean that he always was concerned about the same requests.

This is brought out by the words, "Do not cease to pray for you, and to desire . . ."

He did not just mean that he was always praying for them, but that he was always praying about the same things--the things that he mentioned in the latter part of verse 9 and the verses which follow.

You see, Paul was teaching the Colossians (and all believers from that day to this) that our needs basically are always the same--our real needs, our greatest needs, our spiritual needs! So we may mention special requests from time to time, but for the most part we need to be concerned about the same things.

"Praying" here means that he was continuously addressing himself to God on their behalf; "desiring" means that he was bringing particular petitions. He was not just praying to be praying, but he was bringing specific requests for them to God.

Paul was faithful in prayer. He would tell them in chapter 4, verse 2, to "continue in prayer." And

they knew that Paul was practicing what he preached.

Perhaps you and I need some encouragement here. We often pray and pray, day after day, without seeing much in the way of results. But we need to keep praying. If we are praying for the right things, we cannot pray in vain.

So there is much that we can learn about prayer from simply the first part of verse 9.

But let us go on to the last part of the verse. Here we have:

II. PAUL'S PRIMARY REQUEST (Col. 1:9b).

I call this Paul's primary request, his principal request, his basic request, because his other requests rest upon this one. Without knowing God's will we cannot walk so as to please Him. Without knowing God's will we cannot be fruitful in the work of the Lord. Without knowing God's will we will never grow in our knowledge of the Lord, etc.

So it is very important that we know what Paul was praying about when he prayed specifically that they "might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."

What, really, was he praying about? Where to you find "the knowledge of his (God's) will"?

Well, let me say that he was praying that they would understand THE WORD OF GOD. It is very probable that he was thinking at that moment about this Epistle that he was writing to them. He wanted them to understand the truth of God, and he knew that they could not understand the Word without the help of the Lord. That is why he was praying about this particular thing for them.

But beyond this Epistle, knowing God's will extends to all of the Word of God. Only Christians have the ability to understand the Word. Our Lord made it clear while he was here on earth that the Holy Spirit would be given to His people to teach them the truth of Scripture.

FROM THE MOMENT ANY ONE OF US WAS SAVED, THE BIBLE BECAME OUR MEAT AND DRINK SPIRITUALLY. IT BECAME OUR SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL STRENGTH AND LIGHT. A CHRISTIAN CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT HIS BIBLE. IT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT BOOK THAT HE WILL EVER READ. AND HE NEEDS TO UNDERSTAND IT!

But what did Paul have in mind when he spoke of "the knowledge of his will"?

There seems to be no good reason in this verse, nor in what follows, to restrict the word "will." This is the will of God in its broadest sense: His will concerning salvation, His will concerning sin, His will expressed in the death of Christ on the Cross, His will regarding His people--what they should know, how they should live, how they shall be perfected, and what their final destiny will be. To state it as briefly as I know how, "the will of God" is another title for the Bible. The Bible gives us the revealed will of God. We really know nothing about the will of God apart from the Scriptures, the Word of God.

And to be "filled" with it, is to know it completely. The word for "knowledge" really means a full knowledge, a complete knowledge. The word presupposes that they had some knowledge, but Paul was praying that their knowledge would grow! And this is why we can always make this request for one another: because we never know it all; we can always learn more, and we need to be learning more and more about the Word of God.

However, this full knowledge is not simply the ability to define and explain the great truths of God's Word, but it is what William Hendriksen in his commentary on Colossians and Philemon calls "heart-transforming and life-renewing" (p. 57). We do not really know any truth unless it has had some practical effect upon our lives.

BUT we need to know the Word "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." What did Paul mean by these words? They are not separated from that full knowledge of the will of God, but explain it in greater detail.

"All" suggests that as our knowledge grows, our wisdom will grow, and so will our understanding. "Spiritual" reminds us that all of our knowledge of God Word comes by the Spirit of God.

It is not easy to distinguish between "wisdom" and "understanding," but I will give you what I think that they mean.

"Wisdom" is the ability to relate the truths of the Word of God to each other--both doctrinally and practically. We take our knowledge and we seek to arrive at a unified body of truth.

"Understanding," or "spiritual understanding," is

discernment: the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error.

Now let me restate all of that for you:

- 1) "Knowledge" here is a growing acquaintance with the doctrines of Scripture and of their practical application to our lives.
- 2) "Wisdom" is the ability to see the relationship of the truths of Scripture to each other.
- 3) "Understanding" is to be capable of recognizing error when you hear it, and so to be able to preserve the truth.

There may be more to these words than I have seen, but these, it seems to me, are the main ideas.

People can learn a lot of verses without knowing much doctrine, and certainly without ever seeing the practical effect that the Word is to have on their lives. Or they can know a lot of individual doctrines, but they have never related them to each other. And also there are those who know a lot of truth, but they lack discernment. A false teacher can come along and, if he uses the Bible, many who have been under a Bible teaching ministry will be carried away. Paul prayed this prayer continually because he knew that false teachers were everywhere, and that the only thing that could preserve the people of God was a growing, thorough acquaintance with the Word of God.

Concl: This is as much as I have time for today, but in anticipating what is coming, let me ask this question: WHY WOULD PAUL PLACE SUCH A HEAVY EMPHASIS UPON THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORD?

Well, as I indicated before, the following requests grow out of this.

What follows immediately after verse 9? It is the request at the beginning of verse 10: "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." As we learned in studying Ephesians, walking is living! The first purpose for the Word is that God might be glorified. The second is that we might be transformed, that our lives would be changed, that our purpose in life would be to live our lives in a manner that is "worthy of the Lord," that we might seek to please Him first and always.

The Word will delight us. The Word will instruct us. The Word will preserve us. May God help each one of us to love the Word, to search out its truths, to think about them until the Lord makes them clear to us. May the Lord cause us to

see the glorious unity of Scriptures, and to convince us by the Word that any teaching that is contrary to our Bibles cannot be the truth of God, and so must be rejected.

We do not grow in the Lord by treating the Word passively. It calls for the greatest diligence and perseverance on our part, much prayer and trusting in the Spirit of God to guide us, to enlighten us, to change us.

Paul's prayer for the Colossians ought to be our prayer for each other. May this be a primary concern that we all have as we gather for our Day of Prayer. And then may it be a continuing concern every day after that until we get home to heaven.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE
Colossians 1:10-12

Intro: When we talk about the Christian life among professing Christians, we have to be specific as to what we mean because there are many different ideas as to what that expression, the Christian life, means.

If you were to talk to some people, it is a life in which you are on a continual high of excitement and miraculous events. The Lord is viewed as a Person Who wants us to have a good time with a minimum of troubles or problems.

Talk to others, and you will get the impression that the Christian life is a very restricted existence in which there is not a great deal of joy. To them the Christian life is really a bondage, an existence in which there is more fear than pleasure.

Those are two extremes. It would be impossible to state all of the different ideas there are among professing Christians as to what the Christian life is. With some it centers around man; with others it centers around God. What is the correct answer? Where can we find the truth about the Christian life?

I think that most Christians would agree that the Bible has something to say on the subject. Personally I believe that the Bible is the only place where we can find the right answer. Furthermore, I believe that we have that answer, at least in its major points, in the prayer of the Apostle Paul we are considering in Colossians 1.

The first part of Paul's prayer is in verse 9. We considered that last Sunday. We saw that if we are to "be filled with the knowledge of his (God's) will," we must go to the Bible. The Bible contains the will of God. In fact, as I suggested last week, we could take that term, the will of God, and make it the name of our Bibles.

To "be filled with the knowledge of his (God's) will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" means three things:

- 1) We must be learning the truths of Scripture.
- 2) We must be learning also how the various truths of Scripture are related to each other.
- 3) We must be learning to use the Word of God to discern between truth and error, and between right and wrong. This is the only way that we can be protected against the many false doctrines that are always being taught.

We all realize that we do not know everything that there is to know about the Bible, but we must continue learning. That

is why we are here today. That is why (hopefully) we read our Bibles during the week. Nobody ever learns it all, but we must continue to learn more and more.

So let us all recognize that if we are not learning the truths of the Bible, we are not going anywhere in the Christian life. It is just as impossible for us to be growing as Christians if we are neglecting our Bibles as it is for a person to continue to live in this world if he or she does not eat food. The Bible is the Christian's food. And he needs to be feeding on it, learning more about it, every day.

I hope that the Spirit of God has impressed that so strongly upon your heart that you will never forget it.

I touched on something else last week that I want to go into a little more today. It is this: When Paul spoke of being "filled with the knowledge of his will," he was not talking just about knowing the doctrines of Scripture, but the words he used indicated that he was thinking also about the practical effect of the doctrine upon the lives of the Colossian believers. THAT IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR ALL OF US TO REMEMBER! Bishop Lightfoot, in his commentary on Colossians (p. 205) wrote: "The end of all knowledge, the Apostle would say, is conduct." Creed leads to conduct; doctrine to duty; precept to practice. The Word leads to the walk, as we clearly see in Paul's prayer.

And so, following upon what we have seen about the importance of the Word, let us go on to see what Paul wrote about:

I. THE CHRISTIAN WALK.

I have discussed this word with you before, but for those who might not be acquainted with it, let me explain it once again.

The word "walk" is of Hebrew origin. Sometimes it is used in the OT of ordinary walking, like God said to Abram in Gen. 13:17, "Arise, walk through the land." But it is also used to describe the way a person lives, like the expression found in Gen. 5:22, 24, "Enoch walked with God." We have the same thing said about Noah in Gen. 6:9: "Noah walked with God."

The Bible does not say that God walked with them, but they walked with God. What does it mean?

It means that they were living in fellowship with God, doing what God wanted them to do, obeying God, seeking to please Him in every detail of their lives. But it was

not just an outward way of life. This expression meant that inwardly and outwardly they were seeking to please the Lord.

One of the best explanations of what it means to walk with God is stated in Paul's instructions to servants in Eph. 6:6 where he told the servants to obey their masters "as the servants of Christ, **doing the will of God from the heart.**"

Paul brought that out in the way he described how he had been praying about their walk. He said, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing."

To "walk worthy of the Lord" is to live in a way that would be fitting for a person who claimed to belong to Jesus Christ. It would mean to seek to live as He lived, to show the same spirit and attitude, to manifest the same kind of love, to demonstrate the same hatred for sin, to seek to do God's will, to glorify God more than anything else.

The word "walk" is expressed in such a way that it shows that this is the result of the Word in a person's life. His way of living has been transformed. Before he sought to please himself, or other people; now he is concerned about pleasing God.

And this is "unto all pleasing," which means, pleasing God in all things.

So to know the will of God as it is revealed in the Word of God, leads to a transformed life. There is no way that a person can live such a life IF he is neglecting the Word of God day after day.

But let us go on.

In the four verbs that follow (two in v. 10, one in v. 11, and one in v. 12) we have:

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (Col. 1:10b-12).

Paul elaborated on the Christian life as he went on into his Epistle, but he touched upon some of the basic characteristics in these three verses. These were things that he was praying about. They are:

- 1) "Being fruitful in every good work."
- 2) "Increasing in the knowledge of God."
- 3) "Strengthened with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness."

4) "Giving thanks unto the Father, . . ."

Now what all of this means is that IF we are walking so as to please God, we will be fruitful, we will be increasing in our knowledge of God, we will be strengthened with a strength that comes from God, and we will have a thankful heart that will be expressing itself in thanksgiving to our heavenly Father.

Just what did Paul have in mind with each of these? Let us look at them.

A. "Being fruitful in every good work" (v. 10).

Fruitfulness to Paul, and also work, were very different from much that we say about fruitful work today. Paul was not promising that we would be able to lead to Christ every person we talk to. Even he was not able to do that. Even when he referred to "fruit" in Col. 1:6 he did not just have in mind that people were being saved. He was speaking of how the Gospel changes people's lives. If lives are not changed, they have not been saved.

When we leave this expression in its context, with what Paul said about walking in a manner that would be becoming to the Lord, seeking to please Him in everything, "being fruitful in every good work" meant that by the grace of God, and as evidence of the power of the Gospel in their lives, they would be "fruitful" in all that they sought to do to please the Lord. All that we seek to do to please the Lord, and to become like He is, is a good work. Always remember that!

B. "Increasing in the knowledge of God" (v. 10).

I agree with Charles Simeon who said that this cannot be just a repetition of what Paul had already said in verse 9 about knowing the Word. No, it seems that what he had in mind here was a life of greater fellowship with the Lord! It means enjoying the Lord Himself in a greater way, and experiencing more of His presence.

Learning about the Lord, and walking with the Lord, and seeking to become like the Lord, causes you to love the Lord more and more. But, you see, all of this is related. Paul, by his prayer, was taking the Colossian believers step by step into what the Christian life really is--a Christ-like life, a life of fellowship with God.

But this is not all. The third characteristic of the Christian life as Paul was relating here is:

C. "Strengthened with all might . . ." (v. 11).

When Paul spoke of "patience and longsuffering with joyfulness," he had in mind those times in our lives when we go through trials, and our faith is tested.

We all know what it is to fail the Lord. We all know what it is to be in situations where we are unable to cope with the circumstances. What we need is strength, and there is only one place where we can get the kind of strength that we need: that is from the Lord!

"Patience and longsuffering" are two words that are used together several places in the NT. Cf. 2 Cor. 6:4, 6; 2 Tim. 3:10; Jas. 5:10, 11. Bishop Lightfoot explained them this way (and so does Trench):

While ὑπομονή is the temper which does not easily succumb under suffering, μακροθυμία is the self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate a wrong. The one is opposed to cowardice or despondency, the other to wrath and revenge (p. 206).

And then he went on to say that patience is closely allied with hope; longsuffering, to mercy.

We need the power of God to be kept from despondency just as much as we need the power of God to keep us from taking matters into our own hands to retaliate against someone for a wrong that has been done to us.

And we do not do this grudgingly, but "WITH JOYFULNESS." Amazing! You know that God is at work in our hearts when we are spared from going under in our trials.

And then we come to the fourth characteristic:

D. "Giving thanks unto the Father . . ." (v. 12).

Verse 12 leads into verses 13 and 14.

When we are spending time in the Word, learning the truths of Scripture, seeking to please our Lord by becoming like Him, enjoying His fellowship more and more, overcoming in our trials and temptations, WHAT IS IT THAT WE ARE MOST THANKFUL FOR?

The answer to that question is very clear:

SALVATION! We marvel at God's grace in saving us. As we look over all of the blessings that we enjoy every day, this blessing of salvation far exceeds all of the others that we have!

Here is a good way for you and me to check to see where we are spiritually. From the way we live, and from the way we pray, what are we most thankful for? We need to be thankful for all blessings--material, physical, social. But when we find ourselves putting salvation at the head of the list, then we can know that we are making progress spiritually. We are growing!

Concl: This is the Christian life. A Christian loves the Word of God. He will want to be like the Lord. The Word makes him confident that the Lord will fulfill the desires of his heart. Through the Word he enjoys the Lord. Through the Word he is strengthened against all his enemies. And through the Word he never gets beyond the place where he is deeply grateful to God that he is saved.

Does this sound like one of your prayers? Is it like my prayers for you? If it isn't, it ought to be! What a privilege it is to be able to pray for each other, but it is just as important for us to know that we are praying in the right way for the right things.

Let me ask you as I close, What place does the Word of God have in your life? Have you been reading it this week? Are you seeking to obey it? Have you been seeing the Lord in it? Just take these requests, and before you pray them for anyone else, find out how your life checks out request by request. It may be that before we pray these requests for others, we need to pray them for ourselves, and ask others to pray this prayer for us, too. How different our lives would be, how much happier, and how much more peaceful, and what greater influence we would have on others, if we were faithfully, day after day, really feeding on the Word of God!

Remember Jeremiah's words in Jer. 15:16, and make them your own: "Thy words were found, ..." And Peter's words in 1 Pet. 2:2, 3 and 2 Pet. 3:18.

THE HIGHEST PRAISE

Col. 1:12-14

Intro: It is very clear in the Word of God, OT and NT, that one of the distinguishing characteristics of a child of God is thanksgiving--a thankful heart, a grateful spirit, words of praise to God.

This is clear from Col. 3:17.

It is specifically commanded of us in Col. 3:15. Note also Col. 4:2.

Col. 2:7 seems to teach us that thanksgiving to God is an evidence of spiritual growth.

After Paul gave his usual greeting in the first two verses of this Epistle, he followed it with words of thanksgiving.

Earlier when Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church, he said,
In everything give thanks,
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus
concerning you (1 Thess. 5:18).

In the last verse of Psalm 50 (v.23a) we read that the Lord said, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me."

The writer of Hebrews penned these words:

By him therefore let us offer
the sacrifice of praise to God continually,
that is, the fruit of our lips
giving thanks to his name.

When we pray for others, and when we pray for ourselves, we need to ask the Lord to make us thankful. But Paul's prayer here in Col. 1 teaches us that thanksgiving arises from the heart of one who is learning the truth and walking in the truth. And so a lack of thanksgiving is an indication that there are problems in our relationship with the Lord.

Worship and praise are very closely related, and yet they are two different kinds of prayer. When we worship the Lord we are honoring and adoring the Lord as a Person. When we thank the Lord, we are expressing our gratitude to Him for the blessings that He has given us.

There are different kinds of blessings which we receive from the Lord. We have material blessings (the food we eat, the ^{clothes} we wear, the houses we live in, and many, many others). We have physical blessings in the health that we have--being able to see, to hear, to talk, to walk, the strength to do our work, and so on. But our text would teach us that THE

HIGHEST PRAISE that we can offer to the Lord has to do with our spiritual blessings! And by spiritual blessings I am referring to those blessings which only the people of God have. We can offer God no greater praise than when we, from our hearts, express thanksgiving to God for the blessings Paul mentioned in verses 12, 13, and 14 of Col. 1. Let me read them for you again.

(Read vv. 12-14.)

If you remember what I said about the participles in verses 10-12 last week, starting with "being fruitful," you will recall that I said that they are in the present tense, meaning that these things were to be going on continuously.

Therefore, we do not just give thanks to the Lord once in a while, but all of the time! Make sure that this is an outstanding part of your life every day!

Paul could have mentioned many things, but here he singled out three spiritual blessings in particular, and we want to look at these three today. As I have mentioned, the first is in verse 12, the second in verse 13, and the third in verse 14.

The first blessing is:

I. A FULL AND COMPLETE SALVATION (Col. 1:12).

Look at the end of the verse first of all. What is "the inheritance of the saints in light"?

Paul mentioned our inheritance again in Col. 3:24, "the reward of the inheritance."

What is our "inheritance"?

Well, an inheritance is what we receive from our fathers. Actually we can receive an inheritance from anyone, but we usually think of inheritances as that which parents leave to their children.

Notice that Paul was "giving thanks **unto the Father**" in this twelfth verse. "Father" and "inheritance" go together. God is our heavenly Father, and he has made us heirs! In Rom. 8:16 Paul told us that we are "the children of God," and then he went on to say in verse 17,

And if children, then heirs;
heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ;
if so be that we suffer with him.
that we may be also glorified together.

According to this verse our inheritance is that we will be glorified together with Christ!

A part of our inheritance is that we will be "with Christ" in heaven, but the main part is that we will be "like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). This is our "hope" which Paul had already mentioned in Col. 1:5. (Read also Col. 3:1-4.)

Peter linked our hope and our inheritance together in 1 Peter 1:3-5.

And so we are to share the inheritance of all of the saints. Conformity to Christ is the inheritance in which we all have a share.

But what about that part of the verse which says that the Father "hath made us meet . . ." ? It means that He, by His work in our hearts through Christ, has done everything necessary to guarantee that this work will ultimately be accomplished in each one of us. We are fully qualified in Christ to attain unto that inheritance. Christ is sufficient for all of us. There is much to be done in all of our hearts before the work is completed, but we do not need to look to anyone but CHRIST!

That is some that we need to thank our heavenly Father for every day that we live.

Spurgeon linked this verse with John 14:2 and pointed out that "heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people." Our Lord is preparing heaven for us, and He is preparing us for heaven. Our preparation is in Christ, and in Christ alone.

But let us look at verse 13. There we have:

II. OUR DELIVERANCE (Col. 1:13).

Now we see a reason for the last two verses of verse 12: "in light."

By the same work of salvation through which we have been qualified for our inheritance, we have been "delivered" and "translated," or transferred.

"The power of darkness" is the authority of the Devil and the world and the flesh. We were in bondage to the forces of evil throughout the universe and within our own hearts. We were kept enslaved to our sins, and could do nothing to set ourselves free.

Cf. Col. 2:15.

But God again, through Christ, has taken us out of one, and put us into another. We are taken out from Satan's power and placed into the kingdom of the Son of God's love. Now we are free--not free to sin, but free from sin.

— The Apostle Peter spoke of God
 . . . who hath called you out of darkness
 into his marvellous light:
 which in time past were not a people,
 but are now the people of God:
 which had not obtained mercy,
 but now have obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:9b, 10).

So to have been translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son is to be under the sovereign authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, dependent upon Him, and responsible to Him.

But let us go on to verse 14. Here we have:

III. REDEMPTION (Col. 1:14).

"Redemption" here speaks of being released from something because of a payment which has been made.

— The release is from our sins, and the payment that was made was the sacrifice of our Lord when He shed His precious blood upon the Cross.

The release from our sins is called, "forgiveness." Our sins called for our death, our eternal death. Cf. Rom. 6:23a. But the Lord Jesus came to die in our place, as our Substitute. Long before Paul wrote to the Colossians Isaiah wrote to Judah, and he said this about our Lord Jesus Christ:

Surely he hath borne **our** griefs,
 and carried **our** sorrows,
 yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God,
 and afflicted.
 But he was wounded for **our** transgressions,
 he was bruised for **our** iniquities:
 the chastisement of **our** peace was upon him;
 and with his stripes **we** are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray . . .
 (Isa. 53:4-6).

— How can we ever consider what happened on the Cross, and then minimize the awful nature of our sins? On the other hand, how can we ever understand the sacrifice of Christ and yet question the forgiveness of our sins? The debt was too great for us, but the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for the sins of every sinner who ever lived.

Some MSS omit the words, "through his blood," referring to Christ's blood shed on the Cross. But the blood of Christ is mentioned in verse 20, and the counterpart of this verse in Ephesians, Eph. 1:7, certainly indicates that it is only through Christ's blood that we have forgiveness. Listen to that verse:

In whom we have redemption through his blood,
the forgiveness of sins,
according to the riches of his grace.
Cf. Col. 2:13 - "all trespasses." Also, Col. 3:12.

We did not deserve such a gift, but neither could we have ever done enough to atone for our sins. So it is Christ, or eternal doom. There are not many Saviors, not even two, only One, and His Name is the Lord Jesus Christ.

We can all sing those words of Isaac Watts,
"Why was I made to hear thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"

Concl: How long has it been since you gave thanks to God that He has prepared you for heaven, that He has delivered you from Satan's power, from the power of your sins, and from hell itself, and that you are in the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Has it been a week, a month, a year, or several years? Or could it be that you have never given Him thanks for saving you? Does it still delight your soul that you are saved, that you are on your way to heaven?

If you are deficient here, could I ask about your fellowship with the Lord--is it a delight to your heart? If you are lacking in thanksgiving, it is very likely that you are lacking also in fellowship with the Lord. The more you and I walk with Him, the greater will be our joy in salvation, and the greater will be our praise.

Mr. Spurgeon used to point out the certainty that is expressed in these verses. Paul did not say that "he hoped that we have," but "we have"! We can have the same certainty, and it is only the assurance of these great truths that will produce a continuing song of thanksgiving to God for all that we have in Christ, and because of His death for us on the Cross.

If you are not prepared for heaven, if you still are in bondage to your sins, and if you under the guilt of your sins, there is only one answer to all of that, and that answer is CHRIST! Whenever most people get concerned about their sins, the first thing they try to do is to atone for them some way by themselves. But that does not bring the

assurance of heaven. That does not enable us to give up our sins. Nor does it cover the sins that we have already committed. Salvation is not through what we have done, or can do. It is only through Christ. And in Christ salvation is full and free, and it is forever!

Come to Christ today, now! Trust Him for your salvation. Whatever your sins may be, there is forgiveness for all if you are trusting in Christ. He saved the chief of sinners, and He will save you.

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRIST
Colossians 1:15-19

Intro: If there is one verse, or a part of a verse, which gives the keynote of Colossians, it must be Col. 1:18, especially the last part of the verse: "that in all things he might have the pre-eminence."

Paul was speaking of Christ--"that in all things" CHRIST "might have the pre-eminence." God the Father has given Christ "the pre-eminence" in everything. This means that our Lord holds first place, He alone is worthy of the highest honor, He has supreme authority. No one ever has had, or will have, a greater place than our Lord. He is the most outstanding person that there ever has been. The world has had its great men, many who were (or are) worthy of high honor. But none surpasses our Lord Jesus Christ. All who are in the Church, or out of the Church, are inferior to Him. And this is as God has willed that it should be.

All of us should feel like John the Baptist who said that he was not worthy to loosen the thongs of our Lord's sandals. Cf. John 1:27. Or like the Roman centurion who wanted the Lord to heal his servant, but added, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof" (Matt. 8:8).

The only other time this verb, to have the pre-eminence, was used in the NT is in 3 John 9 where it is joined with the verb, _____, and was used of Diotrephes "who loveth to have the pre-eminence." This means that He aspired, he was desirous of being first. Whether Diotrephes knew it or not, he wanted the Lord's place. He was a man with a proud heart. He had never come to understand the truth that, hopefully, we are going to understand today. Church leaders might be honored in the Lord. They might be eminent. But only Christ is PRE-EMINENT!

Paul was speaking of the pre-eminence of Christ when he wrote Phil. 2:9-11: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him . . ." Whatever dangers may have been threatening the believers at Colossae, they all could be placed under one heading: **THEY WERE ATTACKING THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRIST!** In our text for today we see the pre-eminence of Christ in three relationships which he had:

- I. HIS PRE-EMINENCE IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER.
- II. HIS PRE-EMINENCE IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH CREATION.
- III. HIS PRE-EMINENCE IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH.

The first is in verse 15a. The second is in verses 15b-17. The third is in verse 18a. Verses 18b and 19 give us the divine purpose for the pre-eminence of Christ in these three areas, or relationships. Let us consider them in order.

I. THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRIST IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER (Col. 1:15a).

God is called here, "the invisible God." We can understand this because "God is a Spirit" (John 4:24a), and we are unable to see spirit beings. John also tells us that "no man hath seen God at any time."

Paul worshiped God in these words found in 1 Tim. 1:17:
Now unto the King eternal, immortal, **invisible**,
the only wise God,
be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews in Heb. 11:27 says that Moses in his flight from Egypt "endured, as seeing him who is invisible." He did not actually see God, but he knew that He was there, and this is what enables him to persevere under very trying circumstances.

We are going to be dealing with creation in just a moment. Let me anticipate that by quoting what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman believers in Rom. 1:20. He said,

For the invisible things of him
from the creation of the world are clearly seen,
being understood by the things that are made,
even his eternal power and Godhead;
so that they are without excuse.

We can learn a great deal about God from creation: His wisdom, His power, His glory. But the revelation of the invisible God through creation is marvelous, but by no means complete.

God has made known a great deal about Himself in the OT. Many of God's attributes are mentioned in the OT. Many of them are demonstrated by the things which the Lord did in OT times. But when we gather together all that we can learn about God from creation, and all that we can learn about God from the Old Testament, our understanding of God is still not complete. And it was not complete until He came Whom Paul called here, "the image of the invisible God."

Again, in 2 Cor. 4:4 the Apostle Paul called our Lord, "Christ, who is the image of God."

What does "image" mean?

It means that Jesus Christ is like God, and that He has come to represent God, and to manifest God. This is one of the strong statements in Scripture for the absolute Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ and God are one--

not the same Person, but identical in their Deity. This is why the Lord could say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9m). I quoted from the first part of John 1:18 a moment ago; let me finish that verse for you now. (Quote it.)

Jesus Christ is pre-eminent in His relationship with the Father because He alone is "the image of the invisible God. Others may have told us about God, such as, Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all of the OT prophets, but no one was in his person a revelation of the Father. This place of honor is occupied by our Lord Jesus Christ alone. And to understand God we need never, must never, go beyond the Lord Jesus Christ.

But let us go on to our Lord's second relationship.

II. THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRIST IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH CREATION (Col. 1:15b-17).

Verse 16 states it very clearly. Our Lord is the Creator. This does not mean that neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit had anything to do with creation. We know that they did. But Paul here was expressing his agreement with the Apostle John who said,

All things were made by him;
and without him was not anything made
that was made (John 1:3).

This includes all things "that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible." He created angels; He created men. He established the kingdoms and their rulers on earth; and he established the authorities that exist among the heavenly, angelic creatures. He created the visible world; He created the invisible world.

Not only that, but "all things were created . . . for him." All things had their beginning in Him, and all things will reach their final fulfillment and glory in Him. He existed before all things came into existence, and down to the present hour everything operates and is held together by our Lord. What man call the law of gravity is pure and simply a manifestation of the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. The heavenly bodies move by His power. According to Heb. 1:3, our Lord who is "the brightness of" God's "glory, and the express image of his person," is "upholding all things by the word of his power." Our Lord brought creation into existence by the word of His power, and He keeps it going the same way.

What an amazing person our Lord is! But why is He called, "the firstborn of every creature"?

This has caused many to teach that our Lord may have been active in creation, but as "the firstborn of every creature" He was the first of all of God's created beings!

We know that that is not true, but why use such an expression which seems to help those who would make our Lord less than God?

This is one place where it is evident that leaving a verse in its context will preserve us from error. See how verse 16 explains the last part of verse 15. (Read.)

But notice that we have this word, "firstborn," again in verse 18. In Heb. 1:6 our Lord is called "the firstbegotten," and the angels are called upon to "worship him." In Rev. 1:5 our Lord is called "the firstbegotten of the dead." All of these expressions are the same in the Greek, and each time they are used there is the idea of One Who is pre-eminent--and He claims this position because in creation, in resurrection, in His coming again to the earth, He far-surpasses all creatures, having existed before them. And although He became a man, yet He always has been and always will be one with the Father and with the Spirit.

And so "the firstborn of all creation" means, essentially, that our Lord is the Lord of creation.

But we still have another relationship to deal with.

III. THE PRE-EMINENCE OF OUR LORD IN HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH (Col. 1:18a).

In Ephesians and in Colossians Paul spoke of "the church." But it seems that he did so with this difference:

- 1) In Ephesians he spoke of the Church, the body of Christ.
- 2) In Colossians he spoke of Christ as the Head of the Church.

We might also say that we have just been talking about our Lord's pre-eminence in original creation. Now we are going to see that He is pre-eminent in the new creation.

But why is He called, "the head of the body"? In Col. 2:10 our Lord is called, "the head of all principality and power." Why "the head"?

Christ is the Head of the Church because He is the One Who has supreme authority. There is none greater in the

Church than He is. He is both Master and Lord. All in the Church are to do His will, and to live for His glory. He is worthy and qualified for such a position over the redeemed because of what we have seen previously:

- 1) His equality with the Father.
- 2) His work in creation.
- 3) And now in this verse we see His death (implied), and His resurrection--and His authority over all who will be raised from the dead.

John Eadie, a Scotch commentator who lived in the last century, had this to say about the statements made in this passage:

Any creature would be deified were he so highly exalted; for he would, from his position, become the god of the Christian people, as their blesser, protector, and object of worship. But the church and the universe are under one administration, that of Him who is "King of Kings and Lord of lords." The king of the universe is able to be Head of the church, and He has won the Headship in His blood. It is no eminence to which He is not entitled, no function which He cannot worthily discharge (Colossians, p. 64).

We come now to:

IV. THE PLEASURE OF GOD CONCERNING HIS SON, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST (Col. 1 18b, 19).

This is the ultimate purpose of God concerning His Son and concerning the work of salvation. The Lord Jesus is supreme, and all fullness dwells in Him. What fullness? Surely the fullness of Deity is in Him. But the connection between verse 19 and verse 20 seems to suggest that here Paul was speaking of the fullness of salvation. There is no need to go beyond Him. There is nothing lacking in Him that needs to be made up by ourselves or others. What was demonstrated in creation, manifested in the incarnation, fulfilled in our Lord's death and resurrection--all is just as God ordained that it should be. And so to go beyond Christ is to go beyond God. To be without Christ is to be without God. But to be trusting in Christ is to have the full and eternal provision that has been made for us by God through Christ.

Concl: If Christ is the Pre-eminent One according to God, and if all fullness dwells in Him, then what does this mean to us in the Church today?

It means that we must accept the Father's testimony

concerning His Son, or we cannot expect to be saved. No person can rightfully call himself a Christian who does not wholeheartedly believe that Jesus Christ is Deity. If He is not the Son of God, then He is an impostor. If He is not the Son of God, then He needs a Savior just as much as we do. But He is the Son of God, and we need to know that, and believe that, and trust Him to do for us what He came to do.

Secondly, we need to believe all of the truths which He taught. There was no greater Teacher than He. He is our final authority. Let Augustine and Luther and Calvin and all of the other great teachers of the past declare and support the teachings of our Lord and of His apostles, but remember that they are not the supreme authority. Christ is, and we need to judge all doctrines by His doctrine.

Thirdly, if Christ is pre-eminent, then we need to live as He teaches us to live in His Word. What a contradiction it is to claim that He is our Lord if we do not do what He has told us to do. The great proof that we recognize the pre-eminence of Christ is to be seen in the obedience we give to the Word of God.

There are many other things that could be said, but let me conclude with just one more.

If Christ is pre-eminent, then let us be at peace regarding world conditions and the ultimate outcome of God's purposes. I did not say that we should be indifferent, but peaceful. God has not ceased to be God, nor has He changed His mind about His Son. God's purposes still stand. And the day is coming when all creatures heavenly and earthly will recognize the pre-eminence of our Lord.

Make sure today that your hope is in Christ, and in no other. We have no other hope, no other source of blessing, except in Him.

FRIENDS OF GOD
Colossians 1:20-23

Intro: Who is an enemy?

And enemy is not just a person you do not like, but he (or she) is a person toward whom you are antagonistic, or hostile. The dictionary describes an enemy as "one who seeks the overthrow or failure of that to which he is opposed" (Webster's Collegiate, p. 330). And enemy is a foe. He is anything but a friend.

Paul told the Colossian believers that they were "sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works." See verse 21. "Sometime" means once, or formerly. To be "alienated" is o be estranged, which means o be turned away, wanting to have nothing to do with the person from whom you are estranged, and, if not actively hostile, at least totally indifferent to that other person.

Paul was picturing here in verse 21 what all of those Colossians believers were in their relationship with God before they were saved. They were opposed to God and to the truth. They were opposed to Christ. They were enemies of God, estranged from Him, wanting nothing to do with Him, and opposed to everything that God was seeking to do. Whether in a state of indifference, or actively hostile to God, they were in the camp of God's enemies. To state it as simply as possible, they were at war with God! They were not on God's side; they were against Him, against His purposes, against His Word, against His Son, against His people.

That is the worst possible position for any person to be in because the person who is an enemy of God is certain to be defeated.

Note that Paul clearly says that it is man who is at enmity with God, not the other way around.

But Paul has some wonderful things to say about how all of that has been changed for the Colossian Christians. That had all been changed, and **NOW THEY WERE AT PEACE WITH GOD!** See verse 20. What does this mean?

This means that now they were friends, FRIENDS OF GOD! No longer did they hate God; they loved Him. No longer did they try to avoid Him; they wanted to be with Him. No longer did they oppose Him; they sought to serve Him. They were no longer enemies, but friends--**FRIENDS OF GOD, AND FRIENDS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST** (because you cannot be a friend of God unless you are also a friend of our Lord Jesus Christ). What an illustration this is of the way in which Paul described a

child of God in 2 Cor. 5:17 where he said, " . . . old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

What Bible word describes this change when a man who has been an enemy of God suddenly becomes a friend of God? It is the word, reconciliation. To be reconciled is to be changed from one state to another. And Paul used a prefix on the normal verse, to reconcile, to indicate that this change had been made so completely and so finally that things could never again be like they once were!

It would be impossible for me to tell you anything more wonderful than that. If you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, God is your Friend; Jesus Christ is your Friend; the Holy Spirit is your Friend. I do not mean to lessen the glory of the Godhead in any way, but I want you to see how wonderful it is to be reconciled to God.

In my growing up years we used to sing a Gospel song with a chorus that went like this:

Friendship with Jesus, fellowship divine;
O what blessed, sweet communion!
Jesus is a Friend of mine!

In addition to what Paul wrote here about reconciliation, he only discussed this doctrine in two other chapters in his Epistles: Romans 5 and 2 Corinthians 5. He was speaking of reconciliation when he wrote in Rom. 5:1,

Therefore being justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that hopefully we understand what it means to be reconciled, let us notice the details of this wonderful truth as Paul wrote it to the Colossian church. The word does not appear in the Ephesian Epistle which we have just concluded. But it is a very important part of that greater word salvation which includes all that God has done for His people through Christ.

And so let me ask a series of questions. First:

I. WHO IS THE RECONCILER?

Did we reconcile ourselves to God? Did we take the initiative and make peace with Him? Who is the one who resolved this problem between God and us?

There are two Persons involved in bringing about the reconciliation of every sinner--and I do not mean God and you, or God and me. I mean God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read verse 19 with verses 20-22.

This is true about all of salvation. Man did not ask to be reconciled. Man did not change his own attitude toward God. It was God who took the initiative, and He accomplished this through Christ. If God had not done something about our alienation, we would still be God's enemies.

No person **EVER** turns to God of his own accord. If the Members of the Godhead had not done anything to remove our enmity, we would still be enemies.

A second question:

II. WHAT DID THIS RECONCILIATION REQUIRE?"

Paul made this very clear also. Read verse 20, and then the last part of verse 21 with the first part of verse 22.

You see, the reason for our enmity against God is that we are sinners. Sin has made us God's enemies. Sin has blinded our eyes to our need of God, to the goodness of God, to the love of God, to the righteousness of God. Sin has made us act like we are God. It has made us feel that we can take care of ourselves, and that we do not want God or anyone else telling us what we must do.

And so "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:4). He has "put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Heb. 9:26b). "Surely he hath borne our griefs . . . , yet we did esteem him . . . But he was wounded . . . All we like sheep . . ." (Isa. 53:4-6).

How deep and how terrible was our alienation from God, our enmity against God, for our reconciliation to require the awful death that our Lord Jesus Christ died! And we would still be enemies if He had not died.

And so I say that there were Two involved in our reconciliation: the Father and the Son. As the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:14,

And we have seen and do testify
that the Father sent the Son
to be the Saviour of the world.

We must beseech people to be reconciled to God, but it is only through Christ that such warfare in our souls against God will ever come to an end.

A third question:

III. HOW EXTENSIVE IS THIS RECONCILIATION?

When we first read this verse, we might think that the universalist is right after all--that all people will eventually be saved!

If this were all that we had in Scripture, then we might have trouble answering the universalist. But it is not all! We know from other Scriptures, many other Scriptures, that not everyone is going to be saved. Many will be in hell eternally!

No, Paul was not saying that everyone will eventually be saved. What He was saying is that the effect of the work of Christ on the Cross for His people will be felt throughout the whole universe! Sin has not only ruined man; sin has affected all of nature. The very presence of weeds in our lawns and gardens is a testimony of the corruption of nature. The enmity that exists among animals, and among men and animals, is a testimony of the effect of sin upon creation. Hurricanes with their devastating force and destructive effect are a testimony that nature is under the curse. And what about sickness and death?

And then just think for a moment about the course of life on the earth. Think of the crime, the drugs, the abortions, the broken homes, the drunkenness, the dishonesty, the wars--all of these things that are getting worse and worse, and which cause so much unhappiness through the world in every generation. This is not the world that God created, nor is it the world that God intended that it should be. The millennium is going to witness many of the reconciling works of the Lord when men beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, when the lion and the lamb will lie down together, and a child will play with snakes without getting hurt or killed.

And what about the Devil and his angels, and the rebellion that exists in the heavenlies. We know very little about that. But God is going to clean all of that up, too.

And the climax of it all will be the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwells righteousness. In ways in which we now are not able to understand, all of these works of reconciliation throughout the earth and the heavens will come about as a result of the triumphant work of our Lord on the Cross.

However, the main focus in the doctrine of reconciliation is

upon what all of this is going to mean for those of us who know the Lord as our Reconciler and Redeemer.

So now let me ask a fourth question:

IV. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE RECONCILIATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE?

We are about this in the latter part of verse 22: "to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight."

A major part of reconciliation is our ultimate glorification--when "in his sight," in the sight of our heavenly Father and in the sight of our dear Savior, we will be "holy and unblameable and unproveable."

Let us find out what those words mean so we can rejoice even more in the great and glorious future ahead of us.

A. "Holy."

Paul had called them "saints." And in 3:12 he addressed them as "holy and beloved." How is it that they would be holy, and yet they already were holy?

Well, the answer is quite simple, and yet it is so wonderful that it is hard for us to take it all in.

We are "holy" now in that our lives are being cleansed from sin, but when we are presented before God in Christ in heaven we will be absolutely sinless, and incapable of ever sinning again! What a day that will be!

But look at the second word.

B. "Unblameable."

This should be translated, without blemish.

It means that the effects of sin will be gone. The crippling, deforming effects of disease will be gone. No one will look old. Parts of our bodies that have been lost in accidents, in war, will be restored in a glorified form. There will be no hard of hearing people in heaven, no blind people. All will be perfect in appearance. We will be perfect in body and in soul.

The third word:

C. "Unreproveable."

This means that there will not be one accusation that can be brought against us. Our record will be clear in the court of heaven. Don't believe for a moment that you are going to have to answer for all of your sins when you stand before the Lord--or even part of them. The charges that had been there are gone!

But how can this be? This is not what we deserve. And even since we have been saved we have not lived for the Lord, or served Him, in such a way that we could have a hope like this!

That is true! We do not deserve it. Nor have we earned it. It all goes back to the Cross of Christ, and to the precious blood that was shed there. Our reconciliation, and all that it includes, is ours BY GRACE, AND BY GRACE ALONE! It does not show that we are wonderful people. It only shows that we have a wonderful Savior, and what He intends to do for and with every single one of us! This is our hope. This is what we have to look forward to. When we are completely "holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight," then we will have become like our blessed Lord.

But finally we come to:

V. A WORD OF WARNING (Col. 1:23).

Paul was not saying here that we will continue to be reconciled to God IF we "continue in the faith." No, that would make us responsible for our own salvation. What he was saying is that we can be assured that we are reconciled IF we "continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . ."

What did he mean, "grounded and settled"?

A true believer is not going to be perfect in this life, but with regard to "the faith," which here would be a synonym for the Gospel, there will be a continuing growth in his knowledge of the truth, which will give a "settled" character to his life: a stability. As a result he will not be moving back and forth, in and out, as far as the Gospel, and the hope of the Gospel, are concerned.

And this Gospel is the same Gospel that is preached everywhere. And so the evidence of salvation is the same in every place. Paul was warning here against a false

hope, a profession of faith without that evidence of faith which is manifested, not in a perfect life, but in a life growing in holiness and consistency of love for a life that is pleasing to God, where Christ is pre-eminent.

Paul was speaking here about the perseverance of the saints. How this truth needs to be proclaimed in our churches today! There seems to be little doubt but that countless numbers have been lulled to sleep by the fact that they have professed faith in Christ, or they are the member of some church, or they are busy doing good works, but you would look in vain to see any evidence of spiritual life. They are not interested in the Word. They do not grow. They continue on in their sins (although they try to be respectable). But Christ is not the delight of their souls. They are unchanged. They are not continuing because they have never started.

This was Paul's ministry, not only to proclaim the Gospel and reconciliation as a part of it, but to warn those whose lives do not manifest true faith in Christ.

Concl: Let me be perfectly clear that we are not saved by works. But I want to be equally clear that we cannot be saved without some real changes taking place in our lives. The Bible does not recognize a salvation that leaves people exactly as they were before. The people who go in and out of churches, who live like Christians for a while, and then change, or the people who go to church on Sunday but live like the rest of the world during the week, are the people who need to look closely into the Word to see what salvation really is, and then examine their hearts before God to make sure that they are in the faith.

But for those of us who have experienced the saving grace of Christ, what gratitude should be in our hearts for the the Lord has saved us from, and what He has saved us for. And then let us faithfully seek a greater understanding of the Word that we may live more and more as He would have us live. What joy it should bring to our hearts that God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, are our Friends! Amazing grace!

PAUL, THE MINISTER -- HOW AND WHY?

Colossians 1:23-29

Part 1

Intro: This Sunday and next, and possibly on the Sunday after that, we are going to be considering the Apostle Paul as "a minister."

He used this title of himself twice in this latter part of chapter 1: once in verse 23; the second time in verse 25.

He also used it in chapter 1, verse 7, with reference to Epaphras. And then he used it in chapter 4, verse 7, in speaking of Tychicus. And of Archippus in 4:17

So--Paul was a minister; Epaphras was a minister; Tychicus was a minister. What, or who, is a minister?

This is the word that is translated deacons in Philippians 1:1 where Paul addressed that Epistle, "to all the saints ... with the bishops and deacons." In fact, our word deacon is really a transliteration of the Greek word into the English: διάκονος. So, sometimes this word is used to indicate that one is a deacon in the church.

But that interpretation does not seem to fit here.

We have no evidence that Paul ever held such a position, and it would seem that Epaphras and Tychicus ^{and Archippus} were more like pastors than deacons. So I am going to set aside that interpretation of how Paul was using that word in this Epistle to the Colossians.

Let us go to the basic idea in the word διάκονος.

The main idea in the word is that of service, one who carries out the commands of his master. This is not the same as a bondservant (although Paul also considered himself a bondservant of God). The word "minister" does not really tell us anything about the nature of the relationship that the servant has with his master, but that he is one who is busily carrying out the will of his master. This is his responsibility, and a true "minister" does it. Paul was highly commending both Epaphras and Tychicus when he called Epaphras "a faithful minister of Christ," and Tychicus "a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord." These were men whose lives were devoted to serving the Lord Jesus Christ. AND THE SAME WAS TRUE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL.

This is what every deacon should be, but it clearly is not limited to the deacons. In this sense this same word could be used of elders.

But we are thinking about Paul as a minister. How did he become a minister? Did he assume this position just because of his great love for the Lord, and because he wanted to serve the Lord. No! Both of those things were true of Paul, but there was more to becoming "a minister" than that!

Twice Paul said in this text, "I ... am made a minister." See verse 23b and verse 25a.

We could translate this merely that he became a minister, but this does not tell the whole story. What Paul was saying in these verses is that he was appointed to be a minister. He had a divine commission. This was not a responsibility that he had take on himself. The Lord had called him, had appointed him, to do the work of a minister!

This is what Paul had in mind when a few years later he wrote to Timothy and said this:

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord,
who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful,
putting me into the ministry (1 Tim. 1:12).

So, while Paul loved being a minister, he did not appoint himself to that position; he was put into the ministry by his Lord.

And this brings me to the question, WHY?

The general, overall answer to that question is that he was put into the ministry to do the will of the Lord. Whatever the Lord had for him to do, that was what Paul was called and appointed to do.

But Paul was more specific in this passage than just to generalize about the will of God for himself. He has recorded for us here FOUR SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES that he had as a minister of the Lord. I am not going to point them out for you ahead of time, but I want you to find those for yourself which I do not mention in my message this morning. I will probably tell you the first two.

The first is mentioned in verse 23.

In concluding my message two weeks ago I just had time to mention very briefly what Paul was talking about in this verse. I mentioned that the "if you continue in the faith" was not the condition upon which they could keep their salvation, but it was the evidence that they had been truly saved.

This is what some of the old timers called, the perseverance of the saints. And let me explain it again. We do not persevere in order to be saved, but if we are genuinely

saved, WE WILL PERSEVERE! The person who has claimed to be a Christian, and then turns away and like those disciples in John 6, walks no more with Him, has not lost his salvation; HE NEVER HAD IT TO BEGIN WITH! Once you are saved, you cannot become UNSaved again. Salvation is forever. Salvation is a work of God. When you are born again, you cannot be unborn? So Paul was not promising that every professing Christian that he would be presented "holy and unblameable and unproveable" in God's sight; that promise was made only to those who showed the reality of their faith by their continuance "in the faith."

I hope this is clear to everyone here, and to everyone who will hear this message in the coming days. "The hope of the gospel," which Paul mentioned in this verse, is only for those who REALLY know the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.

This leads me to the first point in Paul's ministerial commission:

I. HE WAS COMMISSIONED TO PREACH THE GOSPEL (Col. 1:23).

Acts 9:15 gives us the words which our Lord spoke to Paul when as Saul of Tarsus he was struck down on the road to Damascus. This was the time when Paul was saved, and this is what the Lord said:

... he is a chosen vessel unto me,
to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings,
and the children of Israel.

And when Paul was telling King Agrippa later about his call from the Lord, he said that it was, concerning the Gentiles,

To open their eyes,
and to turn them from darkness to light,
and from the power of Satan unto God,
that they may receive forgiveness of sins,
and inheritance among them which are sanctified
by faith that is in me (Acts 26:18).

The only way that Paul could do that was by preaching the Gospel of the grace of God!

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church he told them how deeply this conviction was embedded in his soul. Listen to his words:

For though I preach the gospel,
I have nothing to glory of:
for necessity is laid upon me; yea woe is unto me,
if I preach not the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16).

And by the way, just as you can tell if a person is really saved by whether or not he perseveres in the faith, so you can tell if a man has really been called to

preach the Gospel by whether or not he continues to preach the Gospel, and only the Gospel.

But what did Paul mean when he said in verse 23, "which was preached to every creature which is under heaven"?

This is similar to Paul's statement in 1:6.

Some commentators call this a hyperbole--an exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. I do not believe that the Apostle Paul engaged in such teaching. What he was emphasizing was the fact that the Gospel was not a local heresy, as some opponents of the Gospel were saying, but that wherever people were, whether Jew or Gentile, the Gospel had been preached to them as the only way of salvation.

Paul used an aorist participle here, and sometimes the aorist is used to speak of something in the future that is so certain that it can be spoken of as an accomplished fact. But the previous explanation is more likely.

What we need to see is the faithfulness of Paul and his fellow-workers in proclaiming the Gospel as a part of their commission from the Lord.

But there is a second part of Paul's commission that I want to mention this morning:

II. HE WAS COMMISSIONED TO SUFFER (Col. 1:24, 25a).

Again let me take you to the words spoken by the Lord about the Apostle Paul (when he was Saul of Tarsus) on the road to Damascus. The Lord said this as a part of what Ananias was to tell him:

For I will shew him how great thing he must suffer for my name's sake (Acts 9:16).

Do you remember the words which the Apostle Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders, recorded for us in Acts 20:24, when he had just referred to the way in which people had been warning him not to go to Jerusalem because there "bonds and afflictions" were waiting for him. And he said that he knew the Holy Spirit was leading them to say that. But what was his response? Listen to what he said:

But none of these things move me,
neither count I my life dear unto myself,
so that I might finish my course with joy,
and the ministry,
which I have received of the Lord Jesus,
to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

Wherever the Gospel is preached, there is going to be suffering. The suffering may vary in degrees, but it will be suffering nevertheless. In fact, most of the suffering that the people of God experience according to the Scriptures is suffering because of the Gospel.

That is why Moses suffered. That is why Elijah suffered. That is why Jeremiah suffered. That is why Daniel suffered. That is why John the Baptist suffered. That is why James suffered. That is why Stephen suffered. That is why Peter suffered. That is why Paul suffered. In fact, most of the suffering that is mentioned in the Bible was because of the Gospel. THAT IS WHY OUR LORD SUFFERED!

But Paul spoke here of suffering in a special sense: filling up "that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." What did he mean by this?

Some take it to mean that the Lord did not actually complete the sacrificial work of redemption, and that it is now being completed by the sufferings of His people. This is one Scripture that those who believe in the necessity for indulgences have turned to for support of their doctrine.

But this is completely contrary to Scripture. The Apostle Paul taught the sufficiency of the work of Christ when he wrote to the Corinthians church,

For he (God) hath made him (Christ)
to be sin for us, who knew no sin,
that we might be made
the righteousness of God in him (Christ)
(2 Cor. 5:21).

And the Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Pet. 3:18,
For Christ hath once (for all)
suffered for sins, the just for the unjust,
that he might bring us to God,
being put to death in the flesh,
but quickened by the Spirit.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in Heb. 10:14,
For by one offering he hath perfected for ever
them that are sanctified.

So Paul was not teaching that anyone needs to add to what Christ has done. What then did he mean?

Paul was a sufferer, suffering in his flesh for the sake of the Colossian church. But in reality they were "the afflictions of Christ," the sufferings which belonged to Christ. If it had not been for his relationship to

Christ as His servant, His minister, Paul would not have suffered as he did. If Paul had not been fulfilling his position as "a minister" of Christ to the Colossians (as well as to believers in other places), he would not have been suffering.

So if his sufferings led to the glory of Christ, and to the blessing of the Colossians, Paul could rejoice, and he did rejoice!

But there is another wonderful truth here, and it is this: They were Christ's sufferings. Therefore, Paul knew that the Lord entered with him into His sufferings, and this brought great consolation to Paul's heart.

Let me give you some Scriptures to illustrate what I believe Paul was saying.

- 1) 2 Cor. 1:5,
For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us,
so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.
- 2) Acts 9:4 where the Lord said to Saul of Tarsus,
Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?
- 3) Isa. 63:9,
In all their affliction he was afflicted . . .
- 4) When the Lord in the last part of the Olivet Discourse spoke of being hungry and thirsty, and a stranger, and naked, and sick, and in prison, and they did not help Him, those on His left hand, "When did we see thee hungry, etc.?" And He said,
Verily I say unto you,
Inasmuch as ye did it not
unto one of the least of these,
ye did it not unto me (Matt. 25:45).
- 5) Even it is said of Moses in Heb. 11:26 that he
... esteemed the reproach of Christ
greater riches than the treasures of Egypt:
for he had respect
unto the recompense of the reward.

Do we look upon our afflictions for the sake of the Gospel as helping to complete that affliction which belongs to Christ, in anticipation of the day when those trials will be forever over?

If it brought glory to God and to His Savior, and blessing to the Lord's people, Paul could rejoice that he was, as it is said of the Apostles when they were beaten and commanded not to speak any more in the Lord's Name.

Acts 5:41 tells us that
... they departed ... rejoicing that
they were counted worthy to suffer shame
for his name (i.e., the name of Jesus).

Paul did not take his sufferings as a surprise; he expected sufferings. He knew that this was a part of his calling as a minister of Jesus Christ. He knew that if the world hated his Lord, he could expect nothing better for himself. And so he rejoiced in it, not because he enjoyed suffering, but because he knew that the purposes of God were being accomplished, and God was being glorified--and that only eternity would reveal all of the tremendous things that were accomplished through the trials and afflictions of the people of God.

And did you notice the emphasis upon particular redemption. The Lord's sufferings are "for his body's sake, which is the church."

Concl: This is as far as I can go today with this subject. But there is plenty here for us to consider.

Our calling is not in every respect like the Apostle Paul's, but in these two points that we have covered it is. We have a commission to spread the Gospel message. And if we do, we are sure to have troubles that we do not have now.

But is this not the very reason that we do not do more witnessing than we do--because we are trying to stay out of trouble? And, as a result, people are not hearing the Gospel, and so we are not seeing people saved. Many we try to talk to will let us know that we do not want to hear what we have to say, and they may avoid us afterwards, or even try to make things difficult for us. But along with all of the disappointments, God has promised to bless His Word. And here and there we are going to see the Lord using us to bring people to the Savior.

If we view our work as that of ministers, with the obligation we have to our Lord, more will be done toward reaching the lost, greater will be our blessing, greater will be the blessing of the church, and greater will be the glory which the Lord will take to Himself.

PAUL, THE MINISTER

Part 2

Colossians 1:21-29

Intro: In the latter part of chapter 1 Paul wrote about his appointment as a minister. His appointment had come from God, and it meant that he was to be occupied with four specific responsibilities.

Last Sunday we looked at two of them:

- 1) His commission to preach the Gospel. That is in verse 23.
- 2) His commission to suffer on behalf of the Church. That is in verse 24.

We could really call this a fourfold commission because there are two others that Paul mentioned in the remaining verses of chapter 1.

As I have mentioned on other occasions, it is important for all of us to understand Paul's view of the ministry so that we will know what the ministry is even for us today. None of us is an apostle, but apart from the special works that only the Apostles did, the ministry has remained the same down through the history of the Church. For the ministry to change, there would have to be a change in the Word of God. But we know that that has not happened. The Word of God has remained the same for the past 2,000 years. We may have some new translations, but the message of the Bible remains the same. And the work of the Lord remains the same. If we had kept this in mind, we probably would have seen greater blessing than we have. But many ministers in every generation are always trying to add to what we have in the Scriptures to make the Lord's work either more attractive, or more effective, or both.

From what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians, as well as what he wrote in his other Epistles, we can see that he was not the one who determined what the work of the ministry would be. GOD DID THAT! AND WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO CHANGE IT. Therefore, a passage like the one that has been read to us is a passage of immense importance if we are to serve the Lord the way He has planned that we should serve Him, and, what is equally important, if we are to see the blessing of God as we seek to do His will and to do the work that He has given us to do.

Now what are the first two parts of the Apostle's commission?

- 1) The call to preach the Gospel--in verse 23.
- 2) The call to suffer--in verse 24.

What is the next one? You will find it in verses 25 through 27. This is a special apostolic commission, but it is

important for us today, too. It is:

- I. HE WAS COMMISSIONED TO COMPLETE THE WORD OF GOD (Col. 1:25-27).

(Read.)

Paul's commission is given in the latter part of verse 25: "to fulfil the word of God."

While one excellent commentator (Lightfoot, p. 233) suggested that this means the complete preaching of the Gospel, yet he does suggest the translation, "'to give its complete development to'" the Gospel.

Translating it very simply Paul said that it was given to him to finish, to complete, the Word of God.

This obviously does not mean that he was called to write the last Book of the Bible. The Apostle John did that, not Paul. He probably was speaking of the Gospel in its most extensive meaning, that is, of justification and sanctification and glorification. The Gospel includes all three. We have seen in verses 5 and 23 that he has mentioned our "hope." And what do those three words in verse 22 but our glorification? "Holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight."

So it was given to Paul, as a part of his commission, to finish the revelation of the Gospel. There is only one Gospel. The Gospel of the OT is the same as the Gospel of the NT. But the whole revelation was not made until after Christ died, and it was the Apostle Paul who was God's chosen instrument through whom that completed revelation was given.

Now this does not mean that we should set aside everything except the Epistles of Paul. God also used the other writers to give further details about the completed message, but what Paul wanted the Colossians to know was that since our Lord came, and since the revelation had been completed, nothing more can be added to the Word of God--nor does anything need to be added!

When we get to chapter 2 we are going to see why Paul made this point as strongly as he did. And I will tell you here that it was because false teachers had come in who were either going back and trying to revive the Mosaic Law, or they were inventing new things to add to the Word of God.

Paul wants us to know that the revelation of the Gospel

has been progressive. It was not all revealed to one person at one time. Nothing was held back that was necessary for the salvation of a single sinner, but the revelation of the whole story of salvation had to await the coming of Christ and the completion of His redemptive work on earth.

At this point I want you to look at that word "mystery" in verse 26. And we have it again in verse 27. It is also used two other times in Colossians: in 2:2, and in 4:3.

What is a NT "mystery"?

It is actually a secret, a secret which God did not make known in OT times, nor even during the ministry of our Lord on earth. It was, or they were, revealed afterwards. And when they were revealed, God's revelation regarding all that He intended to tell us about salvation WAS FINISHED! He had no more to say about the Gospel, no more to say about how saved people are to live now, and how they will eventually be made like the Lord Jesus Christ. The revelation is finished!

I could go into the background of the word "mystery," but we will save that for another time. What we need to know is that we now have IN CHRIST, and IN THE WORD OF GOD, as Peter has written, "all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3b).

And so with the writings of Paul and Peter and James and Jude and John the revelation was FINISHED!

I cannot emphasize this too strongly. You and I who know the Lord NEVER need to go beyond the Scriptures to find the answers to our spiritual needs. Are you having trouble with certain sins? Go to the Bible for your answer. Are you having marriage problems? Go to the Bible for your answer. Are you having troubles with your children? Your answers are in the Bible. Do you want to know how to pray? The answer is in the Bible. Are you weak so that you give in to temptation very easily and quickly? Look into your Bible for your answers.

And all of those who would take secular psychology and try to add it to the Scriptures should read Col. 2:8-10.

But now I want you to look at the words, "the dispensation of God," which you will find in verse 25. What was Paul talking about there?

The word means a stewardship, a stewardship to which Paul had been appointed. It is much the same as a ministry. It means that Paul had made God responsible to preach and to record "the mystery," and that God would hold him accountable as to whether or not he was faithful to his stewardship.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, written earlier, he had said this:

Let a man so account of us,
as of the ministers of Christ,
and stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1).
And then he went on to say in verse 2 of that chapter,
Moreover it is required in stewards,
that a man be found faithful.

That says it all as far as the ministry is concerned.
Ministers do not work out their own plans; they have a
divinely appointed message to perform in God's appointed
way.

How does this apply to us?

Our preaching and teaching and living is to be within the
limits of the Word of God--NOTHING MORE, NOTHING LESS,
NOTHING ELSE! In both the Old and New Testaments we are warned about adding to, or taking from, or substituting something else. The false prophets in Jeremiah's day were preaching words that God had not given to them--and they fell under God's judgment because they did.

In many places today church services are cluttered with a lot of things that have no foundation in Scripture. It is time that we got back to Scripture to see what the New Testament mystery is, and then do it! Adding all that we have makes us just as guilty as the false prophets of the Old Testament, and the people who often stoned the true prophets.

Oh, that God would keep us faithful to the Word. It may be slower that way, but that is where the blessing ultimately will be!

But we still have not found out in particular what "mystery" Paul had in mind as he wrote to the Colossians at this point. What was it?

He stated it in verse 27. It is this: "Christ in you, the hope of glory"! Is it any wonder that he introduced it with the word, "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles ..."? Can you think of anything more glorious,

anything that would go beyond what we could ever deserve, or even expect? And that applies especially to the Gentiles in this passage. Would the Lord Jesus Christ condescend to dwell in us? Yes, He would! And He does!

This brings me to my final point, and the last part of Paul's commission as a minister and as a steward. It is this:

II. HE WAS COMMISSIONED TO "PRESENT EVERY MAN PERFECT IN CHRIST JESUS" (Col. 1:28, 29).

When he said, "every man," he meant every man who believes in Christ, and every woman, and every child. There are all kinds of people among the children of God, with different gifts, different limitations, different problems, different besetting sins. But we all have one destiny! What is it? We are all being made like our Lord Jesus Christ.

But any minister with any understanding of the task would cry out as Paul did, "And who is sufficient for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16b). Just think of it: a minister who is unable to perfect himself is made responsible for the perfection of all of the people who are under his care.

In two ways:

- 1) By preaching and warning and teaching "every man in all wisdom" about the indwelling presence of Christ.
- 2) By laboring in the power of that very same Christ who both indwells and empowers those whom he has appointed as His ministers.

Notice Paul's words.

"Whereunto I also labour." It means to work until you are weary and exhausted. "Striving according to his working ..." -- We get our word agonizing from the verb "striving" which Paul used here. He spoke of his agony again in verse 1 of chapter 2: the word "conflict." And what was his "conflict"? It was a "conflict," a struggle, agony in prayer.

So this leads me to believe that:

- 1) In verse 28 Paul was speaking of his public ministry to people, whether to a crowd, or to an individual--his tireless preaching and teaching and warning.
- 2) In verse 29 he was speaking of the battle he fought in prayer, on his knees, God working mightily in him and through him, as he pled with God for the spiritual growth and perfection of God's people.

You see, the Lord Jesus Christ not only helps and empowers us in the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, but, what is equally important, He brings us to our knees in our helplessness and distress, agonizing for the people of God, striving against the Enemy, until we are prepared to recognize that blessing can only come from the Lord Jesus Christ, and that all of the glory for every blessing in the life of any child of God, belongs to the Lord alone.

Concl: How wonderful it would be if we could only enter into what the Apostle Paul has written here! How different this is from the present-day idea of the ministry! The ministry today tries to be cute and entertaining and innovative. Paul sought to be godly, pouring out his heart to preach Christ, pleading with God in prayer that God would bless him with fruit.

Paul's way was, and is, God's way. It may be slower, but it is surer. Whatever God does, He does forever. And when he wrote this Epistle, he wrote also to the church at Philippi telling them that he was

... confident of this very thing,
that he which hath begun a good work in you
will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ
(Phil. 1:6).

What we want to see is God at work. It is then that lives are changed, and that they continue to change. He works through His Word. He works in answer to prayer. He works when Christ is preached, when Christ is exalted, and when we are depending upon Christ to use us as He sees fit for the fulfillment of His purposes and for the glory of His Name.

May each of us accept the place of ministry that the Lord has given us,

- 1) To proclaim the Gospel.
- 2) To suffer for His people and with them.
- 3) To make sure that we are abiding by the Word—nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.
- 4) To labor in the Word and prayer to present every man "perfect in Christ Jesus."

Paul used the word "present" twice in this passage: once in verse 22; then in verse 28. In verse 22 it is the Lord who will present us to the Father; in verse 28 we have the joy of presenting the saints to God, lit. standing by their side, exhibiting them to the Father as trophies of his wonderful grace. If the Lord gives us that privilege, sometimes by preaching, sometimes by praying, sometimes by preaching and by praying, then our joy will be full. Cf. what Paul said to the Thessalonians in 1 Thess. 2:19, 20.

A GREAT CONFLICT
Colossians 2:1-5

Intro: In chapter 1 Paul, after giving his usual greeting, told the Colossians not only that he was praying for them, but what the requests were that he was presenting continually before the Lord on their behalf. Primarily the requests were concerned with two things, and either one without the other would have been impossible.

The first was for their spiritual growth.

The other had to do with the pre-eminence of Christ.

There is no such thing as spiritual growth unless Christ is pre-eminent in our lives, but often Christians are guilty of seeking to grow spiritually without considering the place that the Lord has in their lives. Paul brought these two great needs together in a very wonderful way.

Having done all of this, he proceeded to explain to them the nature of his ministry. We have seen that this was fourfold:

- 1) He was commissioned to preach the Gospel.
- 2) He was commissioned to suffer.
- 3) He had the unique privilege of completing the Word.
- 4) His was a ministry of seeking to "present" every child of under his ministry as "perfect in Christ Jesus."

This latter point could only be accomplished by preaching, warning, and teaching, on the one hand, and by prayer on the other. And Paul's praying was not just repeating prayers in a perfunctory manner, but it was a struggle, a battle against the forces of evil, a work which could only be accomplished through the mighty power of the Lord Jesus Christ working in him, and through him.

From what Paul wrote in Colossians chapter 1 we can see to him the ministry of the Church in every age involves the glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ through the faithful teaching of the Word, preceded and followed up by prayer. How important it is for all of us to keep these points in mind!

Today we move on to chapter 2. But remember that in the original letter there were no chapters nor verses, and so we are simply continuing with what Paul had to say about the ministry. We do need to keep in mind, however, that he was guided by what he had to say by the special needs of the Colossian church. And yet we know that the Epistles of the NT are really timeless because the problems of the early churches are to be found also in the churches of the twentieth century, and every century in between the first and the twentieth.

If there is one word which Paul has already used which seems to be descriptive of what we have throughout chapter 2, it is the word, "warning." Cf. 1:28. This is a chapter in which Paul was warning the Colossian church of dangers which they were facing, or would face. It is not necessary that we identify in particular what each problem was. I will attempt to do that where I can. But the important thing is that we realize that we are confronted with the same problems today, although the form that they take with us may be different.

Let me explain what I mean.

In verse 8 Paul mentioned "philosophy," and then used some other terms to elaborate on what he meant. "Philosophy" stands here for some form of wisdom, human wisdom--a way of life that was in conflict with Paul's teaching. The particular kind of "philosophy" that it was, was probably not the same kind of humanistic reasoning that we have today. But we have humanistic reasoning today to which we are all continually exposed, and we need to "beware" of it just as much as the Colossians did the prevailing "philosophy" of their day.

Colossians 2 teaches us that the our spiritual growth is not just a matter of being taught the right things, but we need to be warned about the counterfeit substitutes which are always present in the world.

So, with all of this in mind, let us look at the first five verses of chapter 2.

First of all we have:

I. PAUL'S GREAT CONFLICT (Col. 2:1-3).

We saw last week in the last verse of chapter 1 that Paul spoke of a conflict which he had, which is indicated by the word, "striving." This word is used six times in the NT. One other time it is translated "conflict," as here. Cf. Phil. 1:30. Once, as "contention." Cf. 1 Thess.2:2. Twice, as "fight." Cf. 1 Tim. 6:12. And once as a "race." Cf. Heb. 12:1.

The verb form of this word is used in Col. 4:12 where it is translated "labouring fervently." We could translate it, agonizing. This does not describe any moaning that Paul did in prayer, but that Epaphras was struggling, contending, fighting, as Thayer (p. 10) has written, against

... 'all hindrances ... to attain the goal of perfection set before the followers of Christ';
any struggle with dangers, annoyances, obstacles,

standing in the way of faith, holiness, and a desire to spread the gospel.

And one of the ways in which we fight, enter into the conflict, opposing the world, the flesh, and the Devil, is BY PRAYER!

And Paul called it a "great conflict" because of its tremendous importance, but also because of the many obstacles that stood in the way. It always took its toll upon him physically. And then, while he was a prisoner of Rome, he probably was never alone; there would have always been someone listening to him. Paul was not speaking here, as Bishop Moule suggested, of the content of his prayers (which I tried to expound in chapter 1), but of the manner of his prayers. And it was not just the outward struggle that the Apostle Paul would endure, but the struggle that was going on within his own soul.

Let me ask you some questions: How many people could you write to, and say what Paul has said here? How many do you pray for as a wrestler in the Olympic games, or as a runner in the races--people whom you have seen? And what about people you have never seen?

Paul was letting the Colossian believers, and those at Laodicea, take a glimpse into his soul. We can take from these words that there was nothing of any greater importance in Paul's life than his prayers for the people of God.

But what, in this instance, did he say that he was praying for?

Three things:

- 1) "That" their "hearts might be comforted." Let me simply say here that Paul was a great encourager. And he knew how much every child of God needs encouragement in his life as a Christian. So this was one of his great burdens.

- 2) How was this comfort, or encouragement, to come to them? "Being knit together in love."

This really means that Paul was praying that they would be united in love. The NT especially has so much to say about the way you and I as the people of God should love each other. Cf. John 13:34, 35.

Now keep this in mind. So far we have had two things which Paul has been praying about: encouragement and love.

- 3) "Unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ."

This seems to be the goal toward which his prayer has been directed.

Paul wanted them to not only to understand the truth about "the mystery of God," but he wanted them to be so fully persuaded that it was the truth that no person, nor any other doctrine, nor any circumstance, could ever turn them aside from the truth.

What truth?

The truth that the complete revelation of all that God is has been fully revealed for us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in no one else! We need no more than we have in Him because, as he said about our Lord in verse 3, in HIM

... are hid all the treasures
of wisdom and knowledge.

All that God intends for us to know about Himself--His nature, His ways, and His will--are to be found in Christ, and in no other person, no other place.

This is where our comfort, our encouragement, comes from, that we will attain to the hope of the Gospel. This is where our unity comes from, not at the sacrifice of the truth, but with the closest adherence to the truth of God as it is in Christ Jesus, our Lord!

As chapter 2 will show us, we need to beware of any teacher, or any teaching, which either

- ignores Christ, or
- detracts from Christ, or
- adds to Christ.

As some MSS render the latter part of verse 2, "to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, even Christ." God has nothing for us by way of truth, nor as a revelation of Himself and all that has to do with Him, except in Christ.

But let us go on to verse 4 where we have:

II. PAUL'S PURPOSE (Col. 2:4).

As we will see in verse 5, Paul was encouraged that things were going so well in Colossae, but that is exactly when we need to be on our guard. When the blessing of the Lord is apparent, so will be the work of the enemy. And this is Paul's concern in chapter 2.

Notice those two words, "beguile" and "enticing." What

do they mean?

To "beguile" is to deceive by false reasoning (Robertson, IV, 488). And such teachers will use "enticing words." That is, they use carefully selected words in reasoning without the Scriptures for the purpose of deceiving those whom they teach.

Now the only way that any person can be discerning when it comes to false doctrine is by knowing true doctrine. And anyone who does not know the truth can easily become a prey to those who teach error. This is why Paul was praying so earnestly and so continuously for the saints at Colossae. The best defense against error is the truth.

And this is why it is so foolish for some well-meaning Christians to underestimate the value of doctrinal preaching and teaching. Such ignorance of the truth leaves the people of God without any defense before the false teacher.

When the Apostle John wrote his First Epistle he said this in chapter 4, verse 1:

Beloved, believe not every spirit,
but try the spirits whether they are of God:
**because many false prophets are gone out
into the world.**

It was true then, and it is true today. In fact, it may be that the threat from false teaching today is greater than ever before. The trouble is that many of the Lord's people do not know the truth well enough to recognize error when they hear it.

Paul wrote to Timothy, charging him to "preach the Word." And he gave this as his reason:

For the time will come
when they will not endure sound doctrine:
but after their own lusts
shall they heap to themselves teachers,
having itching ears.

And they shall turn away their ears from the truth,
and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:3, 4).

We are in days like this. People will turn out by the thousands to hear a writer of so-called Christian fiction who writes about demons and spiritual warfare, but who readily admits that he is not "an expert in spiritual warfare," just "a broker of ideas." And yet they come by the tens and twenties to hear the Word of God taught. And it makes very little difference to many people if a writer or speaker goes beyond the Scriptures. In fact, that is usually the thing that makes a teacher today

popular. If Paul prayed as he did in his day, what would be his exhortation to us today regarding the need to combat error by prayer?

One more point:

III. PAUL'S ENCOURAGEMENT (Col. 2:5).

Verses 3 through 8 of chapter 1 show that he was encouraged about the church in Colossae. Things were going well. And here in 2:5 he commended them for their "order" and "the stedfastness of" their "faith in Christ."

The use of these two words, "order" and "stedfastness," is an indication of the unusually good and healthy spiritual life of the people and the church.

In Paul's second letter to the Thessalonian church he rebuked some because they were walking in a "disorderly" fashion. In writing to the Corinthians about their meetings, he exhorted them to "let all things be done decently and in order." And so Paul's joy over the order of the Colossians probably meant that he was commending them for the way they were living, and for the way they were conducting the work of the Lord in their church fellowship. This gave him great joy.

But he also commended them for "the stedfastness of" their "faith in Christ." This is the only time this word for "stedfastness" was used in the NT. Thayer says that some take this as meaning the "solid front" in a military sense that the church had taken for their faith in Christ. In fact, both "order" and "stedfastness" have a military character to them. "Order," in a military sense, would refer to the discipline an army has undergone, so that it is in a total state of readiness for action at any time.

Paul rejoiced in this. Even though he had never been with them, he took the information he had heard about them, and rejoiced in it just as though he were actually present with them—which he was, "in spirit."

Concl: The lesson is obvious. Here was a church, a good church, a spiritually strong church, a church where the Lord was loved and served faithfully, unswervingly. But conflict was inevitable. The Enemy was certain to attack. He would not leave a work like this alone. And he would do it by sending his emissaries, people who also appeared to be standing for the truth, who would in a subtle way begin to add in little ways to what the Word teaches about God and

Christ and the Gospel, or so graciously deny some parts of the truth. And little by little they would influence more and more people until the unity would be destroyed, there would be no more encouragement, and less and less would be said about Christ and His Word, more and more about the way that the teachers were encouraging the people to go.

God has blessed us with a wonderful fellowship. We love to hear His Word taught. We do not want anything else. But this all, over a period of time, could change. We could be talking less about Christ, and thinking less about Him, turning to things that seem to be more appropriate than the Word of God. And then we would be in deep trouble.

The place to preserve all that we have is, first of all, in our individual relationships with the Lord. Read the Word every day, meditate on what you read, obey what the Lord tells you to do, and pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes more and more to the truth of the Word and to the glorious Person of Christ. And then as we come together, let us continue to expect the Word of God. Let us rejoice whenever Christ is exalted. And let us pray for greater and greater blessing upon the ministry of the Word, that others may be saved, and that many who are saved will join with us in worshipping the Lord and in serving Him for His glory.