

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle
to the
Colossians

I. The Introduction (Col. 1:1-14).

- A. Salutation (1:1-2).
- B. Thanksgiving (1:3-8).
- C. Intercession (1:9-14).

II. The Apostle's Message – The Glory of Christ (Col. 1:15-23).

III. The Apostle's Mission (Col. 1:24-2:23).

- A. His deep concern and his objectives (1:24-2:5).
- B. His first exhortation (2:6-7).
- C. His warnings and his rebukes (2:8-23).

IV. The Apostle's Application of the Truth (Col. 3:1-4:6).

- A. For heavenly mindedness (3:1-4).
- B. To mortify sin (3:5-11).
- C. To cultivate holiness (3:12-17).
- D. For special groups (3:18-4:1).
 - 1. Wives and husbands (3:18-19).
 - 2. Children and fathers (3:20-21).
 - 3. Servants and masters (3:22-4:1).
- E. Concluding exhortations (4:2-6).

V. The Conclusion (Col. 4:7-18).

- A. Tychicus and Onesimus, the letter carriers (4:7-9).
- B. Salutations (4:10-15).
- C. Paul's parting words (4:16-18).

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October 2, 2000 – Colossians 1:1-14

Intro: Colosse is nothing but ruins today. Even in Paul's day it was in decline, as Bishop Moule has said in his commentary, it was somewhere between a town and a village. It was located about one hundred miles east of Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia. It previously had been a flourishing city. It was located within walking distance of two cities in Col. 4:13, Laodicea and Hierapolis. All three were located in the Lycus River Valley. Of the three Colosse was the least in importance. Five centuries before Christ, Colosse was a thriving city of considerable importance, but shortly after the third century the inhabitants had moved about three miles south to Chonos.

But this is where Philemon lived along with Apphia and Archippus (whom we will meet when we study the little epistle to Philemon. Here Onesimus lived, as well as Epaphras. We do not know how the church at Colosse was established, but many feel that it was the work of Epaphras who may have been saved under the ministry of the Apostle Paul when he was in Ephesus. Epaphras is mentioned in Col. 1:7 and 4:12. He must have been the pastor of the church in Colosse.

But Colosse in Paul's day, in addition to being in decline, was not a place where people were particularly interested in learning. In fact, it seems that the atmosphere because of its decline generally was one of melancholy and discouragement. And so when we put all of these pieces together, it is quite amazing that this epistle written to that church would have a place in the Word of God. But that is exactly what the Holy Spirit intended it to have. And so it was not the importance of Colosse that accounts for this epistle being in the Bible, but the nature of the trouble that they were facing and its effect upon the truth regarding the Person and Work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

As we all should know by this time, Paul's epistle to the Colossians is one of the epistles that Paul wrote during his first imprisonment in Rome. The other three were his epistles to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, and to Philemon. It is generally thought that Philippians was written first, in the early 60's A.D., and that Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were written a year or two afterwards. Philippians, Ephesians, and Colossians were written to churches. In addition we should note that Ephesians may have been intended as a circular letter, going to the church at Ephesus first, and then circulating possibly among the churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3. Philemon is the name of a man who lived in Colosse, and who must have been a member of the church at Colosse.

Even a child reading Ephesians and Colossians can tell that they are very similar, more alike than any other two books in the whole Bible. Ephesians has 155 verses; Colossians has 95 verses. One writer who is quoted by Dr. Griffith Thomas, examined these two epistles, and he came up with the figures that out of the 155 verses in Ephesians, 78 are like those in Colossians. And out of the 95 verses in Colossians, 78 are similar to those in Ephesians.

But there is a difference between the two epistles which is fundamental. Both deal with Christ and the Church, the body of Christ. Ephesians deals with the Church as the body of Christ; Colossians deals with Christ as the Head of the body, the Church. And so both deal with Christ. If there is a difference we could say that while both deal with Christ and His work of salvation, there seems to be a greater emphasis in Colossians on the Person of Christ, while in Ephesians the emphasis is upon His work. But let me emphasize that both deal with Christ, and both deal with His work of salvation.

Now let us come to *the message of the book of Colossians* which we will be considering together in the weeks

to come.

This will be the outline that we will follow:

- I. The Introduction (Col. 1:1-14).
 - A. Salutation (1:1-2).
 - B. Thanksgiving (1:3-8).
 - C. Intercession (1:9-14).
- II. The Apostle's Message – The Glory of Christ (Col. 1:15-23).
- III. The Apostle's Mission (Col. 1:24-2:23).
 - A. His deep concern and his objectives (1:24-2:5).
 - B. His first exhortation (2:6-7).
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- IV. The Apostle's Application of the Truth (Col. 3:1-4:6).
 - A. For heavenly mindedness (3:1-4).
 - B. To mortify sin (3:5-11).
 - C. To cultivate holiness (3:12-17).
 - D. For special groups (3:18-4:1).
 - 1. Wives and husbands (3:18-19).
 - 2. Children and fathers (3:20-21).
 - 3. Servants and masters (3:22-4:1).
 - E. Concluding exhortations (4:2-6).
- V. The Conclusion (Col. 4:7-18).
 - A. Tychicus and Onesimus, the letter carriers (4:7-9).
 - B. Salutations (4:10-15).
 - C. Paul's parting words (4:16-18).

The Exposition

- I. **The Introduction (Col. 1:1-14).**
 - A. **Salutation (Col. 1:1-2).**

1:1 It was according to the ancient custom of writing for the writer to mention himself first, and also those to whom he was writing. This would not be a bad practice for us to follow today. Think of how much turning of the pages to the end of the letter we are saved when we are immediately told who the writer is.

Paul did not speak of himself as an apostle out of pride, but to indicate his authority. False teachers were busy in the Colossian church, and Paul was writing to clear up the confusion called by those false teachers. And so his title would indicate that he had the authority of Jesus Christ behind him. John Eadie, who is well known for his keen, God-given ability to express himself accurately and for our blessing, said about Paul's apostleship: Paul was an apostle of Jesus Christ, as he bore His commission, enjoyed His inspiration, did His work, and in all things sought His acceptance. His call to the apostleship was by a signal and unmistakable

summons of the Divine will (*Colossians*, p. 1).

And Griffith Thomas said,

Yet the Apostle, while insisting upon the divine source and authority of his work, nevertheless showed himself to be truly humble, for he was not only independent of man but also, in a sense, independent even of himself, so submissive was he to God's will (*Studies in Colossians*, p. 23).

It was Paul's responsibility as an apostle not only to teach, to warn, and to correct, but his was a special commission to reveal truth. He was always humbled by the high position that the Lord had given him. He told the church at Corinth,

9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me (1 Cor. 15:9-10).

And so Paul did not feel that he was an apostle because of any merit of his own, but solely by the grace of God.

In Philippians we read the Apostle Paul's commendation of Timothy. Cf. Phil. 2:19-24. (Read.) In 1 Cor. 16:10 Paul said of Timothy, "He worketh the work of the Lord, as I do." What a blessing he was to the Apostle Paul! Every servant of the Lord who has a "Timothy" working with him, is especially blessed. Timothy may be the one who wrote this epistle as Paul dictated it to him, although at the end we see that Paul signed his name as proof that the letter was from him. But Timothy was very dear to the Apostle, and Paul could not have accomplished all that he did without him. How lovingly the Apostle Paul called him "our brother" – not only his, but a brother to all of the saints in Colosse.

1:2 This letter is addressed to "saints" and "faithful brethren." "Saints" is a term that is applied to all believers in the writings of the NT. It certainly implies that believers in Christ are to be a holy people, but as Griffith Thomas pointed out it does not necessarily speak of a believers condition, but of his position. Nevertheless, as "saints" we have been set apart from the world and set apart for God. We don't become saints when we die, but we are saints right now IF we truly know the Savior. "Faithful brethren" as those who are to live trusting the Lord, faithful to Him in their daily lives, which means living in obedience to the Word of God.

Notice the two positions that the Colossian believers had. Their heavenly position was that they were "in Christ"; their earthly place was "at Colosse." And the more we realize our heavenly position "in Christ," the more saintly and faithfully we will live in our Colosse, wherever that may be.

Then we come to Paul's characteristic greeting which is also a prayer. These are the two great needs that every child of God has every day, the need for grace, and the need for peace. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ is not in all of the better MSS, but this should not be of concern to us because we know that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father (Jas. 1:17), but His blessings come upon us because of the merit we have with God through Christ. "Grace" is the Gentile blessing; "peace," the Hebrew. It is through "grace" that we have "peace." "Grace" should always remind us that the Lord's blessings are undeserved. "Grace" also means strength, according to 2 Cor. 12:9 where it is specifically called, "the power of Christ." "Peace" does not mean that our circumstances will always be peaceful, but it means that our hearts can be at peace even when there is turmoil all about us. It is by God's grace that we are saved, and by God's grace that we are what we are, and that we are not what we would have been if the Lord had not saved us. The Christians in Paul's day would greet each other with, "Grace to you," or "Grace to you, and peace from God our Father." When we look back at verse 1, we realize that because God was Paul's Father, and Timothy's heavenly Father as well, that they were brothers in the family of God. As Paul told the Galatian churches, "Ye are all the children (Gk., *sons* of

God by faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal. 3:26). So much for the greeting, but I am sure you agree with me that there is a lot of wonderful truth in those first two verses.

Next we move on to:

B. Thanksgiving (Col. 1:3-8).

This section, from verse 3 through 8, is one long sentence in the KJV, and also in the NKJV. This may not be what present-day grammarians approve of in writing, but it is good Biblically and theologically and spiritually. It goes from their “faith” to “your love in the Spirit” in verse 8. Paul’s heart was so full because of the evidence of saving faith that was evident among the believers in Colosse. Remember it was just a very small place, not important at all as far as the world was concerned, but tremendously important to God where He had done a mighty work of grace in the hearts of those who were saved. Even where two or three are gathered together in the Name of the Lord Jesus, He is present with them

Concerning this paragraph on thanksgiving, Bishop Moule said,

Nothing could be more characteristic of St. Paul, as regards thought, feeling, and expression. His heart and his mind are in every phrase, we may say in every word (p. 33).

October 3, 2000

1:3 What a prominent place thanksgiving had in the life of the Apostle Paul! Evidently he was always looking for evidences of the Lord’s blessing so he could thank God for what He was doing. And so we need to notice that he was not just thankful (as even Christians are liable to be), but he was thankful to God – here, “to God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word “God” can mean different things to different people, but Paul was thankful to the true, the one and only God, the God Who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But thanksgiving was not all that was a vital part of the life of the Apostle Paul; intercessory prayer was too. And we need to keep in mind that according to Col. 2:1 Paul had never been to Colosse as he wrote this epistle, and most, if not all of the believers in Colosse had never seen the Apostle in person. But Paul was constantly giving thanks to God for them, and interceding for them as well.

But what was it that prompted Paul to give thanks for them and to intercede for them as he was doing? The remainder of this sentence tells us, and it all had to do with the way God had used the Gospel in their lives. We see Paul’s reasons for his thanksgiving and intercession in the following verses. How did he hear about what was going on in Colosse? Verse 7 tells us that Epaphras had carried the good news to Paul.

1:4 It was because of their “faith in Christ Jesus,” and because “of the love which ye have to all the saints.” And then he continued in verse 5 by speaking of “the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.” Now if Paul gave thanks to God for their faith, their love, and their hope, it was because God had given all three to them. Believers are inclined today to think that we provide the faith, and then God does the rest. But Hebrews 12:2 says that the Lord Jesus is “the Author and Finisher of our faith.” Romans 10:17 teaches us, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” As people hear the Word of truth, God uses that Word to produce faith in our hearts. And then the great doctrine of salvation is clearly told in Eph. 2:8-10. (Quote.) Paul would not have given thanks to God for the faith of the Colossians if they had produced their faith, and then God had done the rest. *All of salvation, from start to finish, is all of God. Therefore, “to God be the glory, great things He hath done.”* Let us be sure that we understand this. We believe, but our faith is

evidence of the work of God in our hearts.

I like the way Bishop Moule speaks of faith. He calls it the soul's reliance "in Christ Jesus," anchored in Him and resting in Him. Salvation is "in Christ Jesus" alone. We make no contribution to our salvation. It is not even in one thing because of our works. Salvation is just as much a work of God alone as the creation of the world was His work. "If any man be in Christ," lit., *it is a new creation*. Solomon was describing salvation as well as everything else that God does when he penned the words that we find in Ecclesiastes 3:14:

I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before him.

So we must not overlook our faith, nor the faith of other believers, when we thank God for saving us. People can make a false profession of knowing Christ, and then fall away, but when one is truly saved "by grace through faith," *that work of God is eternal!* This is the first evidence of true salvation that we are to look for in ourselves, or in anyone else – "your faith in Christ Jesus."

As I mentioned a moment ago, Bishop Moule described faith as an anchor which "sinks *to* the floor of the sea, and then *into* it, that it may be held *in* it" (*Ibid.*)

But there is more: "And of the love which ye have to all the saints." (Notice "saints" again, as in verse 2)

The Apostle John said in 1 John 3:14,

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

Before a person is saved it is usually true that the last place he wants to be is in church among people who love the Lord. But after he is saved, he loves to be with the people of God, having fellowship with them, and enjoying the ministry of the Word. And it is not that we just love the Lord's people who go to our particular church, but we love the people of God everywhere! A Christian's best friends should be other Christians! It is not that we avoid other people because we are here in this world to bear testimony to them, but it does mean that salvation transforms our lives even *socially!*

This word "love" is the well known Greek word, ἀγάπη. This word applies to our relationship to the Members of the Godhead first. We delight in Them. Our hearts go out to Them. We love to be with Them, and we want more than anything else to please Them. But how humbling and truly amazing it is to learn that the Lord felt this way about us long before we experienced the God-given love in our own hearts. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5b). And the Apostle John said that "we love (Him), because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God loved us. Then we love God. And it must follow that then we love those whom He loves.

You are probably going to hear a lot from Bishop Moule this year. He was a man who tasted deeply of the truth of the Word of God which he loved so much and studied so thoroughly. He spoke of love, this love that we receive from God, as that which makes us "migrate no more" (p. 40). It was like Augustine said (and I am not sure this is an exact quotation, but it expresses what he said), "Our hearts are restless until we find our rest in Thee." It is like what happened to us when we met the person that we fell in love with, and married. *We quit looking!* Our days of migration were over!

Now we as the people of God are far from perfect, and we are not always easy to love, but with all of our imperfections and idiosyncrasies, we prefer each other to anyone else in the world. But it all starts with loving God, and loving the Lord Jesus, and loving the Holy Spirit.

Years ago James McGranahan penned the words of a lovely hymn which is hard to find these days. It is in the old Keswick Hymnal which Lucille and I bought years ago. It expresses the truth I have been trying to get across to you in words that are better than mine. These are the words:

O Christ, in Thee my soul hath found, and found in Thee alone,
The peace, the joy I sought so long, the bliss till now unknown.

I sighed for rest and happiness, I yearned for them, not Thee;
But, while I passed my Savior by, His love laid hold on me.

Now none but Christ can satisfy, none other Name for me;
There's love and life and lasting joy, Lord Jesus found in Thee.

We love Christ. We love God. We love the Word. *But we also love the Lord's people, the saints.* This is what we are to look for in our own hearts, as well as in the lives of others, who claim that they know the Lord. Paul rejoiced and thanked God as Epaphras told him how the believers in Colosse loved each other, and “all the saints.” That should give us the same joy too! And it is a great reason for giving thanks to God.

October 9, 2000

1:5 The third word which Paul brought into his thanksgiving is the word “hope.” We must realize that Paul's use of the word “hope” here has a very special, and thus a very important, meaning. In everyday English we use this word to express “a feeling that what is wanted will happen” (*Webster's New Word Dictionary*, p. 360). And sometimes in the Bible it is used this way. For example, when Luke was describing the shipwreck that Paul experienced on the way to Rome, he said this:

And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away (Acts 27:20).

The way we usually use the word hope expresses what we want, but it always carries with it a certain degree of uncertainty with it. But Paul was not speaking of anything uncertain. He was speaking of a future prospect which is absolutely guaranteed by the promise of God.

Paul used this word “hope” two more times here in Colossians 1. You will see it in Col. 1:23, and again in 1:27. Paul links this word “hope” to the Gospel in verse 23, and to “glory” in verse 27. And so Paul was saying that our “hope” has to do with the ultimate purpose of God in our salvation.

Two verses in 1 John 3 help us to understand the apostles' use of this word in most cases – verses 2 and 3 of 1 John 3:

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3).

So our “hope” is that we will be like our Lord.

In Romans 8:24-25 Paul used the word “hope” five times. He wrote:

24 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

So we are waiting for our full conformity to the likeness of Christ. But to show that there is nothing uncertain

about this, we let our eyes run on down in Romans 8 to verses 28 and 29, and there we read:

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

So it is by the degree of God that “our hope” is secure.

Now, as we saw a moment ago, in Col. 1:27 Paul called our hope, “the hope of glory.” That is, our hope means our glorification. So when we come back to verses 4 and 5 in our chapter, Colossians 1, we see that Paul rejoiced in their faith in Christ, and their love for the brethren, because this was evidence of their salvation, and indicated that this glorious hope was theirs – not only to be with Christ, but to be like Christ.

This is a good place to repeat what I have said before about our salvation. Salvation is the big word, and it is composed of three great truths: justification, sanctification, and glorification. So if we are saved we can truthfully say, “I have been justified; I am being sanctified; and I will be glorified.” And Paul went on to say here in verse 5 that they had heard about their hope when the Gospel was preached unto them. So when we preach the Gospel we need to tell people why it is so wonderful to be saved – it is only by the Gospel that our sins are forgiven, that we become the children of God, that we are brought into the fellowship of the best people in the world, our fellow-Christians, that we have the Holy Spirit living in us, that we can begin to understand the Bible, that we will be in heaven some day, that we will be with the Lord, but, best of all, “we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.”

It is no wonder that Paul was thanking God for the Colossian believers, and praying for them.

But we have not finished all that is in verse 5 yet. Notice what Paul said about our “hope”! It is “laid up for you in heaven.” “Laid up” – the Greek verb ἀπόκειμαι, which means that it has been *reserved* for us, but also *preserved*! Eadie says in his commentary that this is “a reality that excites and sustains the emotion of hope in the present state” (p. 9).

Now that is enough, but if you are concerned about yourself and whether or not you will persevere in the faith, let me remind you of what the Apostle Peter had to say about this. This is what he wrote in 1 Peter 1:3-5:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

How anybody who knows the Lord, and is acquainted with these verses of Scripture, could possibly think that he, or she, could lose his salvation, is more than I can understand. Our glorification has been reserved for us, and preserved in heaven, and we who know the Lord are “kept by the power of God unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

So the important thing is for all of us to make sure that we are saved, and then look forward to seeing the Lord soon, resting in the truth that nothing can take this glorious hope away from us.

What a salvation, and what a Savior!!! Men talk about all of the wonderful things they are on the verge of discovering here on earth, and some of them are truly amazing. But as wonderful as they might be, all of them together cannot begin to compare with “the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9). And do you know that the fulfillment of all of this could take place any day now? Let’s train ourselves to

be looking for this “blessed hope.” The Lord might come today. We don’t know when it will be, but it clear from Scripture that the Lord’s people have been expecting Him to return ever since He ascended back to heaven.

Before we leave verse 5, notice Paul’s statement, “the word of the truth of the Gospel.” This probably anticipated what he was going to say about those false teachers who had come to them perverting “the truth of the Gospel.

Now let us go on to verse 6.

1:6 Here Paul continued to write about the Gospel. Notice it had come to them, they had not sought for the Gospel, “as it is in all the world.” Here Paul had to be speaking of *the Roman world, the Empire*. And this is the way it is wherever the Gospel goes. It has to be taken. People were not seeking God in those days, neither are they seeking God in our day. The Lord Jesus had said, “GO ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The believers in the early church, under the blessing of God, did an amazing work in spreading the Gospel. Bishop Moule brought out that the verb translated, “bringeth forth fruit, would warrant the translation, “*fully bearing fruit*,” to “state *with emphasis and energy* the vast diffusion of the Message in the Roman Empire” (p. 32). However, the same has to be done in every generation. Perhaps the blessing they saw was because they believed in the power of the Gospel itself. The ASV translates “bringeth forth fruit” as “bearing fruit and increasing,” because this addition is found in some of the MSS of the Colossian epistle. Griffith Thomas said, “It is always an essential feature and strong proof of the Gospel that these results should be both constant and progressive” (p. 29). It is a sign of a spiritually healthy church when people are being saved continuously.

Again quoting Eadie, he said:

It was in all the world, because it had come to it. It was not indigenous in any country, but was there, merely because it had been carried there. . . That world which lay all round about them—those countries which to them were the world, and were by them so named, had been brought into contact with the Gospel (p. 13).

And wherever the Gospel had gone, it bore fruit. As Paul said in Rom. 1:16, he was not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ because it was the power of God unto salvation. And there is no other message of salvation from sin, its penalty and its power. And as Eadie remarked again,

And surely such a gift they would keep as their own, prize highly, love dearly, and never suffer it to be contaminated with popular errors, or exchange it for those mystical reveries which were broached among them (p.12).

But unfortunately that was not the case. We cannot be too watchful for those who would pervert the simple Gospel of the grace of God. Notice how Paul used the word “truth” at the end of verse 5, and again at the end of verse 6. The truth of God never changes, and we create problems for ourselves if we think that we have to adapt our message to the changes that are always taking place in society, whether it be in the Roman Empire, or in the United States of America. Notice how the announcers on KPDQ keep talking about “Today’s Christian Radio,” as though it has to be different from what Christian radio has been in the past. We heard this same expression on the so-called Christian radio station in Vancouver, B.C.

Evidently from the very first time that the Gospel was preached in Colosse, people had been saved. And then more were saved after that.

1:7 From Col. 2:1 we learn that Paul had never been in Colosse when he wrote this letter. So he was not

the one whom God used to win people to the Lord in Colosse, and to see a church established there. Who, then, was the messenger? From this verse it seems that it was Epaphras. And from verse 8 it seems that Epaphras had visited Paul in Rome, had told him about the work in Colosse, and that this was what prompted the Apostle Paul to write to the Colossians.

Epaphras is only mentioned three times in the NT. Here, in Col. 4:12 and in Philemon 23 where Paul called him “my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus.” Here Paul called him, “our dear fellowservant,” and for the church in Colosse, “a faithful minister of Christ.” With the reference in 4:12 it is clear that Epaphras was loved by the Apostle Paul, that Epaphras had a great love for the Colossian believers, *and especially that he was very devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ*. “A faithful minister of Christ” suggests not only that he was serving Christ, but that he had ministered Christ to the Colossians. This would have been what made him so dear to Paul, and to the Colossians. And it is a very wonderful commendation that Paul gave to him.

1:8 It is important to note that with this verse we have all three Members of the Godhead involved in Paul’s introduction to the epistle. Here “the Spirit” is mentioned. “The fruit of the Spirit is love” (Gal. 5:22). And this is a divine love which Paul said in Rom. 5:5 is “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who is given unto us.” “Shed abroad” speaks of *an abundant provision* of God’s love given to each child of God.

The Apostle Paul would have found great joy in what Epaphras had told him about the love of the people in Colosse because, in the first place, it was evidence of a genuine work of God in their hearts, but also because of what Eadie mentioned about the significance of “love in the Spirit”:

But love is regarded as the love and consequence of all other graces, and the mention of it presupposed their lively and effective exercise. For this love is no affection based on common relations—such as human friendship or social instincts. It is the offspring of spiritual influence in a heart so full of antagonism by nature to what is good and pure. The Spirit of Him who is Love takes possession of the believing bosom, and exerts upon it His own assimilating power . . . and as it is the great object of the Gospel to create and perfect it in the church, *it may safely be taken as the index of spiritual advancement* (italics mine, p. 19).

Applying this to Gal. 5:22-23, it would confirm that where you find divine love, the rest of the fruit of the Spirit will also be present.

All of what Paul has said from verse 3 on to verse 8, indicates why his heart was so full of thanksgiving “to God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and why his heart was so moved to pray for them as he now said that he was praying for them.

And so now we come to the third part of Paul’s Introduction:

C. Intercession (Col. 1:9-14).

The prayers of the Apostle Paul which are recorded for us in Scripture, are not just to show us how he prayed for the people of God, but they are to teach us to pray. The Bible ought to be our prayer book, and there is nothing wrong about making them our prayers as long as the prayers are the true expression of our own hearts.

There was much to be thankful about concerning the church at Colosse from what Paul has already said, but the evidence of the Lord’s blessing upon any people was never a reason for Paul to skip them and to pray others where the need seemed more apparent. Instead it was like a call for more and continued prayer. Where the Lord is working, the Devil will be at work, too, and that was true in Colosse. The first way to successfully

thwart the purposes of Satan, is by prayer. It is not the only way, but it is certainly a primary way.

Charles Bridges, who was born in England in 1794, and died in 1869 after ministering during his whole adult life in his native country, in 1829 wrote a book with the title, *The Christian Ministry*. During the twenty years that followed his book was reprinted nine times, and it is still in print today. Many still feel that it is unsurpassed in dealing with the work of the ministry. I have read it more than once, have underlined it more than any book I have ever read, and I taught it to several of our young men in the early days of Trinity Bible Church.

In Bishop Moule's book on Colossians, he quoted one sentence from Bridges' book at the beginning of his commentary on Paul's prayer in Colossians 1. And this is the statement:

There can be little doubt but we shall find that our most successful hours of employment for our people were not those when we were speaking to them from God but when we speaking for them to God (p. 46).

From what is said in Scripture about the praying of the Apostle Paul, there is much evidence that Paul would agree with Charles Bridges. And Bishop Moule must have been in agreement with Bridges' statement, or he would probably not have put it in his book.

The Apostle Paul has just finished writing his thanksgiving to God for what had taken place in the lives of the Colossian believers. Bishop Moule raises the question, "What will the Apostle do now?" And he give us his answer:

He is full of thanksgiving; but he cannot rest in even that. Just because he is so thankful he must at once go on to pray. Have the Colossians so truly found life in the Name of Jesus Christ? Then he must at once ask that they may live it out in the right line. Have they received the power, the fire, of love, kindled in the golden lamp of faith? Then he must pray, with all his soul, that this power may be passed into the channel of the will of God, [and that] this flame may burn along the path of humble and happy obedience (pp. 47,48).

(Read the prayer – vv. 9-14.)

In my estimation, as wonderful as all of prayers are, none of them surpasses this prayer. As we go through it, I trust that this will be, first of all, our prayer for ourselves, and then may it be a prayer that we pray for each other. So much of our praying tends to stay on the surface. This prayer takes us into the deepest depths of the spiritual life.

1:9 "For this cause we also" emphasizes what I have just been saying. And "since the day we heard it" takes us back to verses 4 and 5. As wonderful as it is to know that God has done a work in one person's heart, or in the hearts of a group of people (as was the case in Colosse), we need to keep in mind that those early days and weeks and even months are very crucial in the lives of those who have come to the Savior. A good beginning does not necessarily mean that it will continue. And so young believers need as much help as we can give them because they can easily shoot off on some tangent – especially in our day when so many weird things are going on in the Name of the Lord. But first we need to pray. And then we need to teach them, or make sure that they get where they can get solid Bible teaching. But let us see how Paul prayed for them, and then see how he taught them.

First notice that he did not wait to see them before he started to pray, and he did not just pray occasionally nor half-heartedly, but he prayed for them *without ceasing*. This does not mean that he didn't do anything else but pray, but it means that they were continually upon his heart, and that he was praying for them even as he went

about his other duties. But I think that we have to say that the Apostle Paul must have spent a great part of every day in prayer. All that he said about his own prayers in his epistles would require a large portion of every day, and occasionally whole days given to prayer. Taking time for prayer is something that we have to do because we live in days when our lives are so full, and we have so many demands upon us, that if we don't take time to pray, *we just won't pray*. Instead of hoping that sometime during the day we can get a few minutes to pray, we need to begin our days with prayer, giving prayer real priority among all of the things that we have to do.

"To pray" and "to desire" are not infinitives in the Greek text, but they are participles which should be translated *praying* and *desiring*, which would speak of what was already going on, as compared with what he intended to do in the future. Eadie suggested that the difference between the two words would be that *praying* had to do with prayer in general, and that *desiring* had to do with specific requests. So we could translate this part of verse 9 in this way: *We do not cease praying for you desiring that . . .* And then he began with his requests.

His first request: "That ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." This was his prayer for all the Colossians.

Where do we find "the knowledge of His will"? There is only one place: in the Word of God. Paul did not have in mind just what we do when we are seeking to know the Lord's will about some problem we are facing. He had in mind, as the second request shows, the knowledge of the Lord's will as to the way they were to live as Christians. Paul called it, as he so often did, the "walk."

The word that Paul used here for "knowledge," is ἐπίγνωσις, not γνῶσις. The difference between the two words is that γνῶσις is to know something, ἐπίγνωσις "is bringing me to be better acquainted with something that I have known before (Trench, p. 285). It means "knowledge which goes deeper than the surface of [the] facts" (Moule, p. 32). It is a mature knowledge, even a growing knowledge. It is not only knowing what we should do or not do, but seeing that doing is related to what we are, and that we cannot do anything to please God in our own strength, but we must trust Him to make us willing to do His will, and then to enable us to do His will. Paul was praying for their spiritual growth, their maturity in the things of the Lord.

Bishop Lightfoot pointed out that this word, ἐπίγνωσις, became a favorite word with Paul in his later epistles. In all four of the Prison Epistles he used it in his opening prayer in the epistles, as he did here in Col. 1:9. See also Eph. 1:17; Phil. 1:9; Ph. 6. It was very likely because in his imprisonment as he contemplated the spiritual immaturity of many in the church, and the presence of false teachers who were perverting the Gospel of the grace of God, he saw the great need for a deepening of every believer's understanding of the Gospel.

"In all wisdom and spiritual understanding" – Every commentator tries to distinguish between these words, but frequently their distinctions are not clear. From what I have read "all wisdom" can be taken to mean all of the truth that God has given us in His Word, and relating the truth to our Lord. In 1 Cor. 1:24 Christ is called "the power of God, and the wisdom of God." The truth of God, which is His wisdom, is far different and infinitely superior to the wisdom of men. And so when we are saved, there is a whole new area of truth that is opened up to us, and it is necessary for all of us to learn what it is. Paul in writing to Timothy has this to say about the Scriptures:

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15).

The Scriptures makes us wise in telling us how to be saved, but after we are saved we are to grow in our know-

of men, that there is such a field of knowledge. However when we speak of the wisdom of God, we are talking about divine truth which has been revealed by the Holy Spirit and permanently recorded for us in the Bible. The Greeks in particular were enamored with wisdom. You remember that Paul said in 1 Cor. 1:22 that “the Greeks seek after wisdom, but the preaching of Christ was to them “foolishness” (1 Cor. 23). Then Paul took their word and responded by saying that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men.”

In chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians we have Paul’s clear and classic statement about the fact that there is a wisdom of God which is far different, and far superior, to the wisdom of men. **(Read 1 Corinthians 2.)**

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The Scriptures makes us wise in telling us many things that we would not know otherwise – the knowledge of God Himself and of Christ, the knowledge of Their ways, the knowledge of Their purposes, and so on and on. But it also tells us the truth about ourselves – that we need to be saved, why we need to be saved, and how to be saved. And it tells us also that after we are saved we are to grow in grace and in our knowledge of all of the wisdom contained in the Word of God.

In “spiritual understanding” we are concerned with the application of the truth to the way we are to live. And the word “spiritual” should make us think of the Holy Spirit. He is our Teacher, and it is under His guidance that we learn the truth, and then seek to live according to the truth. All of this is life-long as to our learning and as to the application of the truth. “Filled” has to do with the spiritual capacity that we have for the truth. A babe in Christ is filled with less than a more mature believer. As we grow in the Lord, it takes more to fill us. Our capacity for the truth increases as we grow. But our objective ought to focus on knowing all of the Word, or as much as we are capable of learning under the direction of the Holy Spirit. As I reminded you before, Paul’s word for “knowledge” was not the simple word for knowledge, γνώσις, but ἐπίγνωσις, a full knowledge, a complete knowledge. It is, as one writer has said, “super-knowledge” (Ironside, p. 31). And this has to do with understanding the full and eternal plan and purpose of God. To acquire this knowledge means studying all of the Word of God, seeing God’s plan unfold from the before the foundation of the world on into the culmination of all things. So to be *filled* with the *full* knowledge requires a life-long study of the Word of God under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

And so we must start with the Word. We read it for ourselves. Our parents read it for us, and explained it to us. We go to a church where we can hear the Word. And if you are not getting teaching from the Word where you go, you need to find a place where you can hear the Word of God. The right kind of churches are getting harder and harder to find, but the Lord has His faithful servants who know that they are commissioned to preach and to teach the Word. And as we are learning right now, it is even in the Word that we learn to pray. And the Word teaches us how we are to live. This first request is basic to our lives. We always need to be growing in “all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

Although writing in Hebrew instead of Greek, it is interesting that Solomon put these two words together when he wrote Proverbs 4:7, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get

understanding.” See also Prov. 19:8, “He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul: he that keepeth understanding shall find good.”

October 16, 2000

1:10 Here we come to the second point in Paul’s prayer, and it is based upon his request in verse 9. This second request has to do with the walk of the people of God. That is, what we are to become as the people of God, and how we are to live. This is anticipated by Paul’s request that they would be “filled with the knowledge of His will,” God’s will, “in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”

Eadie correctly says concerning the verb “walk,” that it “is a common one, and is of Hebrew origin. He said (on p. 24) that it “denotes the general tenor of one’s life, . . . whether he hold on his way with a steady step, or is seduced into occasional aberrations” – which is a straying from the right way. This is the object of all of our learning of the truth of the Word of God – not ministry first, but living. And our object as the people of God is not to please ourselves, and certainly not to please others either in the church or in the world, but it is to be “worthy of the Lord.” Let me quote from Eadie again:

To walk worthy of the Lord, is to feel the solemn bond of redeeming blood, to enshrine the image of Him Who shed it, to breathe His spirit and act in harmony with His example, to exhibit His temperament in its elements of purity, piety, and love, to be in the world as He was in the world, to be good and to do good, and to show by the whole demeanor that His [Word] is the rule which governs, and His glory the aim which elevates and directs (p. 24, 25),

And here Paul sets the highest possible standard. We are to please the Lord, and we are to please Him in everything! There is no change that is ever greater than the change that takes place in a person’s life from what he or she was before salvation, and what we all are to become after we are saved. And the only way we can know what is pleasing to the Lord is by the Word. We can’t take our standards from the ever-changing ways of the world, but we are to follow the Word of God which never changes, but, like our Lord, is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

This applies to us individually, and to us corporately as churches. What seems to be the standard today? It is what is pleasing to people. It is what other churches are doing. People want to have fun when they go to church. They are not concerned about what is pleasing to God. Many churches have taken on the ways of the world in an attempt to draw people into the church. In no way does the NT approve such methods and objectives.

Concerning the Greek words, εἰς πᾶσαν ἀρεσκίαν, “unto all pleasing,” or as Charles Williams translated it, “to His full satisfaction,” Bishop Moule had this to say.

In Classical Greek it denotes a cringing and subservient habit, ready to do anything to please a patron not only to meet but to anticipate his most trivial wishes. But when transferred to . . . the believer’s relation to his Lord the word at once rises by its associations. *To do anything* to meet, to anticipate, His wishes is not only the most beneficial but the most right thing we can do. It is His eternal due; it is at the same time the surest path to our own highest development and gain (p. 49).

Therefore, it follows that the better we know the Word, the better we will understand what is pleasing to the Lord. And Paul here was speaking of the Lord Jesus. The opposite of what Paul was speaking about here is the word “menpleasers” in Col. 3:22, followed by what Paul said in verse 23. (Read.)

All that we are to become, and all that we are to do, must be done heartily to please God, which will be for His

glory – and ultimately for our good. We are always losers when we disobey the Word of God, but we are always blessed when we are obedient to the Word.

But what a standard this is! We ought to feel like David did when he was writing about the omnipresence of the Lord in Psalm 139: “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psa. 139:6).

The fact that it will also be profitable spiritually for us, is indicated in the latter part of verse 10 where Paul wrote, “Being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

May I remind you of the three w’s we have had so far, which are the real basis of Paul’s prayer:

1) The Word.

2) The walk.

And now 3) the work.

See these same three in Ex. 18:19-20. And you will find these same three again in 2 Tim. 3:16-17. How could there be any stronger emphasis upon what we as the people of God need to be concerned about. This was true in OT, and it is still true today. And these three always maintain that same order: the Word, our walk, and the work that the Lord gives us to do.

“Being fruitful in every good work” – This does not mean that every person to whom we witness will receive Christ as Savior. It does not mean success on man’s terms. But it does mean that we can be assured that God will accomplish His purposes in us. And we rarely know what those purposes are. But we also find that in doing the will of God, facing the obstacles that stand in the way, and perhaps grieved by our own limitations, God will use those circumstances to lead us into a fuller and more intimate knowledge of Himself. Here we have ἐπίγνουςις again.

A good illustration of this is to be seen in the life of Moses at many points, but I will just point out one of them. After Moses had gone to Pharaoh telling him that the Lord had said for him to let the children of Israel go, Pharaoh responded by saying, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go” (Ex. 5:1). And then Pharaoh decided to take away the straw that had been provided for the children of Israel to make bricks. They would have to gather their own straw, and then make the same number of bricks as before. Of course, this was an impossible requirement. When the officers of the children of Israel complained about the change, Pharaoh accused them of being idle, and the officers could see that they were in trouble. As they left Pharaoh’s presence, they met Moses and Aaron and accused them of complicating their situation, and, as they said, “To put a sword in their hand to slay us” (Ex. 5:21). Moses had no answer for them, and he did the only thing that he knew to do: he took the matter to the Lord! And this is what he said to the Lord”

22 And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me?

23 For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all (Ex. 5:22-23).

What was the Lord’s answer to Moses? See Ex. 6:1:

Then the LORD said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land.

This is a lesson that we all need to learn concerning the good works that the Lord gives us to do. They give us

continued opportunities to come to a greater knowledge of the Lord. King David said in Psa. 9:16:

The LORD is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.

And David said also in Psalm 103:7 concerning the Lord, “He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.” So we learn about the Lord from the Word, but we also learn about the Lord and His ways by how He deals with us as we serve Him. We all have ideas about the Lord that need to be cleared up, and those are not always pleasant experiences for us, but they are always profitable because they make us better servants of the Lord.

Paul was learning more about the Lord and His ways as a prisoner of Rome. Often when it seems to us like our work is a failure, and we experience the discouragement that follows, but those are usually the most profitable times in our lives. When we seem not to be accomplishing much, the Lord is working *in* us that He might do a greater work *through* us. However, we are usually the worst judges of the fruitfulness of our work. We may think we are being fruitful when we are not, or we may be bearing real fruit when it seems to us that our work is in vain. Paul’s prayer was that as the believers in Colosse pursued the knowledge of the Word, walking in the light that God gives to us, seeking always and first of all to please the Lord in everything, *we will be more fruitful in every good work which we do, whatever it might be, whether it be great or small.* As Eadie said,

It may be noble philanthropy, or more lowly beneficence—it may be the self-denial of a martyr, or the gift of a cup of water to the humble wayfarer—it may be a deed of magnanimity which startles the nations, or it may be the washing of a beggar’s feet—teaching its first letters to a ragged orphan, or repeating the story of the cross in the hovel of poverty and distress (p.26).

Whatever it may be, God promises to bless the labors of those who seek Him, and who seek to please Him in all that they are and do.

But there is still more to this prayer. More blessings follow.

1:11 Have you noticed how prevalent the word “all” is in this prayer? “All wisdom and spiritual understanding” in verse 9. “Unto all pleasing” in verse 10, and “every [‘all’ in the Greek] good work. “All might” in verse 11, followed by “all patience and longsuffering.”

Lit. the beginning of this verse could read, “In all strength being strengthened.” This is going on continuously. And the next phrase lit. is, “according to the power of His glory.”

Paul used two different words here for power. The first is δύναμις, or the verb, δυναμώω. As this word suggests, being inherent power, the very power of God is imparted to us, to strengthen us, and this is lit. according to manifested power (κράτος) of His [God’s] glory. God’s glory is His Deity, His majesty, His very presence. So God Himself becomes the strength of the one who walks with Him. But this is not generally the way we evaluate power. This is not the power to perform miracles, nor to preach great sermons by which large crowds are moved to Christ. No, this is power “unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.” Now the words “patience and longsuffering” suggest trials, troubles, that things are not going the way we expected them to go, nor the way we wanted them to go. It is exactly what the Apostle Paul was experiencing as a prisoner of Rome. The words suggest that by the power of God Paul did not give up, but instead he persevered under trying circumstances, difficult trials, without even having the desire in his heart to get even. Now that proves the sufficiency of God because our natural desire is always to get even when people do something against us, or lie about us. It takes more power to be submissive and happy under trial than it does to preach an hour-long sermon.

But the words mean even more than that we are resigned to our sufferings. The idea of perseverance is in both of these words, “patience” and “longsuffering.” They look ahead to the prospect of a deliverance, which is always important in the life of a child of God. It is like the Lord said in the parable of the sower, and the seed that fell on the good ground:

15 But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:15).

In Rom. 2:6-7 Paul spoke along the line of his request here in Colossians 1 where speaking of God, he said,

6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds:

7 To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life (Rom 2:6-7).

And then there are a couple of verses in Hebrews that apply here:

For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise (Heb. 10:36).

The other is Heb. 12:1-3:

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

We may have our difficult times in this world as the Lord’s people and as His servants. Even where the people of God have been martyred. Paul probably had them in mind when he wrote to the Corinthians:

55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor. 15:55-58).

So by Paul’s prayer he was seeking the enabling power of the Lord upon those who were having a difficult time, not just to sustain them, but to give them hope that their sufferings were not in vain. We serve a sovereign, victorious Christ, and we are “more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37).

But let us not overlook the words, “with joyfulness.” This means that we do not endure our trials with a sense of hopeless resignation, but *with joy*! It is often in our testing times that we learn how precious the Psalms are for our encouragement and the strengthening of our faith. We know that trials have a divine purpose, and they have an end! Sometimes the end is in heaven, but they come to an end. Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi in particular illustrate how joy can prevail even in the most difficult circumstances. As we read in Psalm 30, verse 5, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

October 23, 2000

1:12 One of my teachers in my Seminary days was Dr. Harry Ironside, who at that time was the Pastor of the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago. He was a very godly man, one who was deeply instructed in the things of God. I have his commentary on the book of Colossians, a book of 186 pages, a paperback, which, according to the back cover sold in those days for fifty cents! I think most of his messages were taken down by a stenographer in those days, edited by Dr. Ironside, and then published in book form. He didn’t go into all the

details of the original languages, but he was a very careful student and was concerned about the application of Scripture equally with the teaching of good doctrine. As I read his books over fifty years since I heard him in person, I can hear him saying what is recorded in his books.

In his commentary on Colossians, as he came to verse 12, he made a very important observation about Paul's words at this point. He said this:

In verses 9-11 we have set forth certain blessings for which he [Paul] prays. In verses 12-14 there are others for which he gives thanks. It is very important to distinguish these things; that is, to have clearly in mind the privileges and blessings which are non-forfeitable, because confirmed to us by God in Christ from the moment we believe on Him who died to make them good to us; and the additional blessings for which we need to pray daily, and concerning which there should be constant soul-exercise lest we fail to enter into and enjoy them. Many believers fail in not distinguishing the two classes of blessing (p. 29).

We need to pray constantly that we will “be filled with the knowledge of [God's] will in all wisdom and spiritual understand.” We need to pray constantly that we will live “worthy of the Lord,” seeking to please him in everything, that we will be fruitful in every good work, that will daily increase in the knowledge of God, and that the Lord will give us the strength, the power, to be patient and longsuffering with joy. These are blessings available to all of us, but some believers enjoy them; others do not. And those who enjoy them, enjoy them to differing degrees.

But as we come to verse 12 Paul began to thank the Father for some of the blessings that we already have, all of us, every child of God *without exception!* The Father has qualified us by His grace “to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. All of us who know the Lord have been delivered from the power of darkness, and . . . translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. And again, all of us have been redeemed through the blood of Christ, which means that our sins have been forgiven. *So we are to thank God for the blessings that we have, but, on the other hand, we are to pray for the blessings that we still need to receive, or which we have received but still need to experience them in a greater fulness.*

Dr. Ironside also said this:

It is questionable if any merely human writer has ever been able to give as helpful suggestions for our own prayer life as will come to us in our meditation upon these various petitions (*Ibid.*)

We have examined the requests which Paul made for the saints at Colosse. Now let us look at the blessings which they all enjoyed, and for which he was giving thanks to the Father.

Some expositors of this verse feel that “with joyfulness,” or simply, *with joy*, at the end of verse 12 must be carried over into verse 12. As we grow in our knowledge of the “super-knowledge” of the Word of God, and continue to receive the blessings that come to us as we walk with Him, and so on as Paul has expressed it in his prayer, it makes us more and more thankful for the blessings that God our Father gave us when we were saved. *The most mature believer can with the deepest joy and the greatest sincerity continue to thank the Lord that he is saved.*

Beginning with “being fruitful” in verse 10, going on to “increasing” in the same verse, and then “strengthened” in verse 11, and going on to “giving thanks” in verse 12, we have a series of present participles, suggesting that all of this is what is to be going on continuously in every believer's life – one thing leading to another. And the same applies to “giving thanks” – not just once in a while, but day after day throughout our lives. As

someone expressed it long ago (and I don't know who it was), *we are not to get over the wonderful fact that we are saved!* And notice that Paul does not mention anything that we have done for ourselves in our salvation, because there is nothing to say! We haven't done anything! The Lord has done it all, and so to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit belongs *all* of the praise.

In Ephesians 1:3 and 4 Paul gave thanks especially to the Father, as he did here in Col. 1:12, because it was the Father Who chose us in Christ “before the foundation of the world.” And this is where we must start when we are “filled with the knowledge of [God's] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” Saving us was God's work; praising Him is ours! Our salvation is eternal, and so must our praise be.

The Father “hath made us meet” – an expression that we don't use very much any more, if at all. It means that God has *qualified us, prepared us, made us fit, even made us worthy* “to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.” We were totally unworthy of such an inheritance before the Lord changed us. He has saved us. We are new creatures. He has brought us into His family as sons, born sons. We have had a new birth. And it is by His redemptive power that we are qualified with every other saint for the inheritance that is ours! And the moment we are saved, we are just as qualified to receive our inheritance as we ever will be.

The words “in light” have to be in contrast with the word “darkness” in verse 13. We are in the light now, but when we finally experience our inheritance in heaven, that is where we will understand “the light,” the glory of God, the glory of Jesus Christ, the glory of heaven, and even our own glory when we are transformed into the very likeness of Christ's glory.

When we think of our inheritance as the sons of God, we have to turn to 1 Peter 1, verses 3-5:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,
5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time
(1 Peter 1:3-5).

When Paul took leave of the Ephesian elders when they were together at Miletus, he said this to them:

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:32).

This is our hope, as Paul said in Col. 1:5. (Read.)

But what did the Father do to qualify us for such an inheritance?

1:13 He “delivered us from the power of darkness.” This is something which we could never have done for ourselves. “The power of darkness” was too great for us to overcome, and so we were hopelessly held under Satanic control and power. The word “delivered” is a wonderful word. It means that the Lord has rushed to draw us to Himself, to rescue us, to deliver us, to set us free. The word “power” is the Greek word for *authority*. Satan has great authority, but our Lord Jesus Christ has “all authority” (Matt. 28:18). Satan is “the power of darkness.” His power is terrible, and extends to the ends of the earth. He is “the god of this world” who has “blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, Who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor. 4:4). But as the Apostle John has taught us, “Greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4b).

But that is only a part of what the Lord has done. The other part is even greater, but could not have been accomplished without our deliverance. God has “translated us into the kingdom of,” lit., “the Son of His love.” To be “translated” means to be moved from one place to another. We have been delivered from “the authority of darkness” into “the kingdom” of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are no longer under Satan’s authority, but under the royal authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the kingdom that we enter by the new birth, the kingdom about which the Lord spoke to Nicodemus. This is the kingdom that the Apostle Paul was referring to when he wrote, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

Geoffrey Wilson, in his brief but excellent commentary on Colossians, quotes a man by the name of Davenant who said,

For God is said to have translated us into the kingdom of His Son, because he hath communicated to us those spiritual gifts, and wrought in us that spiritual condition, which makes us subjects and members of Christ. Therefore, by the kingdom of Christ we must understand all the benefits of grace which are obtained through union with and subjection to Christ our spiritual King (p. 27).

And Wilson added,

As the phrase ‘the Son of His love’ points to Christ as the great object of God’s love, this love of the Father for the Son thus becomes the pledge of His love for all who are ‘in Christ’ (*Ibid.*).

It is interesting to note that Paul at the beginning of his prayer for the Colossians said, “That ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will,” and in verse 10, “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.” But when we get to verse 12 and the thanksgiving, he said, “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers . . .” And in verse 13 “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.” Then in verse 14, “In whom we have redemption . . .” We can almost sense that in these words the Apostle Paul was remembering what the Lord had said to him on the road to Damascus, and which he repeated when he stood before King Agrippa. We read this in Acts 26:13-19, and notice the words in that passage which are found here in Colossians 1:

13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

18 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.

19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance (Acts 26:13-20).

And now we come to the last word of the prayer.

1:14 “In Whom,” that is, *in Christ, the Son of God’s love*, “we have,” as a present possession, “redemption

through His blood,” which means, “even the forgiveness of sins.”

The blessings of verses 12 and 13 which we all have, are traceable to what our Lord did on the Cross as Paul expressed it in verse 14. If there had been no sacrifice on the Cross, we would still be in our sins. And if Christ had not died for us, we would still be under the authority of the Evil One, “the power of darkness.” And if our Lord had not shed His blood for us, we would have no heavenly inheritance, no hope.

Oh, the love that drew salvation’s plan,
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man.
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span
At Calvary.

The words “through His blood” are not in the better MSS. Some feel that they were copied from Eph. 1:7. But that does not change the meaning of the passage in the least because we know that our redemption was purchased by the blood of our Savior, but His sacrificial, substitutionary death of our Savior. The Apostle Peter expressed it in these words:

18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;
19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:18-19):

The word redemption means deliverance through the payment of a ransom. Our sins required death. Jesus Christ was the only One Who could qualify to make that payment which he did by His death. And so by our union with Him – dying with Him, buried with Him, raised with Him, and seated with Him, His death purchased our deliverance from divine judgment, and made possible the forgiveness of sins. “Forgiveness” means that we have been released from all charges against us, and our sins will be remembered against us no more.

So what Paul mentioned last in his thanksgiving to God, in the scheme of redemption, in the order of all things pertaining to our salvation, *must come first!* And this is our through Christ. In verse 14 we are in Christ. In verse 13 we are in the kingdom of God’s Son. And in verse 12 we are in the light. Or to state it another way, in verse 14 we have justification, in verse 13 we have sanctification, and in verse 12 we have glorification.

And so we can say that justification, sanctification, and glorification, the full theme of salvation, is found in and grows out of just the 14th verse. Griffith Thomas has indicated this in an excellent statement on verse 14: Never once do we read [in Scripture] of the forgiveness of guilt or the forgiveness of condemnation, but only of the forgiveness of sin and sins. The word must, therefore, mean something equivalent to the fulness of redeeming love and grace, covering past, present, and future, and embracing position and condition, standing and state, character and conduct. Nor can forgiveness mean only and merely the negative aspect of release, but must involve also the positive element of restoration, including saving, cleansing, justifying, purifying, sanctifying, illuminating, welcoming, blessing, and glorifying. A careful study of the usage of the word in the New Testament will prove this, however novel and surprising it may seem. Of course, we are accustomed to distinguish between forgiveness and justification, but there is a sense in which forgiveness may be said to include everything from the beginning of Christian experience to the end . . . (p. 46).

How thankful we should be if we can say truthfully, “In Whom,” in Christ,” we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” If we can say that, there is nothing else that we need to be able to say. If we can’t say that, nothing else that we will say will matter at all.

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle
to the
Colossians
October 30, 2000 – Colossians 1:16-23

In our outline this is:

II. The Apostle's Message – The Glory of Christ (Col. 1:15-23).

Here we come to the beginning of the doctrinal section of Colossians. It goes down through verse 23. But there is more in chapter 2. So in a general way we can say, as we so often observe in Paul's writings, that his emphasis is upon doctrine to begin with, but then from doctrine he moved on to the application of his doctrine to the lives of the Lord's people. One of the major errors of the church today is to skip doctrine and focus attention on practical things. But it is clear from Paul's epistles that we are in no position to understand how we should live until we are first given the doctrine which determines what the practical emphasis shall be. The lack of teaching (because that is what doctrine is) shows itself in the very superficial nature of church life and ministry today, and the superficial nature of Christian living as well. We desperately need to understand what the Bible teaches about God, about Christ, about the Holy Spirit, about the Bible itself, about the nature of man and his need of salvation, and then to understand, in the light of all of this, the nature of sin and salvation in the light of the ultimate purposes of God. I hope that none of you will ever be guilty of minimizing the importance of doctrine.

It is very evident by the emphasis upon Christ that we have in the first fourteen verses of chapter 1, that we need understand Who He is. And in verses 15 through 23 which we will now consider it is clear that Paul wanted the believers at Colosse to understand:

- 1) Our Lord's relationship to God – He is "the image of the invisible God" (1:15a).
- 2) Our Lord's relationship to creation (1:15b-17). – He is the Creator of all thing in heaven and earth. They were created by Him and for Him.
- 3) Our Lord's relationship to the Church. He is the Church's Head (1:18). And this led Paul to go on to verse 23 speaking of the Gospel.

All of these constitute the major doctrines of Scripture, and we are blessed to have this clear statement of truth in such simple terms and in just a few verses. Volumes have been written, though, explaining in detail these glorious truths which were stated here by the Apostle Paul.

But let us go on now to verse 15.

1:15 Verses 13 and 14 leave no doubt but that in verse 15 Paul was speaking about our Lord Jesus Christ. The NKJV begins this verse, "He is the image of the invisible God."

This is the Greek word. We get our English word *icon* from it. This is an image, or a representation, or an idol. I think that most people who worship idols will tell you that the idol is not their god, but it represents their god. It is used this way in the Bible in the book of The Revelation. Listen to these words which are found in Rev. 13:12-15, speaking of the second beast described in that chapter:

12 And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.

13 And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,

14 And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

(Continued on p. 22)

15 And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

When the Apostle Paul was discussing man's rejection of the light God had given him of His existence in their hearts and in creation itself, he went on in Rom. 1:21-25 to say what man did. Let me read those verses to you:

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:

25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

So the word *icon* can mean an idol. And there have been many icons made to represent our Lord, the virgin Mary, various "saints," and so on.

But the word has another usage in Scripture. The Lord used it when He was asked if they should pay tribute to Caesar. He asked for a coin, and He was given a "penny," a *denarius*. And He asked the Herodians who were trying to get the Lord to say something that would get Him into trouble – He asked them, "Whose is this image and superscription?" (Matt. 22:20), referring to the face that was on the coin. And, of course, they said that it was Caesar's. So it is with many of our coins. Lincoln's head is on some of our pennies. George Washington's image is on our quarters. Even the pictures on our paper money are icons, images, representations of the person we seek to honor. So even a picture is an icon, and many people worship pictures in religious ceremonies.

But it still has a third usage in Scripture. Paul said in Rom. 8:29 that we are "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son," that is, God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul said in 1 Cor. 15:49 that "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." And in 2 Cor. 3:18 Paul wrote:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

The Apostle John said that "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). Now this does not mean that we will become Deity. We will be like the Lord in His character, but less than Deity. So Paul's use of the word in these passage is given with certain limitations on it.

But when we read in Col. 1:15 that our Lord is "the image of the invisible God," there are no limitations on that statement. And to prove it we have our Lord's own words when He told Philip after Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us" (John 14:8), meaning that it would be enough for them. But the Lord responded to Philip with these words which are found in John 14:9:

Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?

We learn from 2 Cor. 4:4 that this is one truth that the Devil does not want people to understand, and he has done a marvelous job keeping it from them. Listen to 2 Cor. 4:3-4:

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

The opening verses of the book of Hebrews gives us one of the grandest statements in all of Scripture concerning the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ;

1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,
2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Heb 1:1-4).

“Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Person.” The word εἰκών is not in this third verse, but an expression which means the same as εἰκών when used of the Lord Jesus, is used. It can be translated, *Who being the effulgence of His glory, and the exact expression of His substance*. The fulness of God’s glory was Christ’s glory, and He was in His being all that God is. The incarnation did not change His glory in any way. It was veiled while He was in the flesh, but all of His glory, all of His Deity was there, and it always be true that Jesus Christ is God, not God the Father, but God nevertheless.

I trust that we all understand this, and that we will never accept any other teaching regarding our Lord Jesus Christ. And without doubt the reason that we have no pictures of our Lord, nor any imprints or likenesses of our Lord on any coin or any monument, is because we are to be satisfied with what the Scriptures tell us of Christ. God throughout history from the very beginning has revealed Himself at different times and in different ways, but in these last days, marked by His coming to the earth, we have in Christ exactly what we would have had if God the Father had become incarnate, and had come to the earth to die for our sins.

“He is the image of the invisible God.” The Apostle John has told us,

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (John 1:18).

Now when we go on to the next expression, we come to a statement that the Jehovah’s Witnesses love. They deny that Jesus Christ was God. They say that this verse indicates that He was the first of all of God’s creation. And that is what it seems that Paul was saying as he wrote that our Lord was “the firstborn of every creature.” But this is an example of the kind of error we can get into when we just take a verse by itself. And yet if we do take verse 15 by itself, then we have to say that Paul was contradicting himself, and that would mean that at least the book of Colossians cannot be in its entirety the infallible and totally true Word of God!

No, if Jesus Christ is “the image of the invisible God,” then He cannot also be a created being even He was the first. So we cannot accept that our Lord was created.

And further support is given to the rejection of the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ interpretation of this phrase because in verse 16 Paul went on to say, “For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him.” So this is Paul’s statement that Christ is not a created being, *but the Creator, the Creator of all things*.

Also in verse 17 we are told that the Lord “is before all things.” That is, He existed before creation, and that all things “consist,” or *were framed together* by our Lord.

But what are we going to do with that expression, “the firstborn of every creature? Actually, a better transla-

tion would be, *the firstborn of all creation*. The NKJV translated it, “the firstborn over all creation.”

The word, “firstborn,” is πρωτότοκος. In Ex. 4:22 we read that Moses was told to tell Pharaoh, “Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn.” The Lord, of course, was referring to the whole nation, but we need to remember that Israel, or Jacob, was not actually the firstborn son of Isaac and Rebekah; Esau was! And so this word “firstborn” does not actually mean the first one to be born, or, in this reference to our Lord, the first to be created, but as Paul went on to say in verse 18 of our text, “that in all things He [Christ] might have the preeminence.” And so this takes us back to the expression in Heb. 12:2 where it is said of God that He appointed our Lord “Heir of all things.” The one who is appointed the firstborn was the primary heir in the family, and that is the meaning of this expression. The Lord was not a created being, but the Creator, and “all things were created . . . for Him.”

Lightfoot mentioned in his commentary that Psalm 89:27 “my firstborn” a Messianic title, indicating that David’s greatest Son would be “higher than the kings of the earth.” Thus we can see from our text that what Lightfoot also said about this term, that it meant *priority* to all creation, and sovereignty over all creation.

So the Lord as the Firstborn of all creation was the Creator and the Heir of all creation.

1:16 “For by Him were all things created.” The “for” indicates that this verse is an explanation of verse 15.

And this supports what the Apostle John wrote in John 1:3, “All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made.” Our Lord was involved in all of creation, whether it had to do with the earth, or with heaven. And so William Hendriksen made this comment:

Hence, it is entirely reasonable for him to say that the Son is not only the One to Whom all things owe their origin, as the divine Agent in their creation, but is also the Goal of their existence. Of all creatures He is Sovereign Lord. Hence, there is absolutely no justification for trusting in, seeking help from, or worshiping any mere creature, even though that creature be an angel. Angels, too, however exalted they may be, are creatures, and as such are subject to Christ (p. 73).

And this applies to what is visible on the earth, and what to our eyes is presently invisible in heaven. Over all of God’s creatures – on earth, men, animals, birds, fish, and all other earthly creatures, nations as well as individuals, and over the elect angels and fallen angels (demons), though unseen by us, He likewise is absolutely sovereign.

But let us note the other words which Paul used in this verse.

Many commentators take the four words beginning with “thrones” to apply to the word “invisible” since it immediately precedes them. But Paul was not just talking about the “invisible” even though we learn from chapter 2, verse 18, that the worship of angels was a problem among the members of the church in Colosse. He was also speaking about the “visible,” the people of Israel with their Law, and the Roman Empire with their power which was a constant problem to the early Church – Paul himself being a prisoner of that heathen government. So I am inclined to take the first two terms as referring to the earth, and to the “visible,” while “principalities” and “powers” are clearly used in the NT of heavenly beings, both good and bad.

So I take “thrones,” even though the book of The Revelation speaks of thrones in heaven, yet for the full comfort of the Colossian believers, it can apply, and I believe it does, to the nations of the earth. In 2 Peter 2:10 the word “dominions” is translated “government.” And so the word can apply to all leaders in government. And in what might be considered a parallel passage in Ephesians, chapter 1:19 through 23. It is a part of Paul’s prayer. This is what Paul requested of the Lord for the church at Ephesus:

19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working

of his mighty power,

20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,

21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,

23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:19-23).

“Principalities” and “powers” are joined together in Eph. 3:10 and again in Eph. 6:12. In Eph. 3:10 it seems that they are the elect angels, but in Eph. 6:12 it seems that they are demonic beings. “Principalities” are those who are in the first places of rank and power, those having sovereignty which can only be exercised within the limits of the will of God. “Powers” are *authorities*. Since they are always mentioned second, it would seem that they are *authorities who serve under the “principalities,” but with less power and in a more limited sphere*.

What the Apostle Paul is saying here is that all officials, whether in the heavens among the angels, or on earth among men, all are under the sovereign power and control of our Lord Jesus Christ, and they have been from creation and will be to the end of time. They were “created by Him, and for Him.” The fact that most of the leaders that we can see have no idea that they are under divine control, and responsible ultimately to our Lord for the way they carry out their duties, does not change the truth at all. God may place corrupt leaders over particular nations as a judgment upon them, but it still remains the truth that “there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom. 13:1b).

Thus we can see what a tremendously important truth the doctrine of creation is. If we live in a world that has just evolved, then no one is in charge. Everything is the result of chance. We are all at the mercy of whatever fate may bring to us. But thank God that is not the case. We live in their world under the sovereign authority of the living God Who is working all things out after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11). And He always works things together for good for those who love Him, for those who are ‘the called’ according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). And therefore our trust needs to be in God, in Christ, and in the Holy Spirit as They are revealed to us in the Word of God.

This is a grand statement concerning creation, and is entirely in harmony, as we have pointed out, with John 1:3. “For Him” means not only for His glory, but for the fulfillment of all of the divine purposes

November 6, 2000

1:17 “And He is before all things.” The Greek preposition, *πρό*, can mean *before in time*, as in Matthew 5:12, where we have the words of the Lord Jesus when He telling His disciples that they would be persecuted, and that people would say all kinds of bad things about them which were not true. This is what He said:

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Matt. 5:12).

Now it is obvious that if our Lord was the Creator of all things, then He had to exist before anything was created. But notice that the Apostle Paul said, “And He is before you,” not *was*. So we must look for some way in which the Lord *was before all things then, and still is!* And so we find that it has another meaning, as it is used in James 5:12, and is translated “above.” This is what James 5:12 says:

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

James was telling the believers that they should give special priority in their conversation to letting “yes” mean yes, and “no” mean no so they would not have to swear by the heaven or the earth or any other thing to convince people that they were telling the truth. You have the same thing in 1 Peter 4:8, but reading verse 7 with it:

7 But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

Peter wanted them to be sober and prayerful in view of the fact that “the end of all things is at hand,” but he wanted them to give special priority to making sure that they had fervent love for each other. Love had to be placed first.

So when Paul used this preposition with the Lord, he meant the Lord is sovereign, He is superior over all things, all created beings and all created things, and this ties in with what he would say at the end of verse 18, “that in all things He might have the preeminence.

So the Lord Jesus Christ is the Lord over all creation. He is the Creator, and He “is” the Lord over all that He has created – all men, all nations, Lord over the sun, the moon, the stars, the land, the oceans, the mountains, the birds, animals, and fish. Yes, and the weather, and politics – He is sovereign over all. And although there are a lot of Christians who don’t believe what I am now going to say, He is the Lord over salvation too.

This is wonderful, wonderful truth! Life would be a terrible burden if this were not true. Would you possibly change this great truth for mere chance, or some mysterious, uncontrolled fate? This is what gives meaning to life. This is what holds us when things happen that hurt us. Thank God that it is still true. Our Lord Jesus Christ is still in sovereign control over the whole universe and everything in it. And this includes the Devil and all of his demons.

“And by Him all things consist.” The word “consist,” συνίστημι, means *to hold together*. Bishop Moule said about this word,

He is not their Cause only, in an initial sense; He is for ever their Bond, their Order, their Law, the ultimate Secret which makes the whole Universe, seen and unseen, a Cosmos, not a Chaos (p. 78).

And then Bishop Moule, who was so blessed of God with the ability to express the truth of the Word in such glorious terms, went on to speak of the glory of our Savior in words that I have to pass on to you. Listen to what he said:

Thus far the adoring Theologian [referring to Paul] has glorified and expounded the Son of God in His relation to Creation, to Nature, to the Universe. Have we listened to him with a full apprehension of the grandeur and significance of the utterance? And have we appreciated its wonder, as we remember of Whom he speaks— the Bring Who so recently had lived in a Galilean town, and suffered a violent death (as we are reminded of few verses below) outside the walls of Jerusalem? This is an aspect of New Testament Christology always surprising and impressive. The Apostles never for a moment forget the historical life and death of their Master; they say so much about it that from their Epistles, and their discourses in the Acts, we can reconstruct a tolerable outline of the story of the Gospels. How could it be otherwise, when those “days of the Son of Man” were well within the adult experience of people who were only elderly when this Epistle was written? Yet in the same breath, and without the slightest apparent strain or effort, they speak of Him, they deal with Him, as the Lord of heaven and earth, nay, in this passage as the infinite Cause and adequate end of all finite existence. And this transcendent view of the Person whose biography in Palestine yet lies so clear, and so near, to their eyes is no excrescence [abnormal development] of their thought, or intrusion [the act of wrongfully taking possession of their thought] into it; it conditions their whole character, it animates, governs, sanctifies, glorifies their being,

while it leaves it perfectly sane and sober in the midst of human life.

There is no really accounting for such a creed, *so held, and so lived*, except . . . that it was the expression of a fact, the supreme fact of all, that “the Son, [Who] is the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, very and Eternal God,” “for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate, and was made Man, and suffered for us, and rose again” [a quotation from Article ii of the English Church and the Nicene Creed]. Blessed be His Name to which every knee shall bow (pp. 78-80).

But I can’t stop there from quoting one more paragraph from Bishop Moule on this point. This is how he concludes his comments on verse 17:

In passing, let us remember the pregnant import of this passage, in which the Son is revealed to us as Cause, Head, and Goal of the created Universe. How much it has to say to us! For one thing, it binds both “worlds,” the seen and unseen, the material and spiritual, in one under one Head. And this is a precious gain when our hearts fail us on the border-line between the two. For another thing, it sanctifies “Nature” to us, and makes its immeasurable heights and depths at once safe and radiant with the Name of Jesus Christ. It connects the remotest star detected by the photographic plate with Him. It bids us, when we feel as if lost in the enormity of space and time, fall back upon the Center of Both—for that center is our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us. In Him they hold together. He knows all about them, the mystery of space, the mystery of time, great to us, are no mysteries to Him (pp. 80, 81).

This is pure Theology. Or to be more exact, it is pure Christology – the doctrine of Christ. And yet Bishop Moule helps us to see how practical theology is. These truths are the very source of our peace. And in these truths concerning our Lord and His sovereignty over the seen and the unseen, we see our hope. As Peter said at the beginning of his first epistle:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time

(1 Peter 1:3-5).

Our Lord Jesus Christ Who created the heavens and the earth, and Who has sustained them from the first day of creation, and will sustain them even when we have the new heaven and the new earth, is the One Who has begotten us as His Son, is keeping us on earth for our inheritance, and is keeping our inheritance in heaven for us.

But this is not all that the Apostle Paul had to say about the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, His glory as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Now we move on to a new subject having to do with His glory: *He is the Head of His body, the Church!*

1:18 The Apostle Paul did not attempt to explain what he meant by “the church,” and so we must assume that he knew that the Colossian believers had received that teaching, probably from Epaphras. We all should know that it is mainly in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians that Paul discusses the Church – both the Church the body of Christ, and local churches. We also have Paul’s Pastoral Epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus, where he discussed local churches, their organization and their ministry.

In 1 Corinthians 12:13 we are told how we are made members of the Church, the body of Christ. We were baptized by the Spirit into this body. And the first occurrence of the baptism of the Spirit was on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. So that is where the Church, the body of Christ, was born. And everyone who has been saved since that time has been made a part of Christ’s body, the Church.

As I have already indicated, the word *church* is used two different ways in the NT. We speak of the Church which is Christ's body, and we are speaking of all believers who have been saved since Acts 2. Many are in heaven today, and we are still on earth. But we are all Christ's body. We have been united with Him in a union that will never be dissolved. And the word "body" suggests that there is a parallel between the human body and the Church, the body of Christ. Paul indicated this when he said in Romans 12:4-5,

4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

But we also have local churches. Originally there was the church in Jerusalem, the church in Colosse, the church in Rome, etc. As time has gone on we have Baptist churches, Presbyterian churches, Bible churches, and so on. Only those groups can really be considered true NT churches if they hold to the doctrines of Scripture, and exist for the glory of God and for the edification, or building up, of the people of God. So there are a lot of organizations which call themselves churches which are not churches at all according to the true meaning of the word as it is used in the NT.

Paul here in Col. 1:18 was not just talking about the church in Colosse, but he was speaking of believers everywhere. I personally do not believe it is right for us to speak of Trinity Bible Church, or any other true NT local church as the body of Christ. The body of Christ is what we sometimes speak of as *the universal Church*, made up of all believers, regardless of who they are, or where they live, or whatever language they may speak.

Paul was not only saying here that there is such a Church, but he was saying that it is Christ Who is the Head of the Church. What did He mean? Well, He meant that Christ bears the same relationship to the Church that He bears to creation. He is the supreme authority over the Church. He is the Source of all of the blessings of the Church. Apart from Him the Church cannot exist. Eadie said, "The King of the universe is able to be Head of the Church, and He has won the Headship with His blood. It is no eminence to which He is not entitled, no function which He cannot worthily discharge" (p. 64).

November 13, 2000

As most of you have heard before, the Greek word for *church* is ἐκκλησία. It is formed from the Greek verb ἐκκαλέω, a verb, which as far as I know, is not used in the NT. But it means *to summon forth*, as in the calling of an assembly. Lit. it means, *to call out of*. And so the church is a called-out people, called out of the world, called out of sin, called out of the kingdom of evil, and called to God. God does the calling. As the Lord Jesus said in His high priestly prayer, John 17, we are *in the world*, but not *of the world*.

In a practical sense this means that the church is not to do what it is doing today. *It is not to employ the methods of the world in an attempt to draw unbelievers into the church. The church does not have a witness to the world by becoming like the world, but by being what the Lord wants us to be.* The Lord did not employ worldly measures to do the work of the Father in His day, nor were the apostles worldly in their ministries. When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians, and mentioned divine election as the first blessing that we have in Christ, he said this:

According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him (Eph. 1:4).

The people of the world are incapable of being holy, or of doing holy things. Therefore, if we employ the world's methods, we are defeating ourselves as far as true spiritual blessing is concerned. Crowds may come to see the performances that churches put on. They may flock to hear a man who has made himself an entertainer. But the true blessing of God comes only as we do His work in His way. People are saved through the simple preaching of the Gospel, and believers are built up through the faithful teaching of the Word. That is where the

power is, not in all of the churches spectacular productions. To use worldly methods is to sow to the flesh, and the Apostle Paul has told us that if we sow to the flesh, all we can reap is corruption. This is what we learn from Gal. 6:7-8:

7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

And Paul also said in Ephesians 5 what His purpose for the Church, the body of Christ, is. Let me read to you what he said. Christ gave Himself for the Church,

26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:26-27).

The word “Head,” of course, is a figure of speech intended to convey a great truth. The words “head” and “body” remind us immediately of our human bodies. Our heads are where our brains are. The direction of our bodies is determined from our heads. And so the Church takes its guidance from Christ, our Head.

John MacArthur pointed out that of all of the metaphors used in the Bible to describe the relationship between Christ and His Church, none is as profound as this one. And he added that it has “no Old Testament equivalent” (*Colossians and Philemon*, p. 51). Christ and His Church have an inseparable union. In 1 Corinthians 12 we have Paul’s main exposition of this great truth.

Griffith Thomas has an interesting paragraph in his commentary on Colossians with reference to Christ as the Head of the Church. This is what he said:

The thought of Christ as the Head of the Church implies three great principles in the spiritual realm as well as in the physical, viz.[usually read, *namely* – an abbreviation of *videlicet* which means *it is easy to see, one may or can see*], life, unity, and sovereignty. He is at once the source of our spiritual life, the guarantor of all spiritual unity, and the supreme spiritual authority. He is the One Who, because He bestows life, controls all believers, who are therefore expected to render Him love and loyalty. The more completely this fact of our union with Christ as the Head is realized, the fuller will be the expression of our spiritual life in fellowship and in obedience as members of His body (p. 52).

“Who is the beginning” – This means that it was the Lord Jesus Christ Who brought the Church into existence, and so He existed before there was a Church. He was the originating power of the Church (Lightfoot But it also means that continues to be the Chief One over the Church. And so it strengthens the idea that Christ is our Head.

“The firstborn from the dead” – The Greek is the *πρωτότοκος*. The Lord Jesus was not the first to be raised from the dead, but He was the first to be raised never to die again. He, by His own death and resurrection, conquered death and all of its powers. His resurrection to glory assures our resurrection. This is what Paul had in mind when, quoting from Psalm 68:18, he wrote in Eph. 4:8-10,

8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

9(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

And in Hebrews 2, verses 14 and 15 we read this of our Lord Jesus Christ:

14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

It was because of His coming death and resurrection, that He said in John 14:19, “Because I live, ye shall live also.”

This great truth of the unique resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the reason that Paul could write in 1 Cor. 15:50-58,

50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54 So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

“That in all things He might have the preeminence.” What is the meaning of “the preeminence”? This means that He holds first place “in all things” – and the context show *first in creation* and *first in the Church*. Jesus Christ is the Supreme One in creation and in the Church, but also in the realm of the dead as well as in the realm of the living. There is none greater than He is. He is Lord of all!

Bishop Moule, in his characteristic way, tells how he was informed by Dean Howson about hearing the aged Charles Simeon as he preached in his pulpit at Cambridge University in or about the year 1835. The Dean heard Simeon utter in a very impassioned way, “that in all things He might have the preeminence.” He said that he “saw the form of the aged preacher actually rise in height as the soul erected the body to bear witness to the Redeemer’s glory.” He said that “the effect was strong and thrilling. But the words and action were after all only the *just* utterance of a faithful servant consenting from his heart to *the fact* of his Lord’s glory, and of His Father’s purpose for the Son of His love” (Moule, p. 84).

But then Bishop Moule continued:

So let our hearts take them up today. For the Universe, for the Church, Christ is and must be ‘preeminently’ the First, the Head. And therefore this He must be, He will be, He shall be, not only to the world and the Church, but to me the creature of His will, the believer in His promise (*Op. cit.*, pp. 84, 85).

In 3 John we read of a certain man named Diotrephes, and this is what the Apostle John said about him:

9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.

10 Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us [falsely accusing the Apostle John] with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

11 Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God (3 John 9-11).

There have been many men since the church began who sought to make themselves preeminent, thus usurping the place that the Lord has in His Church. Someone coined the words “church boss” for the likes of Diotrephes. But not even in a local church will the Lord tolerate anyone else who tries to be the preeminent one.

Christ alone has the preeminence.

Dr. A. T. Robertson, whom I often quote when dealing with the Greek NT, taught for many years at the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. In his comments on the Greek in 3 John 9, he made this interesting statement:

Some forty years ago I wrote an article on Diotrephes for a denominational paper. The editor told me that twenty-five deacons stopped the paper to show their resentment against being personally attacked in the paper (VI, 263).

Politicians seem to think that they hold the destiny of nations in their hands. But one by one they have all fallen. Some who are on the scene today are destined for the same judgment. Christ is preeminent over all! People generally have not recognized that He alone has that position, but someday they will when He is crowned King of kings and Lord of lords. All of us need to recognize the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives, and submit ourselves to His gracious will every day.

1:19 In this verse we have an indication of what some of the false teachers in Colosse were teaching. The Gnostics were spreading the idea that God had revealed Himself in what they called *emanations*. By this they meant some deity was to be seen in angels. They denied that the “fulness” of Deity was in Christ. Part of it may have been in Him, but certainly not all. And this is where the worship of angels (2:18) because they were considered as emanations of Deity. To some of these teachers, Christ may have been a part of the revelation of God, but certainly not all! But here Paul flatly declared that “it pleased the Father that in Him,” that is in Christ, “should ALL fulness dwell.” “Fulness” in the Greek is τὸ πλήρωμα. He was not just one of many emanations, but He was the One and only revelation of God. All the fulness of Deity was in Him, the Man Christ Jesus! Cf. also Col. 2:8-10.

Many times has the question been asked, “What effect did becoming a Man have upon the Deity of our Lord?” The answer is right here in this verse: It had no effect! All the fulness of God continued to dwell permanently (so, the meaning of the aorist) in Him.

And then anticipating what is to come in verse 20, listen to Bishop Moule again:

Once more the Apostle’s great flight of worshiping thought pauses, not to alight but as it were to hover (pro-nounced like *cover*) which it prepares for a new movement. As it stays (between verses 19 and 20), let us rest awhile, in wonder and in faith. Let us take another long look upwards at this blessed Son of the Father’s love, Cause and Corner-stone of the Universe, visible and invisible, Head of the Church . . . Behold Him; He is Tabernacle forever of the eternal Plenitude, Bearer of His Incarnation of Godhead itself, and therefore infinite Fountain for us of every resource which we need for life and holiness (p. 89).

But then moving on to verse 20, Bishop Moule continued:

Let us see this most mysterious Being nailed there with nails, and crowned with thorns, and torn by the Roman lance; a dying, agonizing human frame yielding up a disembodied human spirit. And let us measure by such a Death, demanded, exacted, endured, accomplished, the immensity of our need as sinners, and the immensity also of the reconciliation which is now for us – not to make, but to take. To Him be glory (pp. 89, 90).

Let us see what he had in mind as we move on to verse 20.

1:20 This One, “the image of the invisible God,” the Creator of heaven and earth, the great Head of the Church, is the very One Who by His blood, has made peace for us. How could anything be more

incredible than this?

I don't want to wear you out by one quotation after another, but I must pass on to you what John Eadie has said about the infinite glory of Christ robed in humanity as He came to earth to reconcile us to God. John Eadie had this to say, and it is so much better than what I could have said, that I pass his words on to you. Speaking of our Lord, he wrote:

No eclipse shall sully the splendours of His nature. What He has been, He is, and He shall be. Nor is His Essence bounded by any circumference, but it is everywhere, undiluted by boundless extension. His mind comprises all probabilities, and has decided all certainties. His power know no limit of operation, and is unexhausted by (any) effort. His truth is pure as the solar beam, and the fulness of infinite love dwells in His heart. But such divine glory is common to the Godhead, and He shares it equally with (the) Father and (the) Spirit. Even here, however, He is first; for He has visibility, which the Father and the Spirit have not; and He is the God of the universe, whom it sees, recognizes, and adores. Nay, more, He has cast a new lustre over His original glory by His incarnation and death. He has won for Himself an imperishable renown. This dignity so earned by Him is especially called His own, in contradistinction from His prior and essential glory, and it is His peculiar and valued possession. Robed in His native majesty, which has been augmented by the mediatorial crown, is He not the most glorious Being in the universe? (Eadie, p. 68).

Is it then any wonder that the Lord prayed to His Father as He did in John 17:24?

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world (John 17:24).

The Greek of this verse begins with the middle of the verse as it appears in the KJV. The NASB renders it as it is in the Greek:

And through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven (Col. 1:20 - NASB).

This is the primary purpose for which Christ came, to reconcile to God those for whom He died. The verb is a form found only here, then in verse 22, and in Eph. 2:16. Paul's usual verb for reconcile is καταλλάσσω. But here is it ἀποκαταλλάσσω. And it is a first aorist infinitive, to show, according to Robertson, "the idea of complete reconciliation" (IV, pp. 480, 481). This means that Christ not only made a full reconciliation for those He died for, but as the verse goes on to show, provision was made in the death of Christ to restore the universe from the effects of man's sin. This is brought out in verse 20 by the words, "whether things on earth or things in heaven." And it is in harmony with Paul's passage in Rom. 8:19-23 where I am reading from the NKJV:

19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God.

20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;

21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:19-23 - NKJV).

And so here we run into a truth which we do not often think about in connection with the death of Christ. As Robertson has said, "Sin somehow has put the universe out of joint. Christ will set it right (IV, 481).

But the cost of our reconciliation with God could not have been higher. It was obtained and guaranteed for us by the blood of Christ. Again we turn to the book of Romans, this time to chapter 5 and verses 10 and 11:

10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being

reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

11 And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement (Rom. 5:10-11).

The word which the KJV has translated “atonement” is the Greek word for *reconciliation*. We were at enmity with God because of our sins. God Himself, while we were still at enmity with Him, sent His Son to reconcile us and to make us the friends of God. What grace! We weren’t asking for it. There is no evidence that we wanted it. But God did, and so He sent His Son to die that His chosen ones might be saved.

But beyond what the death of Christ means to us, it is through that death that even creation itself will be restored in a new heaven and a new earth. What a mighty work the Son of God accomplished when He died upon the Cross.

But let us go on to verse 21.

November 20, 2000

1:21 Here the Apostle Paul indicated that the primary purpose of the work of Christ on the Cross, was the reconciliation of His people. How powerfully and with what blessing, must it have reached the hearts of the first readers of this epistle when they heard those precious words, “And you.” And Paul covered the whole history of every child of God in verses 21 and 22.

Bishop Moule drew a distinction between pure and applied theology. Pure theology is the doctrine, the truth about Christ, and about His death, and resurrection. Applied theology is the effect that pure theology has upon people when applied by God. And so verses 21 and 22 has to do with applied theology.

Here Paul rehearses again what we all were before we were saved – “sometime alienated and enemies in [our minds] by wicked works.” The word “sometime” means *once*, or *at one time*. What Paul was about to say speaks of the past history of every child of God. None of us realized at the time the truth about ourselves, but after the Lord saved us we began to realize that there was absolutely no reason why the Lord should have saved any of us. And what makes our salvation even more incredible is that God sent His Son to die for sinners who didn’t even want to be saved, who didn’t even know that they needed to be saved. And what Paul said here about the Colossian Christians in the past, is true of all people who have not been saved *in the present!*

“Alienated” – We were estranged from God. We kept our distance from Him, and the affection which we should have shown toward Him was channeled in some other direction. This was demonstrated by Adam and Eve after they had sinned because “they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord”(Gen. 3:8). Not only is man not seeking God, but he does all that he can to stay away from Him. He wants to avoid any contact with Him. So when we became concerned about our relationship to God, it was not because of anything in us, but it was evidence that God was seeking us. Paul, in Rom. 3:11, quoting Psa. 14 and Psa. 53, said, “There is none that seeketh after God.”

And so we should not be surprised that Paul also said that we were “enemies.” This is to be seen in an increasing way here in “Christian America.” It is a definite hindrance for a politician to let it be known that he is a Christian. Our police still is in plenty of trouble because of convictions he expressed several years which are supported by the Scriptures. I am very sorry that he did not stand by what he had said. But you see, there are enemies of God who are after him. I just heard this week that we are to stop calling what is coming up the Christmas season; it is the Holiday Season. Christians talk about putting Christ back in Christmas, but the world wants Him OUT! Why? Because as our Bibles teach us that they are really enemies of God. And

enemies go to war! In fact, the word *enemy* implies hostility. Sometimes this takes the form of just seeking to avoid anything that has to do with God. Many people have realized that becoming a Christian made their friends drop them.

But notice also in this verse that Paul said “enemies in your mind by wicked works.” When Paul spoke of his own salvation, and what he had done toward Christians and toward Christ before he was saved, he said that he “obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13). That is why it is so important to give people the Word. Only through the truth of the Word of God can that ignorance be taken away. That is why Solomon said in the book of Proverbs, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Prov. 4:7). He was not promoting a college education; he was promoting the wisdom of God which is contained in the Word of God. When our Lord was hanging on the Cross, do you remember how He prayed for the mob stretched out before Him. He said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). And let me remind you of what Paul said along this line in his first letter to the Corinthian church:

6 Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought:

7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:

8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:6-8).

We have all of the trouble that we have in the world today because people aren’t thinking straight. They have minds that are at enmity against God and His Word. So they don’t see what’s wrong with adultery, and what’s wrong with abortion, or what’s wrong with a homosexual relationship. “God is not in all their thoughts” (Psa. 10:4). “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psa. 14:1). The Hebrew text actually says just, “No God,” which probably means, No God for me! No man can really be an honest atheist, but men by nature say, “No God for me.”

So when a person becomes a Christian, one of the first things he realizes is that his thinking has to be changed. And that could not be stated any clearer than it is in Rom. 12:1-2:

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

And know what all of this alienation from God and enmity produces: “wicked works.” This means that they do sinful things. It is true without exception that what a man does shows the place that God has in his life. If he is an alien from God, at enmity with God, it is inevitable that his life will be full of “wicked works.” I am not saying that every man is a criminal by the laws of the land, but I am saying that every man by nature is a criminal according to the laws of God. The world hates the idea of sin. Everybody ought to be free to do what he wants to do as long as he is not hurting someone else. The moment you talk about sin, you bring God into the picture, and the world doesn’t want to think about God. But that is where we need to realize that it is our ignorance of God’s wisdom that is leading farther and farther down in this life, and on toward eternal doom. Do you not think that sin is bad? Then look at the Cross. It took the death of God’s beloved Son to save us from the penalty of our sin, and there is no other remedy for sin but the death of the sinless Son of God. If it took the death of Christ to save me from my sins, then my sins were very, very bad in God’s sight. In chapter 2, verse 8, Paul said this:

Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the

rudiments of the world, and not after Christ (Col. 2:8).

The NKJV translates it this way:

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ (Col. 2:8).

The NIV translates this way:

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ (Col. 2:8).

The wisdom of this world will “spoil” us, “cheat” us, “take us captive.”

What is the big problem in raising children? It is the fact that they have hearts that are alienated from God, and are at enmity with Him. It is hard to realize that when you look at a little child, but that little child can grow up to break your heart if the Lord Jesus Christ does not intervene in his life to reconcile Him to God.

Now just think of all of the evidence that we have piled up from this one verse concerning every human being that was ever born into this world.. And then look again at the first two words of verse 21, and then at the last five words. “And you . . . yet now hath He reconciled.” Who makes the change that you see in a true child of God? Are Christians self-made saints? Of course not! Paul said, “And you . . . yet now hath HE (God) reconciled”! It is not that He will reconcile us, but He has reconciled us. We are reconciled to God NOW. And how do we as Christians feel about God? We love Him. We are so grateful to Him for what He has done in our lives through Christ. And we want to please Him, to live our lives for Him. What a change! And it is all due to the amazing mercy and grace of God.

But notice that in the KJV at least, there is no period after reconciled in verse 21. In verse 22 he tells us again how we were reconciled, and WHY?

1:22 We were reconciled “in the body of His flesh through death.” “The body of His flesh” speaks of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God humbled Himself, and we can say that He humiliated Himself, to become a Man, that He might die for human sinners. But, as Paul said, and as Dr. Ironside enlarged upon it, “it is not the holy, wondrous life of Christ that has thus reconciled us. It is His sacrificial death” (p. 51). His “holy, wondrous life” showed that He was absolutely sinless, and so He was the fulfillment of all of those animal sacrifices in OT times that had to be “without blemish.” As those words are applied to Christ they mean that He was absolutely sinless, absolutely holy. If He had been a sinner, He would have needed a Savior, and He couldn’t have saved us. By His death He removed from us the reason for our enmity, and all charges that were against us were placed upon Him. His death is what resulted in our reconciliation. As Isaiah predicted about 700 years before Christ came,

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 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.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isa.53:4-6).

Bishop Moule saw in the reference to Christ’s body a foreshadowing of the Church, the Body of Christ. We know from other passages that we were joined to Christ in His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. And so Bishop Moule said that it is “as if already mystically” (p. 96) we were members of His body. And so we have profited more than we can understand now from His death.

But what is the ultimate purpose of our reconciliation to God? The last part of verse 22 tells us. It is “to

present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight.” Let us look carefully into the meaning of each of those words so that we can understand our destiny as believers.

“To present you holy” – This means *to stand beside us to exhibit us as the results of His work, not only on the Cross, but also of that continuing work of sanctification whereby we are made holy*. What a contrast there will be between what we were by nature and what we are to become by grace. “Holy” means *morally pure, sinless, absolutely pure*.

When Peter wrote to the believers who had been scattered throughout the Roman Empire because of their faith in Christ, and this is what he said, emphasizing Paul’s words here in Col. 1:22:

13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy (1 Peter 1:13-16).

We are to be making progress in holiness now, in anticipation of that day when the Lord comes when we will be perfectly holy. We are saints now, but we will be totally saintly then. The Apostle John said that “we shall be like Him,” speaking of Christ, “for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). So Paul has in mind in our text that time ahead when the Lord shall come, and we will not only be with Him, but like Him! Just think, He saves His enemies, and makes them holy like He is. There can be no greater change.

“Unblameable” is our next word. Let us remember that these words represent what we will be before God and Christ. Our acceptance before God will be complete and eternal. So that “unblameable” means *without blemish*. God will not see anything in us of which He disapproves.

And so we will be “unproveable in His sight.” There will be no charges that God Himself can bring against us so complete is the work of reconciliation.

Jude 24-25 give us this same truth:

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Lenski in his commentary pointed out that “holy” basically means “separate unto God, the opposite of being in a state of alienation” (p. 70), unblameable, “without spot or wrinkle,” and unproveable, so completely acceptable to God that God will not accuse us, and so no one else can either. We will truly be trophies of the grace of God, as Paul said in Ephesians, “that we should be to the praise of His glory” (Eph. 1:12). No child of God could possibly make such changes in himself. It is only by the grace of God and the working of the Godhead that enemies of God can become perfected saints.

But this section of Colossians ends with a word of warning in verse 23.

1:23 We have been going over some glorious truths, truths full of assurance for every believer. But Paul knew then, and we know now, that not everyone who professes to be a Christian, is in fact a Christian. But the Bible gives us several ways to check ourselves. One of them, a major one, is in this verse. Paul spoke of *continuing in the faith*.

There is an interesting passage along this line in 1 Timothy 4, beginning with verse 1. Let me read it to you.

1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

By this he meant two things, and this is what Paul also had in mind in Col. 1:23:

1) He meant that they no longer held to *the doctrines of the faith*.

2) But he also meant that they had departed from *the practice of the faith*.

There is another example in chapter 6 of 1 Timothy, which has this to say:

9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses (1 Tim. 6:9-12).

To depart from the faith is for sure to turn away from the great doctrines of Scripture: the inspiration of the Word of God, the depravity of man, the Deity of Christ, salvation by faith alone in a crucified, risen, and glorified Christ, the reality of hell, and a place called heaven. And it is this last point that the Apostle Paul was concerned about – “the hope of the Gospel.” But we will come back to this in just a moment.

November 27, 2000

The “if” in verse 23 does not imply doubt about the Colossian believers, but it was to serve as a warning to every believer. And it comes to us today in the same way. In a way it was similar to Peter’s instruction “to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10). What Paul was saying here in Colossians was as suggested by Eadie, “If, as is the case, you continue on in the faith . . .”

There is a definite relationship between the words “grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.” If we are “grounded,” we will be “settled,” and that will make us immovable as far as the hope of the Gospel is concerned.

“Grounded” – This was the verb which the Lord used as He closed His Sermon on the Mount. I am sure you will remember the illustration that He used as He appealed for those who heard Him to be obedient to His words. And this is what He said,

24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock (Matt. 7:24-25).

Here the word is translated “founded.”

We find this verb again in Heb 1:10:

And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands:

And then Paul said, “settled..” By this he meant that the believer who was “grounded” would be firmly convinced of the truth. He would not be, in the words of Eph. 4:14, “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” Do you know people who profess to be Christians, and yet they seem to take up with every new thing that comes along? That is actually very common in our day. These are the kind of people who seek their doctrine outside of the church instead of inside of the church, and so they never get settled. Parachurch organizations claim to be able to put new life into Christians, but they burst forth with a blaze of glory, but then they gradually fade away. The tragedy in the present day is that churches are not teaching, and many pastors just wait in hope that someone is going to come along to give them the answers that they want for their own church. What is greatly needed today are pastors and churches who are devoted to teaching the Word of God. It ought to be the case that the church is where people go to get the truth. But since churches are failing to teach, people, pastors included, are quick to follow almost anything that comes along.

But there is a third expression in this series, isn’t there? It is the verb, “and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel.” This is the only time this word is used in the NT. And it means just exactly what it says. It describes the person who moves away from the hope of the Gospel, to something else, to anything else.

We all should be reminded that Paul had already written about the hope of the Gospel. You will find what he had to say in verse 5 of Colossians 1. (Read Col. 1:5.) Remember that “hope” often means in the NT *a certain future prospect*. What is the ultimate goal of our salvation? Is it to get us to heaven? Yes, but is that all? No! What else is it? *It is to get us to heaven transformed into the very likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The Apostle John stated it as simply and clearly as it can be found anywhere in the NT. Listen to his words found in 1 John 3:1-3:

- 1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.
- 2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.
- 3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

What is it that the Scriptures teach as the goal of our salvation? It is sanctification. It is that we are to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” *Nothing must replace this hope in our hearts. Nothing else must be the primary concern that motivates us every day that we live.* It is not some new doctrine, some new philosophy. When those false teachers came to Colosse with their doctrine about worshipping angels, everybody in the church should have known that they were phonies. The Bible doesn’t teach us to worship angels. In fact, it teaches us NOT to worship angels. The Bible doesn’t teach us that we have to go beyond Christ to learn about God. It teaches that the fulness of the Godhead is in Him. The Bible doesn’t teach us that there are some things we have to do in order to be saved, like being baptized, or keeping the Law. It teaches us that it took the death of Christ to put away our sins, and the only way we can be saved is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Only God can take guilty, defiled sinners, and turn them into saints. Look on down here in Col. 1 to verse 27, and you will see that it is “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” You may be trying to do your best, but if you are not in Christ, trusting only in Him, there is no hope for you! And believers who are “grounded and settled” are not going to move away to some other man-made hope. People in the world don’t like for us to say that Christ is the only Savior, but we would be lying if we said anything else. That is the only message for people wherever or whoever they might be. Go to Japan, or India, or Romania, or South Africa, or Argentina, or any other place, the message is always the same. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). “Neither is there salvation in any other: for thee is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

In saying that the Gospel “was preached to every creature which is under heaven,” “Paul does not say that all

men are converted, but only that the message has been heralded abroad over the Roman Empire in a wider fashion than most people imagine” (Robertson, IV, 483). And they did this without radio, or TV, and without any of the means of transportation that we have today.

“The faith,” as I have said many, many times, is that doctrine, that teaching, of the Word of God. And we must stand steadfastly on that, and never be moved away from it. But you have to know it if you are going to stand on it. That is why we teach the Bible. It is only by the Word of God that we can stand.

Paul has been speaking of “the glory of Christ.” His glory is His Deity. No one ever walked upon the earth who was as great as He. He was the eternal Son of the living God Who took upon Himself human flesh that He might be to us a merciful and faithful High Priest, guaranteeing our salvation by His death and resurrection, and by His present intercessory ministry on our behalf at the right hand of God. He is our Creator, and the One Who holds this universe together. And He is the Head of the Church of which all believers are the Body. And He has been given these unique places “that in all things He might have the preeminence,” which means, as we have seen, that He might be first. And so He must be first in each of our lives as well.

The last statement of this verse is a transition to the next section: “Whereof I Paul am made a minister.” Paul knew what his calling was. He had not made himself a minister, but this had been a work of God. He who before had been a fierce and tireless enemy of Christ, of Christians, and of the Gospel, became, by the grace of God, a tireless and passionate preacher of the Gospel of Christ. Paul mentioned in his letter to the churches of Galatia that after he was saved, he was “unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ:”

23 But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.

24 And they glorified God in me (Gal. 1:22-24).

The Greek word for “minister” and again in verse 25, is δῆακονος, the word from which we get our English word, deacon. But here it is used not as belonging to that office which was later a part of the leadership of the church, but in its basic meaning of “*of one who executes the commands of another*” (Thayer, p. 138). Paul here was indicating that the Lord was His Master, and that his objective in his ministry was to do the will of the Lord. When he was saved, the Lord took his desire to be the chief one in Judaism, and gave him the desire and will to devote his life in service to the Lord Jesus Christ as a member of the Church, the body of Christ..

The Apostle’s message was Christ, the glory of Christ, the Gospel of Christ. Now we move on to the next point in our outline, **The Apostle’s Mission (Col. 1:24-2:23)**.

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle
to the
Colossians
November 27, 2000 – Colossians 1:24-2:23

III. The Apostle's Mission (Col. 1:24-2:23).

The first point under this heading is:

A. His deep concern and his objectives (Col. 1:24-2:5).

1:24 We are reminded as we come to this verse that Paul was writing as a prisoner of Rome. And he told the Colossian believers, who were predominantly Gentiles, that it was because of his ministry to Gentiles that he was where he was. But he was not sorry about it. Instead he was rejoicing in it, not that he enjoyed the imprisonment, but he rejoiced that he had been able to reach the Gentiles with the Gospel even though it meant imprisonment for him. And we need to recognize that he was not saying that he was completing the work of Christ in salvation, but in saying that he was filling “up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in [his] flesh for His body's sake, which is the church,” he was saying that His sufferings were sufferings that belonged to Christ, and that he was experiencing the continuation of the opposition which the Lord Jesus Christ experienced while He was here on earth. The Lord had warned His disciples that this would be the case. In John 15:18-21 we have these words:

18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me (John 15:18-21).

So the sufferings of Paul were not supplemental to those of Christ, but similar, and for the same reasons that our Lord suffered. There always has been, and there always will be, an intensive hatred in the natural heart of man for the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Man rejects the idea that he is totally depraved, and that nothing short of the death of Christ would secure his acceptance with God.

The word “behind” indicates that in the purpose of God there will be suffering for the people of God because of their relationship to Christ. So what he was experiencing was not a part of the atonement, but a completing of the opposition that the body of Christ will experience until the Lord removes His church from the earth.

1:25 “Whereof” refers back to “the church” at the end of verse 24. The Apostle Paul was the Lord's servant to the Church. And so he said that it was “according to the dispensation of God, which is given to me for you, to fulfill the Word of God.”

A “dispensation” is a stewardship. It was Paul to whom the truth concerning the Church was primarily revealed, and this and all that is related to us, was given to Paul “to fulfill the Word of God” – not in the sense that prophecy is fulfilled, but in the sense that God's revelation to His people was completed.

God had revealed His Word for fifteen hundred years before Christ came. This takes us back to the days of Moses who wrote the first five books of the Bible. These take us back long before Moses' day. Genesis takes us back before time began. So Moses was able to write about conditions long before his lifetime, at least 2,500 years before he was born. So the revelation itself in the OT dates back about 4,000 years. There were about 400 years after the completion of the OT with the prophecy of Malachi until Christ came. Now the question

would be, “Will the revelation God gives in His Word continue on until time is no more and we have the new heaven and new earth which Isaiah spoke of?” Cf. Isa. 65:17; 66:22. And the answer to that question is, “No!” In less than 100 years after the birth of Christ, the written revelation was completed with the writings of the Apostle John. And the primary addition that we have in the NT to what was given in the OT, is the revelation of the Church, the Body of Christ – and, as we have already seen here in Colossians 1, of Christ as the Head of the Church.

So now, after almost 2,000 years there has been no new revelation from God. And there will be no further revelations from God. Those who claim to have had an additional revelation, are false teachers, and we should pay no attention to their claims. And I am speaking of Mary Baker Eddy and Judge Rutherford and all of the rest of them. And this includes even believers who claim that God has spoken to them. *It is important for all of us to believe that the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments give us the completed revelation of God.*

Then, consistent with the truth that we had in Ephesians, Paul introduced in verse 26 the word “mystery.”

1:26 This is a very important word in the study of the NT, the word “mystery.” And it has a very special meaning in the NT.

Let us think, first, of what it usually means when we speak of *a mystery*.

The dictionary defines *a mystery* as something that has not been, or cannot be, explained, or something that is beyond human comprehension. We usually associate the word *mystery* with the Sherlock Holmes stories. TV makes constant use of the word *mystery* referring to some story that they don’t want you to figure out until the very end of the program.

But the dictionary also tells us that sometimes the word *mystery* refers to *a secret*. Many lodges have their secrets, and you are not supposed to know what those secrets are unless you have been initiated into the membership of that particular organization.

The word *mystery*, or its plural, *mysteries*, is found twenty-seven times in the NT. And several times it is defined so that we will not be confused as to its meaning. Let us turn to Ephesians 3, and you follow as I read the first eleven verses. (Read.)

Notice that Paul said that a mystery is truth that has been hidden, not in the OT, *but in God!* And yet it is not *an afterthought* because it is “according to the eternal purpose” of God, as we are told in Eph. 1:11.

So it is truth that God had not before revealed, but truth which He has now revealed, truth which we as the people of God are expected to know just like we have learned the rest of the teachings of Scripture – by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.

Turn also to the last three verses in Romans – Rom. 16:25-27 – where Paul again defined a NT mystery.

Then turn over a page to 1 Cor. 2:6-10.

Now let us go back to Col. 1:26 where we have the same meaning given to the word *mystery*.

As Paul indicated in 1 Corinthians, all of Scripture is beyond the ability of man to understand, but God reveals to us individually by the Holy Spirit the meaning of Scripture, and this includes those truths which are called

mysteries in the NT. But a mystery is a truth that God has kept secret until the time that He has ordained that it should be made known. So don't look for the Church in the OT. It isn't there! There may be types of the Church, but the actual revelation of the Church was reserved until NT times, and follows the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so Paul said, "But now is made manifest to His saints." "Is made manifest" is the translation of the Greek verb, φανερώω, which speaks of an external manifestation such as we have in the written Word of God. It is there, we might say, "in black and white." But what is in the Word, needs to be personally revealed to those of us who are "His saints."

1:27 "To whom," that is, from verse 26, "to His saints . . . God would make known," that is, subjectively to each and every believer, but as far as Paul was concerned, *to Gentile believers*, "the riches of the glory of this mystery . . . which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." The NKJV renders "would make known" as "willed to make known," which is much stronger, and more in line with the Greek text.

And so as Eadie said,

The saints did not discover the mystery: the development of Christianity sprang neither from the philanthropy nor their ingenuity, but it was God Who unfolded the mystery in all wisdom and prudence (p. 96).

It is very apparent from Scripture that God is infinitely more concerned that we know the truth than we are to learn what God has revealed.

It is amazing to know that "Christ died for us," and we will never, at least in this life, be able to take in the full significance of those four words, but then to add to that, "Christ is you," we are far, far beyond anything that we as redeemed sinners would ever be true of us. And yet it is! Who could doubt the eternal character of salvation if he is acquainted with these three words, "Christ in you"? He, and He alone, is our "hope of glory," which means not only getting to heaven, but ultimately sharing the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the particular part of the mystery that Paul was concerned about here. Some day "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

December 4, 2000

Bishop Moule had this to say about "Christ in you, the hope of glory":

Our expectation of that indescribable future is not as if we only "saw it afar off" and "embraced it," with wistful longings, across an intervening void. We are in vital contact with it already. "The hope of it" is He Who is the Lord of it. . . And He is in us at this hour! (p. 106).

And John MacArthur reminds us that this was the subject of Paul's ministry, and it is to be the subject of our ministry. The more we learn about the whole of salvation, the more we see that it could not possibly have been designed by even the godliest of believers. Here are John MacArthur's own words:

That Christ indwells all believers is the source for their **hope of glory** and is the subject or theme of the Gospel ministry. What makes the Gospel attractive is not just that it promises present joy and help, but that it promises eternal honor, blessing, and glory. When Christ comes to live in a believer, His presence is the anchor of the promise of heaven—the guarantee of future bliss eternally (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1-5; Eph. 1:13-14). In the reality that Christ is living in the Christian is the experience of new life and hope of eternal glory (p. 79).

Griffith Thomas added this insight. He said,

The beloved F. B. Meyer once used the apt illustration of a man returning to his old home after many years of absence abroad, and sitting down with his mother as though with a stranger. At first she does

not recognize him, and this means “mystery”; then he reveals himself to her, and in her delight the result is “the glory of this mystery.” Lastly, he tells her of his remarkable prosperity in a far country and of the wealth he has brought home to her; and this is “the riches of the glory of this mystery” (p. 66).

And so it is with us as believers. When we first trust Christ we are overwhelmed with what it means to be saved. But then we begin to enjoy the spiritual blessings that are a vital part of our salvation, blessings we did not even dream of when we came to Christ. But then we learned that Christ came to live in us when we were saved, and that He is there are our “hope of glory.” Such was Paul’s ministry, and this is the ministry of the church today. We preach a Savior Who delivers us from the penalty of sin and Who is Himself our assurance that glory is absolutely certain for all in whom Christ dwells.

But now link together the last part of verse 27 with the first part of verse 28.

1:28 “Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach.” This was Paul’s ministry to the people of God, but he would not hesitate to set these truths before those who did not know the Lord as a part of the message which he had been appointed by God to give. And in this Paul was setting forth the nature of the ministry for all future generations. Paul preached Christ incarnate, the perfection of Christ, His sacrificial death, His triumphant resurrection, His glorious ascension, and His present ministry for us in heaven. But he was commissioned to teach another great truth which was evidence of His omnipresence, that He is at the right hand of the Father, and, at the same time, indwelling every child of God the world around! Our minds have trouble taking in such glorious truths, but we can and do two things with it: 1) We must believe it all because it is the teaching of Scripture; and 2) we can act upon it. We can say with the Apostle Paul, “Christ liveth in me” (Gal. 2:20).

“Warning every man” – The context would seem to show that Paul here was speaking about believers. Here he used the words “warning” and “teaching,” but when we get to chapter 3, verse 16, he used the same words but in a reverse order: “teaching and admonishing.” The word “warning” can mean *to admonish*, or *to counsel*. It is the Greek verb *νουθετέω*. It also can mean *to exhort*. Eadie used the word *reminding*. That would make this passage have the same emphasis that Peter referred to in his second epistle where he spoke of repeating truth that the Lord’s people had already been taught. Perhaps you remember his words:

12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.

13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance;

14 Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.

15 Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.

16 For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty (2 Peter 1:12-16).

When the Apostle Paul met with the Ephesian elders for the last time at Miletus, he used this word “warning.” And his words in that passage give us an idea of what he probably meant here in Col. 1:28 by the use of that word. Let me read his words to you. Remember that he was speaking to elders of the church at Ephesus.

28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:28-32).

I want to refer to one more passage in dealing with this word “warning,” or “admonishing,” because not much attention is paid to this part of the ministry in the church today. This passage is in Paul’s first letter to the church of Thessalonica. It is found in 1 Thess. 5, beginning with verse 12:

12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;

13 And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves.

14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

15 See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

16 Rejoice evermore.

17 Pray without ceasing.

18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

19 Quench not the Spirit.

20 Despise not prophesyings.

21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

22 Abstain from all appearance of evil.

23 And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it (1 Thess. 5:12-24).

Here Paul was doing what he said, warning, admonishing, exhorting, reminding, the people of God. We all need warning. We need constant exhortation. We need to be encouraged to read our Bibles carefully, and to obey the Lord. When we get careless about doing the will of God, this can lead to all kinds of trouble. You will remember that the kings of Israel were required to write out their own copy of the Law. This forced them to pay attention to everything that the Lord wanted them to do. Writing out Scripture is not a bad idea for any of us. But whether we do that or not, we need to read our Bibles carefully, with our eyes wide open, after we have asked the Lord to speak to us from the pages of Scripture.

And notice that he said “every man” three times in this verse! By this he meant *every person*! And, as I have already expressed, I believe he was speaking about *every believer*. Paul was not one to give up on anybody. There are people in our churches who aren’t going anywhere spiritually, and it is probably true that most people like that have never been saved. But we don’t know each other’s hearts, and so we have as our goal the salvation of all who are under our ministry.

But now we not only need to be reminded again and again of what we ought to do, but we need to keep learning. And so Paul added here the word “teaching.”

Paul used this word three times here in Colossians. I have already pointed out the word “teaching” in Col. 3:16, but it is used also in Col. 2:7. (Read verse 6 with it.) I heard a definition years ago of teaching which unfortunately is too often the case. This is the definition. “It is the transfer of knowledge from the teacher’s

notebook to the student's notebook without going through the head of either one of them." But that is not real teaching.

I like what Paul wrote to Timothy about teaching. You will find this in 2 Tim. 2:2:

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

From one generation to another, the ministry of the church is to be a ministry of teaching. We are to instruct people in the truths of Scripture so that they will understand them, and then we are to apply those truths to them for their personal application. How do we know that people are understanding what we are seeking to teach them? It will be apparent in the changes that take place in their lives.

There is no book in all of the world like the Bible. It is a book which has been given to us by God, and so we speak of it as the Word of God. It tells us about God. It tells us about ourselves, where we came from, and what our needs are. It explains history for us, and it shows us what we can expect as far as the future is concerned. Most people don't know what is in the Bible, and so that is why we teach. We are not to add anything to what we have in the Bible, and we are not to delete anything.

During our Lord's time here on earth, while He performed many miracles, *He was primarily a Teacher, the greatest Teacher the world has ever had.* Luke, whom the Apostle Paul called, "the beloved physician, wrote two books in the NT, and he wrote primarily for just one man: Theophilus. His book was the Gospel which bears his name, and his second book was a continuation of the first. His second book was the book of Acts. At the beginning of his second book, he referred to his first book in this way:

- 1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,
- 2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen (Acts 1:1-2).

And this implied that his second book was a continuation of all that the Lord continued to do and teach, not personally like He did during His life on earth, but through the work of His apostles. The apostles performed miracles also, but they were mainly teachers, teachers of the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit is also a Teacher, our Teacher. Cf. John 14:26:

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

See what the Apostle Paul commanded Timothy to do in 1 Tim. 4:11 and 6:2: "These things command and teach" (1 Tim. 4:11).

And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort (1 Tim. 6:2).

I hope I have established with you that our ministry is to be a teaching ministry, teaching the Bible.

But next Paul added, "in all wisdom." What did he mean by this?

December 5, 2000

These same three words are found in Paul's prayer in verse 9 of this chapter. And they have to do with the practical application of the truth in our daily living. Paul taught doctrine, but his doctrine was always followed with the practical application of that doctrine. We see this in his epistles. We see it right here in this letter to

the believers in Colosse. Paul's purpose in preaching the Gospel was that people might believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved. His purpose in teaching believers the truth of God, was that they might be holy and live in obedience to the Word of God. Here in verse 28 Paul was writing about this latter point, the effect that the teaching of God's Word should have upon believers. It is as he prayed, "that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing . . . (Col. 1:10).

But what was Paul's ultimate purpose in his ministry? It was "that we may present every man," every believer, "perfect in Christ Jesus."

This verb "present" is the same word that Paul used in verse 22 where it has to do with Christ presenting us. A shortened form of this same verb was used by Jude in those well known verses with which he closed his epistle.

24 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,
25 To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.
Amen (Jude 24-25).

The writer of the book of Hebrews, in chapter 13, verse 17, spoke of this coming presentation when we stand before the Lord. Here are his words:

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you (Heb. 13:17).

It was always in Paul's mind that he was going to have to give an account to God for the stewardship that had been committed to him. We see this also in his first letter to the church at Corinth. In 2 Cor. 11:1-3 we read these words:

1 Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me.
2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.
3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor. 11:1-3).

One who is called to minister the Word has a very solemn responsibility. That is why James wrote as he did in the first verse of chapter 3 in his epistle: "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (James 3:1). Or, as it is translated in the NKJV, "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment." It was because of this that Spurgeon used to tell his students in his college, "Don't preach if you can do anything else." He meant by that, if you can be certain that you are in the will of God doing anything else, then don't take to yourself the responsibility of teaching.

James did not say this to frighten people so that they would not become teachers of the Word, but so they would realize what a holy privilege this is, and treat it accordingly. And all of this has to do with the purpose that we must have in teaching. It is not so that people would commend us for our teaching, although we have to be thankful if the Lord makes us a blessing to others. It is not so that people will know who we are and come to hear us as though they can't learn from anyone else. No, the reason that we have a Tuesday Bible Class, the reason we teach the Word of God in our Sunday School and in our Sunday services, must be "that we may present every man," and I repeat, *every believer regardless of age*, "perfect in Christ Jesus."

And just as I was saying a little while ago about the purpose of teaching – not only that you might understand the doctrines of Scripture, but that they also would affect the way you live – the same must be true of the

teacher. It is good for every teacher of the Word to read Paul's words of rebuke to his fellow Jews, the words we find in Romans 2, beginning with verse 17. And what Paul said there applies to parents who teach their children, or to a husband who seeks to help his wife to understand the Scriptures, or to one who teaches a friend. Listen to Paul's words:

- 17 Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God,
- 18 And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;
- 19 And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness,
- 20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.
- 21 Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? (Rom. 2:17-21a).

None of us is to be just a hearer of the Word. We are all to be doers! And the one who teaches the Word must seek to understand it for himself first, and then to make the application to his own life, or her own life, before he seeks to apply it to others. What a difference it would make in our teaching if those of us who teach were careful about this very, very important point! If I encourage people to read the Bible, do I read it? Am I faithful in reading it? If I teach that you should obey the Word of God, do I obey it? When I teach that you should pray, do I pray? And on and on it goes. Although it is a simple illustration, years ago I heard a teacher of the Word say, "Remember when you point your finger at others, you have three fingers pointing back at yourself." I hope we will all remember this important point.

But what did Paul mean when he said, "That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." I don't know just how we are going to present each other before the Lord, but I have no doubt as to what the Lord is going to be interested in when we stand before Him. He is going to be concerned about our perfection in Christ!

Thayer, in his Greek Lexicon, or Dictionary, says that this word, τέλειος, means "*to be brought to its end, finished; lacking nothing necessary to its completeness; perfect*" (p. 618). It speaks of maturity, spiritual maturity. Paul was not talking about sinless perfection in this life, but of the growth of the people of God so that we reach the ultimate goal for which we have been saved. And this perfection can only be reached "in Christ," by our living union with Him. And we should know that the ultimate purpose of God in saving us is to make us like our Lord Jesus Christ. He began a word *in us* when we were saved, and He is going to see that work through to its completion. Cf. Phil. 1:6; Jude 24-25.

Notice the concern that the writer of the Hebrews epistle had for the people to whom he was writing. He was just starting to speak of Melchisedec when he suddenly digressed. And this is what he said:

- 11 Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.
- 12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.
- 13 For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.
- 14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:11-14).

Our growth toward maturity is a work of God, but we have certain responsibilities in it. We need to study the Word, seeking to understand it. But then we must apply the Word to our own lives, trusting the Lord for the strength and persistence to do His will.

So the business of the church is to teach the Word of God. And the object of that teaching is the education and edification of the people of God. And the grand purpose is our maturity in Christ which will not be fully attained until we are with the Lord. It is good to conclude our study of Colossians 1 with the last two verses of

Peter's second epistle:

17 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.

18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen (2 Peter 3:17-18).

December 11, 2000

1:29 Having stated what his ministry was, in this verse he showed how diligently he sought to fulfill that ministry. When we read in chapter 4, verse 17, what message Paul gave to Archippus, we can see that the Apostle Paul was a great example for Archippus to follow. Even in Roman chains Paul was faithful to the calling that he had received from the Lord.

In these days when there are so many different ideas floating around as to what the ministry is, every pastor, and in fact, every member of the body of Christ, needs to read and re-read what Paul wrote in Colossians 1 about the ministry.

And so Paul said, "Whereunto" – εἰς ὃ, which we could translate, *unto which*, meaning that he labored with all that was in him, to reach that goal with every child of God. The word that Paul used for *labor* is the Greek verb κοπιᾶω which means *to labor to the point of exhaustion*. It is the verb which Paul used in 1 Cor. 15:10 where he said,

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me (1 Cor. 15:10).

But notice in that verse, as in the last verse of Col. 1, Paul took none of the glory to himself.

I came across an excellent statement of the ministry of Paul in a sermon which Charles Spurgeon preach on this text back in 1870. This is what he said about Paul:

The Apostle Paul could very truthfully asset that he laboured and agonised. . . Into how many countries did he carry the testimony of Christ! How often did he cross the sea, traverse mountains, and ford rivers! One sees in his career some more than an ordinary Christian life; he was so indefatigable in service, that surely nothing beyond could have been possible to humanity, even under the help of God. His public labours were not only abundant, but they were the cause of continual inward conflict. He never preached a sermon, wrote an epistle, or attempted a work, without earnest pray and soul-consuming zeal. Night and day with tears, he said of a certain church that he had laboured for its good. He was a man so wholehearted and intense in all that he did, that we ought to remember not merely the amount of his labours, but the way in which he wore out himself by the intensity of his zeal in them. Probably never man led a more intensely ardent life than he. Moreover, added toall this, he carried a weight of care enough to crush him; for there came upon him the care of all the churches—to plant them, to defend them against rising errors, to prevent schism from dividing the flock, to lead on the converts from grace to grace, to instruct them, and to present every one perfect before God. The burden resting upon the Apostle was greater than the cares of an empire; and then, as if to complete the whole, he was called to suffer persecutions of which he has given us a list, which as we read it makes us shudder that one man should have endured so much, and makes us also glory in humanity that it should be possible that so much should be borne and done for God by a single individual (Vol. 16, p. 73).

But then Paul added two more words which have to do with *work*. The first was the word "striving." It is the translation of the Greek verb, ἀγωνίζομαι, and you can probably hear our English word, *agonize*, in the Greek

verb. It means to contend with an enemy, as he constantly had to face the opposition of the Devil. It meant to struggle with the difficulties and dangers which were antagonistic to the Gospel. A man who was as zealous to preach the Gospel as Paul was, was bound to face opponents that those with lesser zeal would never face. This word is used again in Col. 4:12 where it has to do with prayer, “labouring fervently in prayer.”

But notice the real secret of Paul’s ministry. All of this labor and agony was not just so much human effort (although he put forth all of his strength continually), but the real secret of Paul’s ministry was that he was being *strengthened*, lit. *energized*, by none other than our Lord Jesus Christ. “Working” and “worketh” are translations of the same verb, the verb ἐνεργέω. Our English words *energy* and *energize* come from this verb. And the Lord was working in him “mightily,” or *in power!*

So Paul was not taking any of the glory for himself, but he was giving the glory to the Lord.

This is the kind of a passage that calls forth the highest thoughts from godly expositors of the Scriptures. And I was not disappointed when I turn to John Eadie to see what he had to say on this passage. Here are some of his words:

When we reflect upon the motive—the presentation of perfect men to God, and upon the instrument—the preaching of the cross, we cease to wonder at the Apostle’s zeal and toils. For there is no function so moment-ous,—not that which studies the constitution of man, to order to ascertain his diseases and remove them; nor that which labours for social improvement, and the promotion of science and civilization; nor that which unfolds the resources of a nation, and secures it a free and patriotic government—far more important than all, is the function of the Christian ministry. . . Barnes well says—“In such a work it is a privilege to exhaust our strength; in the performance of the duties of such an office, it is an honour to be permitted to wear out life itself” (p. 105).

And then Eadie continued:

It was indeed no sluggish heart that beat in the apostle’s bosom. His was no torpid temperament. There was such a keenness in all its emotions and anxieties, that its resolve and action were simultaneous movements. But though he laboured so industriously, and suffered so bravely in the aim of winning souls to Christ and glory, still he owned that all was owing to Divine power lodged within him—

The work to be perform’d is ours,
The strength is all His own;
‘Tis He that works to will,
‘Tis He that works to do;
His is the power by which we act,
His be the glory too (*Ibid.*)

When we think of being empowered by the Lord Jesus Christ, we have to remember, as Eadie also said, speaking of Paul, but the same applies to us, “He laboured not only under the promptings of the Divine energy, but he laboured just so far as that imparted energy enabled him” (*Ibid.*)

What was it that enabled Paul to say that the Lord was working in him mightily? Well, for one thing, it was the great blessing which he saw in his ministry. God doesn’t use all men like he used the Apostle Paul. His was a very unique ministry. In addition to preaching and seeing multitudes turn to Christ for salvation, he saw many churches established. And then he saw them growing and establishing other churches. In addition to that he was used by God to give us at least thirteen of the New Testament epistles which are a vital part of the Scriptures. But we can be sure that there were certain things that have been true of other men, which were true of the Apostle Paul, and yet the Lord uses all of us in different ways. Let me mention a few of Paul’s characteris-

tics which we all need to follow.

First, he never forget that he was just a sinner saved by grace. And this truth always caused him to walk humbly before men as well as before God. Furthermore, remembering what he had been, and how the Lord had changed him, he became a man who spent much time in prayer. And in addition we can say that he lived his life in obedience to the will of God, and always for the glory of God. And in his work, he did not depend upon himself, but upon the Lord to bless him, to use him, to speak through him, and to strengthen him. And he even gloried in his infirmities, as he did in connection with his “thorn in the flesh . . . that,” as he said, “the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9).

So, regardless of how the Lord may see fit to use us, the conditions for blessing are always the same for each one of us. And this applies to all of us whether or not we are “in the ministry.”

Let me conclude this chapter by pointing out that the words which are translated “mightily” are the Greek words, ἐν δυνάμει, and δύνάμις is the word from which we get our words *dynamite* and *dynamo*. It is by God energizing us that we have power to serve the Lord with His blessing. And the message we have to proclaim, the Gospel, is also “the power (the same word) of God unto salvation to everyone who believeth” (Rom. 1:16).

Christ in us is our hope of glory, and Christ in us is the power we need to live a godly lives and to serve the Lord with His blessing.

Colossians 2

2:1 The first five verses of chapter 2 belong with chapter 1. Although the Apostle Paul had been instrumental in establishing many churches, Colosse was not one of them, neither was nearby Laodicea, and there were others also who had not been established by Paul. And so it was possible that they had the feeling that they did not have the place in Paul’s heart that the churches had which he had established. Paul had just emphasized in a very strong way that he was concerned about “every man” – that is, every believer. And by this he meant every believer whether they were the immediate fruit of his ministry, or not. And so here at the beginning of chapter 2 he was seeking to convince them that as believers they were just as much on his heart as any whom he had led to Christ. And so he spoke of his “conflict” for them, a noun with the same root as the verb “striving” which he had used in verse 29 of chapter 1. It is the Greek word ἀγῶνα – remember *agony*, or *agonizing*?

We have seen that this word had to do with prayer. It had to do with dealing with the opposition of the Enemy and the trouble he could cause in a church. It also is a word which speaks of the preparation and training that an athlete goes through in getting ready for a big game, or any other kind of sports. Paul had prayed for these saints whom he had never seen, and who had never seen him, with the same deep concern that he prayed for people whom he had led to the Lord. And this is a good point for us to remember. We need to be concerned about the Lord’s people wherever they may be, so concerned that we pray for them and use any means at our disposal to encourage and strengthen them. There are, of course, limitations on what any of us can do, but all of us are members of the body of Christ, and so we need to have a concern for the Lord’s work wherever it might be. As I have explained before in our class, it is possible that Colosse, and perhaps even Laodicea, were the fruit of the Apostle Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. We can’t say that for sure, but it seems very likely. This may have accounted for Paul’s personal interest in them.

December 12, 2000

2:2 “That” means *in order that*. Paul’s burden for the believers in Colosse, Laodicea, and in every other place where there were saints whom he had never seen, was, first of all, “that their hearts might be comforted.” Paul was always concerned about what was going on in the hearts of the people of God. He knew that we live in a wicked world, that sin is everywhere. And he knew that there were many different enemies of the Gospel. But he also knew that *there is one major Enemy, the Devil*, who with the fallen angels, seeks to keep everything in a turmoil. The Gospel brings peace. False teaching is an attack upon the peace that we have with God. And so “comfort” was a word of major importance, not only with Paul, but with all of the apostles, and most importantly of all, with our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

As the Lord met with His disciples in the Upper Room, you will remember that He said, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14:1). And then He followed those wonderful words with what we find in John 14:27:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

And then in John 16:33 He expressed what one of His main reasons for meeting with them had been. Listen to what He said:

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

And who can help but be blessed by our Lord’s references in that Upper Room Discourse to the Holy Spirit as our Comforter. Cf. John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15.

And how can we fail to remember Paul’s prayer with which he usually began his epistles, as he did even in this epistle to the Colossian believers: “Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Col. 1:2b). Our comfort also comes from the Word of God. In Rom. 15:4 Paul had these words of encouragement and comfort for the believers in Rome:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

But in spite of all of the great verses we can refer to which have to do with peace and encouragement, peace usually is restored, as Paul has indicated in Col. 2:1, through real agonizing in prayer. It is a daily matter that we all need to be concerned about for each other.

John Eadie had this to say about the situation which the Colossian church was facing:

It appears to us that there is in this earnest wish an allusion to that discomfort which the introduction of error creates, as indeed is more plainly shown by the concluding phraseology of the verse. The conflict of error with truth could not but lead to distraction and mental turmoil; and in proportion to their misconception of the Gospel, or their confusion of idea with regard to its spirit, contents, and aim, would be their loss of that peace and solace, which the new religion had imparted to them (p. 109).

However, let us remember that the verb *παρακαλέω* does not just mean *to comfort*, but it means *to strengthen* and *to encourage*. Error weakens believers and discourages them. Only by the truth of the Word can we be strengthened and encouraged, and so be comforted.

But then Paul added, “being knit together in love.” Not only does error affect our comfort, but it affects our fellowship with each other. It is the truth of the Word of God which binds us together, which causes us to love each other. Error makes us suspicious, judgmental, watching each other’s actions, and listening carefully to each other’s words so as to catch any point of criticism which we might detect.

“Being knit together” is the same verb that Paul used in Eph. 4:16 where it is translated “compacted,” and refers to the relationship that the different parts of our bodies have to each other. After all, we are the body of Christ.

Paul used the same verb again here in Col. 2, verse 19, which is a parallel passage to that to which I have just referred in Eph. 4:16. (Read Col. 2:18-19.)

While Paul was speaking of doctrinal agreement, yet it is doctrinal agreement which binds us together “in love.” Remember Paul’s words to the Ephesians in this same context where he said,

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ (Eph. 4:14-15).

“The full assurance of understanding” is what every believer needs. Once we reach this point, nothing can shake our confidence in the Word of God. And this is given to us by the Holy Spirit. But we read the Word, praying for understanding, constantly seeking greater understanding of what is written, not going beyond the Word itself. This is where we are made strong and firmly convinced that what the Word of God teaches is the absolute, unchanging truth of God. False teachers will try to convince us that we may be right as far as we have gone, but that we just haven’t gone far enough. They want us to think that we need more than the Bible. But a person who has “the full assurance of understanding” will refuse to be moved away from what the Scriptures teach us.

But Paul does not leave us there. He brought in again that word “mystery” which we got acquainted with in chapter 1, truth which God Himself had not fully revealed in the OT because Christ had not yet come, but it amounts to the fact that God’s final revelation of Himself is in Christ. The word translated “acknowledgement” means *the full knowledge, the completed knowledge of God* which is to be found in Christ. The best reading of the latter part of verse 2 seems to be, “to the full knowledge of the mystery of God, even Christ.”

At the risk of making you feel that I am saying the same thing over and over, let me repeat what Paul is emphasizing here because of its supreme importance. *The main purpose of the Bible is to tell us about God. It is God’s own revelation of Himself. But that revelation was not completed until Christ came. What is revealed of God in the OT is wonderful beyond words. But with all of the truth we have there, it was not all that God wanted us to know about Himself. But when Christ came, the revelation was complete. And so the writers of the NT were called upon to do exactly what Paul was doing here in his epistle to the Colossian church: he was showing us the infinite glory of Christ as the revelation of God.*

And so he went on to say in verse 3,

2:3 “In Whom [Christ] are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

Just yesterday I was reading again in the Gospel of John, chapter 19, where we see how the Jews demanded that Pilate condemn the Lord to death by crucifixion. But Pilate kept telling them that he did not find any fault in the Lord, nothing that He had done which was deserving of death. Finally, the Jews gave this answer. I am reading from John 19, verses 5-7:

5 Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!

6 When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify

him. Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him.

7 The Jews answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God (John 19:5-7).

If our Lord's claim was wrong, then He deserved to die. But if He was the Son of God (and He was), then they were the ones who were guilty of blasphemy, and they were the ones who should have been put to death. Deity in human flesh was standing before them, and they were demanding that Pilate condemn to death the very One Who had come to them as the completion of the revelation of the living God.

There is no more fundamental truth in the NT than this. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, with the very same nature that God the Father has. And to see Him, and to know Him, is to see God, and to know God. Any teaching that deviates in any way from what we are seeing here, is heresy, and needs to be condemned by the church of Jesus Christ in every generation.

January 8, 2001

But what did the Apostle Paul mean when he wrote here that in Christ "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"?

Geoffrey Wilson points out in his commentary on Colossians that these two words, "wisdom and knowledge," occur together in Rom. 11:33:

O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

Here these two words, "wisdom and knowledge," "describe the character of God as this is revealed in the great drama of redemption" (p. 47) as Paul had so marvelously written it out in the book of Romans. So that gives us a hint as to the meaning of these words here in Col. 2:3. And in the original text of Col. 2:3 we have, as the KJ has translated it, "the wisdom and knowledge, meaning that these two words are to be taken together. Otherwise Paul would have said *"the wisdom and the knowledge."* In 1 Cor. 1:24 Paul called Christ, "the wisdom of God." In the book of Proverbs Solomon admonished his son over and over to seek wisdom. And the wisdom that he had in mind was not man's wisdom, but the wisdom of God. It is the wisdom of God in the Scriptures by which we come to know God. And that wisdom is likewise hidden in Christ Who came, as we have said, as the final and complete revelation of God. The knowledge of God is hidden from the world, but not from us. It is hidden for us, but not from us. And this was the point that Paul was making also in 1 Corinthians when in chapter 2, verses 9 and 10, we read:

9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

The natural man, the man without Christ, has no ability to understand the things of God, those things which are revealed in Christ. They are hidden from him. That is why the masses cried out for the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul said that even the princes of this world would not have crucified the Lord of glory if they had known Who He really was. But they didn't know, and couldn't know, unless God had made Himself known to them in Christ. He was hidden from the world as in a treasure chest.

"All the treasures" means that all that can be known of God, ^{all} He has revealed of Himself in Christ. Therefore, it is not necessary to go beyond Christ in order to know God. Let me say again, He is the final and complete revelation of God. Take all that is revealed of God in the OT, and you will find it in Christ, and even more.

2:4 Verse 4 makes it clear that verse 3 is one of the most important statements in this epistle, and maybe the

most important. And so in verse 4 Paul explained why he had written what he had just said. (Read v. 4.)

Paul was probably referring here to all that he had said in the first four verses. There were already those false teachers, those Gnostics who claimed to have superior knowledge and understanding. And they were out to “bequile” the believers, to win them over to their beliefs. Anyone who speaks contrary to Scripture and to Christ is a deceiver. And they always seem very persuasive, which is the meaning of “enticing.” Bishop Moule defined “enticing words” or talk, as when someone tries to persuade you “to think another path to peace and holiness more safe, more reasonable, more honourable, than this one Way of Christ” (pp. 127, 128). And then Bishop Moule added, “Is this anxiety needless?” And he responded as Paul would have responded:

No; for, far away as I am, I yet seem to *see* your present happy state, and can only dread the more acutely the dangers which already threaten it (p. 128).

And this is what he actually said in verse 5.

2:5 Paul was in Rome, far away from Colosse, and yet through the report that Epaphras had brought to him, he could sense in his own heart what a precious fellowship the believers in the church at Colosse were enjoying. He spoke of their “order.” By this he was referring to them as a band of soldiers, trained and disciplined, and ready to face the Enemy. And by the word “steadfastness” he was commending them for the way they stood together for their “faith in Christ.” But Paul wanted them to be on their guard. They had the truth, not those false teachers who refused to recognize the full glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so Paul, though unable to be with the Colossian Christians, did the two things that he could do. First, as he has indicated, he prayed. He was battling with the Enemy in prayer. The second thing that he did was to write. We probably don’t know how important letters can be unless we have received a letter from some concerned believer when we were going through a battle. And yet we always need to remember what Paul wrote to the believers at Ephesus. His words are in Eph. 6:12:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

And so we need to put on the whole armor of God, and always be praying.

We can see from this situation which existed so long ago in Colosse how important it is to see that the people of God are grounded in the truth of the Word of God. And there is not much of that going on in these days. It seems that people are more concerned about having fun when they go to church than they are about what they learn. It can never be said too often that one of the great advantages of knowing the truth, is that then we are in a position to recognize error and heresy when we hear it. We need to be reading our Bibles, studying our Bibles, meditating on the truth of Scripture, and supporting it all by prayer.

Before we go on to verse 6, let me remind you of where we are in this epistle. We had **the Apostle’s message** in Col. 1:15-23. And since then (from 1:24) and going on to the end of chapter 2, we have **the Apostle’s mission**. The first part of that is **Paul’s deep concern and his objectives** (1:24-2:5). Now, under his mission, we are ready for his first exhortation.

B. His first exhortation (Col. 2:6-7).

Paul had expressed his thanksgiving for them. He had commended them. He had told them how he had been praying for them. He had been teaching them. He had encouraged them (1:23) to continue in the faith, but in 2:6 we really have his first exhortation – not the only one by any means, but the first one, and an extremely important one! If every child of God were careful to obey verses 6 and 7 of chapter 2, we wouldn’t have very much to be concerned about as far as our churches are concerned. False teachers would not have a chance to

spread their doctrines. The people of the world would once again begin to realize that there really is something very important to the Gospel. The Gospel would again begin to have a profound influence on society itself. We are not going to reach the people of the world by trying to reform our country by political means, but it always has been true that society has been affected in a tremendous way when God has been working in the lives of His people, and when His people have been primarily concerned about holy living. If any of us have lost the joy of the Lord, and our lives seem to be in a stalemate, at a standstill, asking the Lord to enable us to obey Col. 2:6 and 7 will restore our joy in the Lord, and bring the Lord's blessings back into our lives. These words are worth memorizing, and they deserve all of the time for meditation on them that we are able to give them.

(Read Col. 2:6-7.)

2:6 The first question that needs to be answered in dealing with this verse is, Have I received Christ Jesus the Lord? This the way that you identify a true child of God. He, or she, is trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. A Christian is one who is convinced that he is a sinner, under the judgment of God, and that he cannot to earn salvation, or buy it, or merit it in any way. A Christian is one who believes that Jesus Christ the Lord died to save sinners from the penalty of his sins, and that salvation becomes his by faith in the work of Christ on the Cross.

January 9, 2001

This is the Gospel, but Lightfoot believed that Paul spoke of Christ instead of the Gospel "because the central point in the Colossian heresy was the subversion of the true idea of Christ. We all know that there would be no Gospel if it were not for Christ. And so there are times in Scripture that "the Gospel" and, as we have it here, "the Christ Jesus, the Lord," mean the same thing. Salvation means the acceptance of Christ Himself, as contrasted with receiving merely a message about Christ. And Paul would remind them by his double use of the word "the" that salvation is only through Christ. There is no other Savior, and there never will be.

The word "received" is an aorist, referring to what they had done in the past, and speaks of a message that was received by oral transmission, and it often carries with it the idea of passing it on to others in the same way. Cf. what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1 about "the preaching of the Gospel." And in receiving "the Christ Jesus" they had at the same time received Him as "the Lord," *their Lord*.

How this all takes place is explained by the Apostle John in his Gospel, John 1:11-13:

11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Let me ask you a question. Look at these verses carefully and tell me which comes first in our salvation, our reception of Christ, or our new birth? I think you can see that we are born of God, given new life by Him, and then we believe in Christ which is the first evidence that we have been born of God. The two are almost instantaneous, but life comes first and then faith.

Paul was convinced that they had received Christ, that they were truly born again. And he linked together their life as believers with the very nature of their salvation. They had started by receiving Christ, they were to "walk" in the same way, by continuing to look to Christ, by depending upon Him, receiving from Him day by day, and even moment by moment, the will and the strength to please God. Actually the words, "so walk ye in Him," mean *to walk in union with Him*. In salvation we have been joined to Christ. It is as the Apostle John

wrote many years later in his first epistle:

10 He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

11 And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life (1 John 5:10-12).

“Walk ye in Him,” in “the Christ Jesus the Lord.” The word “walk” is a Hebraism, *i.e.*, which is one way of saying that it is a word which has been brought into the Greek NT from the Hebrew OT. And it means *to live!* But we also need to know that it is an imperative (as we can see even in our English translation), and it is *in the present tense!* This means that *we are to walk continuously in Christ, in union with Him, depending upon Him for everything necessary to do the will of God and to please Him.* This is the truth that we had in Paul’s epistle to the Philippians:

12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13).

In verse 7 Paul went on to elaborate on what he meant when he wrote, “so walk ye in Him.”

2:7 Lightfoot reminds us here that we have three metaphors here and in verse 6. “Walk” suggests a pathway that we are to take. “Rooted” has to do with a tree. “Built up” has to do with a building.

In addition there is a change in the tenses that he used with “rooted” and “built up.” “Rooted” is a perfect passive participle meaning that “*once for all*” they had been rooted in Christ, an indication of the eternal character of their salvation. “Built up” is a present passive participle which Lightfoot translated “built up and strengthened *hour by hour*” (p. 242). So when we were saved, we were “rooted” in Christ. But since then, day by day, and as Lightfoot said, “hour by hour,” the Lord Jesus has been working in each of us to build us up in our relationship with Him and, as Jude said it, in our “most holy faith.” We have a responsibility in this, to read the Word, to pray for understanding and strength, even the will to live in Christ, but the Lord is the One Who is doing the work, and so to the Lord belongs all of the glory.

Concerning these two participles, Eadie had this to say:

The main ideas are stability and growth – the root, “in Him,” beyond the possibility of eradication; and the growth that of a symmetrical structure, which, “in Him,” has its unshaken foundation. The first participle, by its tense, indicates a previous state, and the second a present condition. They had already been rooted, but they were still to be making progress (pp. 127, 128).

Geoffrey Wilson stated it this way, quoting Eadie and one other commentator:

As there could be no walking in Christ without a prior reception of Him, so this ‘ability to walk is the result of communicated animation’ (Eadie). In other words, the power to live a new life depends upon daily communion with the living Lord. Thus Christ must be ‘the encompassing and guiding and controlling element of every step of life’ (J. A. Beet) (Wilson, p. 49).

“And stablished in the faith” – Paul had no argument with the teaching that the Colossian believers had received from Epaphras. He had really established them in the truth. Again quoting Wilson, “Far from interfering with the work of an honored colleague, Paul place[d] the whole weight of his apostolic authority behind it” (p. 50). They had had a solid grounding in the truth of God, and Paul was encouraging them to stand by what they had believed before Colosse was involved in the invasion of false teachers. This not always true of believers today.

Let us all remember what we have understood in the past by those two words, “the faith” – the truth especially of the NT, its doctrines and their application.

“Abounding therein with thanksgiving” – There is a special emphasis in Colossians on thanksgiving, beginning with the example of the Apostle Paul in chapter 1. Wilson calls thanksgiving “the hallmark of spiritual life” (p. 50) – that which identifies a person as a child of God. And he also said that the lack of thanksgiving “points to a slight appreciation of the Gospel grace” (*Ibid.*).

And Eadie said this:

They could not but be thankful that the truth had been brought to them, and that by the Divine grace they had been induced fully and unreservedly to believe it (p. 128).

January 15, 2001

Note the references to thanksgiving in the epistle: 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:17; 4:2.

What does it mean *to abound in thanksgiving*? It means to go beyond what would normally be expected. The Lord has never set any limits that we can determine in the blessings He gives us in salvation. And so there should be no limit in the thanksgiving that we give Him. Every new insight into the wonders of our salvation, should call forth from our hearts a fresh overflow of thanksgiving. We need to be giving thanks to God continually, as Paul told the Thessalonian believers: “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18).

This brings us to the next point in our outline.

III. The Apostle’s Mission (Col. 1:24-2:23).

A. His deep concern and his objectives (1:24-2:5).

B. His first exhortation (2:6-7).

C. His warnings and his rebukes (2:8-23).

This latter point is where we are now.

C. His warnings and his rebukes (2:8-23).

2:8 The Devil is always busy seeking to disturb and corrupt those of us who are the Lord’s people. And his great objective is to draw us away from Christ. And by this we mean, from Christ as the fulness of the God head and from Christ as the Savior of sinners. Paul was not saying here that believers in Colosse were following some false teacher, or teaches, but he is point out to them the possibility that they could do so. They were soldiers facing warfare, but it was a warfare for their minds, and ultimately for their hearts.

Paul did not mention a name, or names, of those he had in mind, and this was because his point was that they needed to be careful about *anyone*, past, present, or future who would seek to draw them away from Christ. He used this same method, for example, in Gal. 1:6-9. If Paul had mentioned names (which he obviously could have), the tendency would have been for the people to take the warning as applying to that particular case, but not naming anyone, they would more readily see that the warnings had to do with any person who came at any time with doctrines which were contrary to the truth that they had learned from the apostles.

So let us all take this as a warning. Every child of God is personally responsible to see to it that what Paul was warning them about did not happen to them.

“Spoil” means to take you captive. By “philosophy” – the only time this word is used in Scripture. Lit. it means *a love of wisdom*, and carries with it the idea of *pursuing* wisdom. And it is not to be confined to religious wisdom. Many a professing Christian has, as we say, “lost his faith” as he (or she) has listened to some godless professor in a university classroom attack the Scriptures and the whole idea of accepting anything on faith. Men, unregenerate men, claim that they want solid evidence of anything before they will accept it. But the evidence found in Scripture is not what they are looking for. They ridicule faith. They do not understand that the Bible is a revelation from God, and a revelation means that it contains truth which could never have been discovered by man, and that is the reason that it had to be revealed. I remind you again of 1 Cor. 2:9-10 and 14. The philosophies of men are “vain deceit,” and that applies to the *theory of evolution*, as it once was called, but now it is taught as though it is a proven fact. But it is still a theory, and a false theory, and it is a shame that many Christian schools have sought to find some ground of agreement with the claims of so-called science, and have come up with the idea of a theistic evolution – that God was the Creator, but He did it by an evolutionary process. There can be no compromise with humanistic philosophy. Paul called it “vain deceit,” and this is exactly what it is. It is “vain” because there is nothing to it, and it is “deceit” because that is what it is designed to do. Anyone who turns away from the Scriptures to the philosophies of men, is turning from the truth to error.

It is “the tradition of men.” There is actually nothing wrong with the word “tradition.” It lit. means *that which is handed on either orally or in writing*. Paul used this word in a good sense when he wrote 2 Thess. 2:13-15:

13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle (2 Thess. 2:13-15).

And then in the third chapter of this same epistle (2 Thess.), verse 6, he used the word “tradition again:

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 Thess. 3:6).

So the word can be used in a bad way, or a good way. Paul was using it here in a bad way because it was “after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” It was human wisdom versus divine revelation. The person who tries to study Christ in the light of human wisdom, will be led astray. But the person who studies Christ first, is then in a position to see the error and emptiness of any system that does not give Christ the place that he has in the Word of God – total preeminence!

“The rudiments of the world” – the basic elements of knowledge. For a person who has come to know Christ, to turn away from Him in Whom are “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” and to turn to human “philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men,” would be like a person in a graduate program in some university going back to kindergarten or the first grade to learn his abc’s all over again. Man’s wisdom is hardly anything more than baby talk once a person has come to the knowledge of Christ. And yet even then the knowledge of the wisdom of men leads us in the wrong direction because it is “not according to Christ.”

The godly Bishop Moule has an excellent section in his commentary on Colossians dealing with this expression, “not according to Christ,” and I want to read it to you in its entirety. This is what that faithful servant of the Lord had to say about “not according to Christ”:

We reach the sacred watchword here, and pause to listen to it. Οὐ κατὰ Χριστόν, “*not according to Christ*”; not on His line, not measured by Him, not referred to Him; not so that He is Origin, and Way,

and End, and All. The “philosophy in question would assuredly include Him somehow in its terms. But it would not be “according to Him.” It would take its principles, and draw its inferences, *a priori* [that which can be known by reason alone] and from other regions; and then bring Him in as something to be harmonized and assimilated, as far as might be. But this would mean a Christ according to the system of [human] thought, not a system of thought according to the blessed Christ. And for St. Paul the one true system of spiritual thinking must be altogether “according to” Him. It must have Him for [its] Alpha, and for [its] Omega, and for all the alphabet between. It must be dominated all over by Him. It must “know nothing” as its burthen [burden, meaning responsibility], as its wisdom, as its aim and ambition in research, but Him.

This would mean no dwarfed or withered state of the Christian intellect; rather the very opposite. The thinking power, working on and on “according to Christ,” would find no lack of depth and height, length and breadth, to expatiate in [to go without limits into a subject]. Let a man of elevated and penetrating understanding get a true view of the Christ of God, as the Word shows Him and the Spirit glorifies Him, and he will have a subject-matter for his whole mental powers such as he never had before. But the very law of his thought now, its guarantee at once for freedom and for security, will be to think “according to Christ.” He will find himself now not studying Christ in the light of other things, but studying everything else in the light of Christ. Christ will no longer be a light, however brilliant, shining among others in the firmament of thought. He will be the Sun of the sky. He will be the Sun of the whole rolling system (pp. 142, 143).

Even angels, though greater than men, are not to be held with anything like the same esteem in which we are to hold our precious Savior. He is greater than all.

So again Paul again was emphasizing that the test of any doctrine is the place that it gives to Christ, and the reason for saying this is given in verse 9.

2:9 (Read.)

Here is truth beyond our ability to comprehend it fully. All of the fulness of the infinite glory of an omnipresent God, dwells in Him “bodily” – that is, as a Man. What a marvelous way to state that the incarnation of our Lord in no way diminished His Deity. He was the Son of God in human flesh. There is nothing that is in God that is not in the Man, Christ Jesus.

And the word “dwelleth” means the Deity has found a permanent home in the body that was prepared for him. And we as Christians believe this amazing truth, not because we can explain it fully, but because it is what God has revealed to us in His Word by the Holy Spirit. And the counterpart of this glorious truth is given in the following verse.

2:10 Since we are “in Him” Who is the fulness of the Godhead, then we have to be “complete in Him.” We need no one else, no other doctrine, to make us fully acceptable to God. The truth of our union with Christ, is the basic truth of the Christian’s standing and his life. To look beyond Christ and apart from Christ is always to move down, far down, and away.

The mention of “principalities and powers,” which speaks of angelic beings, and anticipates what the Apostle will say about “worshipping” angels in verse 18, shows that the Lord Jesus Christ is not just one of those emanations of God like the Gnostics taught about angels, but as our Lord is the Lord and Sustainer of creation, and the Head of the Church, so He is not an angel, but the Head, the chief authority over angels.

Eadie has a good statement here when he pointed out that the doctrine which threatened the fellowship and the

— blessing of the church at Colosse and

which was invading them seems to have dealt largely in idle and delusive speculation on the rank and office of angels—assigning to them provinces of operation which belong to the Son of God—looking to them as guardians or saviors, and forgetting that they are but His [our Lord's] servants, executing His commission and doing Him homage. Why rely on the courtiers, when access may be had at once to the King? Why be taken up with our fellow-servants, who are only stewards of limited resources, when the Master has not only the fulness of Divinity, but has it in a human shape—has the heart of a brother to love you, and the arm of a God to protect and bless you? (pp. 148, 149).

The Gnostics, who were responsible for this false emphasis upon angels, did two other things that made both Jewish and Gentile believers who were not grounded in the truth, especially vulnerable. They accepted circumcision and the Sabbath, and also baptism. So this gave them a relationship to the old covenant as well as to the new, and would make their doctrines more acceptable to those with little discernment. Undoubtedly this led to the teaching which the Apostle gave them in the next five verses – 11 through 15.

January 16, 2001

2:11 Why should believers seek circumcision when in Christ they already “are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands” – clearly a statement made in contrast with that circumcision which was made with hands. Man-made circumcision was made with hands, and was only a sign, an important sign under the Law, but nevertheless a sign. Circumcision under the Law could have no transforming effect on the man who was circumcised, but it pointed ahead to the regenerating power of Christ when “the body of the sins of the flesh” would be *put off* once and for all, “by the circumcision of Christ.” The old rite of circumcision did nothing to do away with the penalty of sin, nor to deliver from its power. Besides it was ministered by men. But the true and complete deliverance is administered by Christ, by His death and resurrection, and by the merits of that gracious work as it is administered to believers by the Holy Spirit.

The inability of physical circumcision to save, was brought out by the Apostle Paul more than once, but it is especially clear in the last two verses of Romans 2:

28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29 But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God (Rom. 2:28-29).

And it follows that being circumcised in our hearts by Christ, that makes it possible for us to obey the instructions given to us by the Apostle Paul which we will come to in chapter 3 where he tells us to put off the sins of the old man, and put on the new man. Cf. Col. 3:5-14.

The spiritual nature of the OT ordinance was apparent even in OT times. Eadie summarized it in these words:

When Israel was yet in the wilderness, the Divine command was given—“Circumcise the foreskin of your heart” [Deut. 10:16], and at the same period the Divine promise was made—“And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” [Deut. 30:6]. The prophet Jeremiah repeats the injunction—“Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and Jerusalem” [Jer. 4:4]. He also described a part of the population thus—“Behold, their ear is uncircumcised” [Jer. 6:10]; nay, he declares that the whole house of Israel are “uncircumcised in the heart” [Jer. 9:26]. Ezekiel speaks of men “uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh” [Ezek. 44:7]. Stephen, in his address, used this ancient phraseology, and calls his audience “uncircumcised in hearts and ears” [Acts 7:51]. The Apostle Paul in other places has similar ideas and language [as we

have seen in Rom. 2:29].

So this was all terminology that was familiar at least to the Jewish believers.

But as we go on to verse 12 we find that the same is true of baptism.

2:12 Baptism is very important for us today, but water baptism does not save. It, like circumcision in the OT, was a picture, a type, a symbol. But circumcision and baptism do not picture the same truth. Let us examine this verse.

Just as Paul said that they were circumcised “with the circumcision made without hands,” so he said here that they were “buried with Him in baptism.” He did not mean that they had been baptized in water (although it is very likely that most of them had been). What he did mean was that they were united with the Lord in His death, as he wrote to the church at Rome in the words which we find in Rom. 6:3-4:

1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

2 God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

3 Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?

4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

7 For he that is dead is freed from sin (Rom. 6:1-7).

These two truths, circumcision and baptism, complement each other. In our circumcision by Christ, the penalty due us is satisfied and the bondage of sin in our old fleshly been broken. And by having been baptized with Christ and into Christ, we have new life, eternal life, divine life.

January 22, 2001

The point that the Apostle Paul was making here is that Christ, by His work on the Cross, has done all that we need to make us acceptable to God and to enable us to live for God's glory, so why turn to anyone else or anything else. False teachers can only draw us away from depending upon Christ alone, leading us captive and closing our eyes and hearts to the sufficiency that we have in Christ.

2:13 From verse 10 on the Apostle Paul has been elaborating on his statement in verse 10, “and ye are complete in Him,” that is, in Christ. And it is important for all of us to realize that the work of salvation is all the work of the Godhead, especially of Christ. We do not put “off the body of the sins of the flesh,” Christ does that for us. That is verse 11. We do not baptize ourselves, but we are immersed into Christ by God to remain there for all eternity. And we have been raised with Christ. That is verse 12. And now as we come to verse 13 the same idea continues.

The first part of verse 13 speaks of what we were before we were saved – “dead in your sins and the uncircumcision your flesh.” The second part of the verse, and continuing on down through verse 15, we see the extent of the work of Christ in our behalf as Paul showed the fulness of our salvation.

What were we before we were saved? “Dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh.” Here Paul

pointed to the hopelessness of our condition. We were all spiritually dead. We were unable to hear the Gospel and would have been unable to respond to the Gospel if we could have heard it. By “hear” I mean to hear it so as to understand it and to comprehend its meaning and unique importance. People can hear the Gospel in the sense that the sound of the words goes into their ears, but they don’t see how important it is, nor do they understand that it is the only way to acceptance with God. In fact, “dead” sinners will argue even about the word *sin*. We read in 1 Cor. 2:14 a description of what it means to be “dead” in sins.

14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14).

“The natural man” is a man who is nothing more than he was when he was born into this world. He is *soulish*. It speaks of a man, or woman, who is not capable of thinking on any higher level than that which is controlled by, to quote Vine, man’s “corrupt desires and affections.” Our Lord was describing the natural man when He said,

19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

20 These are the things which defile a man . . . (Matt. 15:19-20a)

It is that in man which causes him to act more like an animal than one who was made in the image and likeness of God. It is man in his depravity. We get our word *psyche* from this Greek word which is translated in 1 Cor. 2:14, “natural.” He is the opposite of one who is “spiritual,” that is, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

What it means to be “dead in trespasses and sins” is described in Eph. 2:1-3:

1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Again Bishop Moule helps us in our understanding of Paul’s words in Colossians. His explanation helps us to understand what it means to be dead in sins. Here are his words”

And you, you Colossians; let me speak without reserve of your awful original need of mercy; you, dead that you were in respect of . . . your trespasses, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, totally devoid of spiritual life, in any sense which could mean a power within you for revival and renewal; helpless and alienated, with an alienation evidenced by actual transgressions, and generally (is it not true?) by a life defiled by the dominion of “the flesh,” the power of self upon the throne; you thus circumstanced, cold and helpless in a spiritual grave, **He raised you to life with Him,** with Christ (pp. 134, 135).

Once again Paul referred to our being united with Christ in His death, and in His resurrection. So our salvation was secured when Christ died, and when we died in Him, after which we were “quickened together with Him.” This means that His death was for us, and therefore we share also in the benefits of His death through His resurrection. And one major blessing is that all of our transgressions have been forgiven – “all” without exception.

What is the particular nature of a sin which is called a *transgression*? A transgression is any violation of the divine will, intentionally or unintentionally, positively or negatively. It is sin. And “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Therefore, what a blessing it is to read in Isaiah’s prophecy about the death of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ,

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 (Isa. 53:5).

And on the basis of the death of Christ, we are forgiven! We are *released* from the penalty that was upon us because of our transgressions by the death of Christ which was for us. And God's promise is, "And their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more" (Heb. 10:17). But not only are we forgiven, but we are declared justified before God. We don't deserve it. We can't earn it. No amount of money could buy it. It is all by the grace of God, and so all of the glory belongs to Christ.

You can see the case that Paul was building here for the Gospel. Since Christ has done all of this for us, what remains for us to do, or for anyone else to do for us. So false teachers with their doctrine are intruding where they are not even needed, regardless of what they have to say.

But Paul was not through.

2:14 What Paul said here is a part of our forgiveness.

"The handwriting that was against us" is the Law. But whose "handwriting" was it? Cf. Ex. 24:12:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them.

See also Ex. 31:18:

And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.

The basic elements of the Law were written *by God* on that tablet of stone. The Law was never given to save us. If so, salvation would have been by works. But salvation is not by the Law as Paul clearly declared in Rom. 3:19-20:

19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

But Paul, writing in Colossians to a predominantly Gentile church, spoke of this handwriting of God as "against us," and "contrary to us." Since God gave the Law to the Jews, how are the Gentiles brought under its condemnation? Again we turn to the book of Romans for our answer which we will find in Rom. 2:14-15:

14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.

Universally men know it is wrong to lie and to steal and to murder, and so on. Why? Because God has written those moral standards upon every human heart. And so every person who has ever lived has a sense of what is right and what is wrong, written on their consciences, written in their hearts. And don't believe anyone who tries to tell you differently. We all know that there is a God, and we all know that God is the One Who determines right and wrong. So the charge of sin with its penalty is upon every human being. But when Christ died on the Cross, those charges brought against us by the Law of God were erased. He took those charges and when He died on the Cross, the charges were erased.

So the Law of God has been satisfied, not because the penalty has fallen upon us, but because He took the charges that were against us, and your penalty and mine were fully satisfied when Christ died as our Substitute.

What can any teacher of another doctrine add to that?

But still this is not all. We have one more verse.

2:15 “Principalities and powers” are words that speak of Satan and his demonic forces, all of them fallen angels. No work of Christ for our salvation would have been complete without winning the victory over the Devil and the demons. He not only “spoiled” them, defeating them by His death, but He stripped them of their power. It was through defeating the first Adam that Satan brought the whole human race under sin and death. Christ by His death completely conquered our Enemy, and stripped him of his power. We still have trouble with the Devil. Our warfare is with him. But he was defeated and his doom was sealed, along with all of the fallen angels, when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the Cross.

This is the truth which is taught very clearly in Heb. 2:14 and 15:

14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;

15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

When the Apostle Paul came to this point in his epistle, the Colossians would have been better able to understand what he had meant when he said, as he did in verse 10, “And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power.”

Let us review what the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished for us by His death on the Cross:

- 1) From verse 11 we can say that He broke the power of sin over us. This is the reality of which circumcision was only a type.
- 2) From verse 12 we can say that having been raised with Christ, we have new life, a life which enables us to do what is pleasing to God. Baptism typifies this. Cf. Rom. 6:3-4.
- 3) From verse 13 we can say that through the death of Christ all of our trespasses have been forgiven – all of them! And on the authority of Scripture we can say, as amazing as it is, that they are forgotten.
- 4) From verse 14 we can say that God’s Law has been satisfied, the charges against us have been satisfied, and so they no longer stand on the divine record against us.
- 5) From verse 15 we can say that our Enemy has been defeated. We are no longer in bondage to him. In fact, now “we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Rom. 8:37).

Can you think of any world religion or any present-day cult which can possibly add to the completeness that we have in Christ? Let me add one thing that Paul did not include here, but he did include it a few verses later. In our Bibles it is found in the first four verses of chapter 3. And so we can make this 6) in our list above.

- 6) From verses 1 through 4 in chapter 3 we can say that having died with our Lord, and having been raised with our Lord, we have also ascended with our Lord, and one day we shall all also “appear with Him in glory.” Cf. what Paul said in Eph. 2:4-7. (Read.)

And so that completes the whole account. How blessed we are, and there is not a single one of us who deserves even one part of all of the priceless blessings. It is all of grace. And they are secured for us in Christ. What, then, could any false teacher add to what we have in Christ. May the Holy Spirit write upon all of our hearts in a way that we will never forget it, that we are “complete in Him,” complete in Christ.

And so we are not surprised that the Apostle Paul would say to Timothy:

7 But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.

8 For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come (1 Tim. 4:7-8).

January 29, 2001

False teachers come with many different ideas, but remember none of them can possibly add to all that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation that He purchased for us by His precious blood when He died upon Calvary's Cross. To know what we have in Christ is really the greatest safeguard we have when people come suggesting that we need more than Christ. Verses 9 and 10 are two verses which every believer needs to know. All of the Godhead, the fulness of the Godhead, dwells permanently in Christ "bodily" – that is, in His humanity. The incarnation of Christ did not lessen the Deity of Christ in any way. And so we are "complete in Him." Nothing can possibly be added to Christ and what He is done to make our salvation more complete. All that we need to be made acceptable to God, we have in Christ. So the additions that false teachers would like to add to Christ, are not only totally unnecessary, but are an affront to God!

This means that it is very important for us to understand the doctrines of the New Testament. And the Apostle Paul began by emphasizing that in his prayer in chapter 1. Dr. J. Sidlow Baxter, who was born in Australia, and later educated at Spurgeon's College in London, and who spent many years ministering in the U.S. and Canada, wrote a survey of the Bible in a six-volume set to which he gave the name, *Explore the Book*. He felt that in Paul's prayer in chapter 1, Paul indicated what would be the twofold emphasis of this epistle to the church at Colosse. His first request in verse 9 was that the believers in Colosse "might be filled with the knowledge of His will," God's will, "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." And Dr. Baxter felt that this was the need that Paul was seeking to meet in chapters 1 and 2, trusting the Lord for His blessing in answer to prayer. In other words, that chapters 1 and 2 give us the doctrinal section of the epistle. And then that Paul's request in verse 10, the second of the only two requests of the prayer, began with chapter 3 and continued on to chapter 4, verse 6, where Paul's emphasis was on a walk, a life, that was pleasing to the Lord. And so the latter part of the epistle, beginning with chapter 3, verse 1, gives us the practical section of the epistle, focusing on the life that believers are to live. I think there is much to commend this division of the epistle.

Furthermore, Dr. Baxter said (and there are many others who agree with this idea) that Colossians has the same relationship to Ephesians that Galatians has to Paul's epistle to the Romans. Galatians defends the teaching of Romans, and Colossians defends the teaching of Ephesians. He also felt that Philippians in a lesser way was also a defense of Ephesians because the problem in Philippi was divisions within the church.

Now with the addition of what Paul would say about the final purpose of God in our salvation when he got to what is chapter 3 in our Bibles, we have just seen how Paul showed the completeness of our salvation in Christ. And as we come to verse 16 in chapter 2, Paul zeroes in on the particular doctrines of the false teachers who had troubled the believers in Colosse and elsewhere, especially Laodicea and Hierapolis.

2:16 We see from verses 16 and 17 that one part of this particular false system was an emphasis upon Jewish ritualism. Paul had just mentioned in verse 14 how Christ had satisfied the Law by His death on the Cross, but here he emphasized some of the practical requirements which were upon the people in their observance of the Law.

By "judge you" Paul meant that they were not to let any man condemn them or accept them, or take them to task, on the basis that they were, or were not, observing the things required of Israel under the Law. By "meat" he meant what they could eat, or were not to eat. This was carefully spelled out in Leviticus 11. By "drink" he must have had reference to certain special cases. Bishop Lightfoot made this comment about drinking:

The ordinances of the Mosaic law applied almost exclusively to meats. It contained no prohibitions respecting drinks except in a very few cases; e.g., of the priests ministering in the Tabernacle (Lev. x.9), of liquids contained in unclean vessels etc. (Lev. xi. 34, 36), and of Nazarite vows (Num. vi. 3). These

directions, taken in connexion with the rigid observances which the later Jews had grafted on them (Matt. xxiii. 24), would be sufficient to explain the expression, when applied to the Mosaic law by itself . . . (p. 259).

But here it is good to remember what Paul said in Rom. 14:17-18:

17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

18 For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men (Rom. 14: 17-18).

Also Heb. 9:7-12 where the writer also spoke of “meats and drinks” in connections with the one day the high priest could go into the holy of holies, etc.:

7 But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people:

8 The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing:

9 Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;

10 Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building;

12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

But besides meats and drinks, Paul mentioned “an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days.” These three words are used in several OT passages as a summary of all of the special days that were observed by the Jews. See, for example, 1 Chron. 23:30-31 where we are told what the priests were to do every morning and every evening:

30 And to stand every morning to thank and praise the LORD, and likewise at even;

31 And to offer all burnt sacrifices unto the LORD in the sabbaths, in the new moons, and on the set feasts, by number, according to the order commanded unto them, continually before the LORD:

We have the same idea in Ezek. 45:17:

And it shall be the prince's part to give burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and drink offerings, in the feasts, and in the new moons, and in the sabbaths, in all solemnities of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin offering, and the meat offering, and the burnt offering, and the peace offerings, to make reconciliation for the house of Israel.

So we can take verse 16 as a summary of all that the Law required in the way of ceremonial observances. And Paul explained in verse 17 why these ceremonies were not only not necessary, but a contradiction that they had all been fulfilled in Christ.

2:17 They were but the shadows, the types of things to come in Christ. “The body is of Christ” means that they were merely types pointing ahead to Christ. The sacrifices were types pointing to Christ, the antitype, or the fulfillment of the type. John MacArthur said, “A shadow has no reality; the reality is what makes the shadow. Jesus Christ is the reality to which the shadows pointed” (p. 119).

Paul said in Rom. 10:4, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.” “The

end” means that He is the goal, the attainment, the consummation. Since Christ has come we are no longer under the Law.

In verse 18 Paul went on to speak of the other feature of the false teaching that was going on in Colosse. It can be described as asceticism, or mysticism.

2:18 The main idea in asceticism is that through self-denial a person can rid himself of sin and all forms of evil so as to reach a higher state spiritually and intellectually. It often, in some cases, amounted to self-torture. But Paul here issued another warning: “Let no man beguile you of your reward.” This is when an umpire would count you out, or when you fully believe that you are going to be rewarded only to learn that you have not accomplished what you had been working for, and so there was no reward. This is illustrated by a person who is working for his salvation only to find out when he stands before the Lord that he is condemned eternally.

So this is a matter of the greatest importance, a matter of eternal life, or eternal death. This is why Paul and the other apostles were always so greatly concerned when the false teachers entered in among the believers.

What is “a voluntary humility”? It was self-abasement in which the ascetics took a great deal of pride. So it was not true humility at all. They were seeking a reward for their own works. It was in complete contrast with the Gospel of the grace of God..

Coupled with this was the “worshipping of angels.”

When the Apostle John was completing the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, he related an experience he had with an angel, the angel which had shown him what he had seen. And this is what he said:

8 And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things.

9 Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God (Rev. 22:8-9).

Angels are creatures, different from us and higher in the creative order than we are, but they are creatures. We are not to worship them. We are to worship God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. It sounds very spiritual to say that you are worshipping angels, but such activity is blasphemous because it means giving glory to a creature when glory belongs to God alone.

We are living in days when there is a strange occupation that some people have with angels which in many cases approaches adoration and worship. But it is nothing less than idolatry. These false teachers claimed superior knowledge, often special revelations through visions, but Paul described it as “intruding into those things which he hath not seen.” In other words, they were liars, blind leaders of the blind where both would fall into a ditch. And the big point that the Apostle Paul was making that these teachers were not satisfied with the Word of God. They were going beyond what was written, and this is always the test that must be applied to any teaching that we hear. How different those false teachers were from the way the Apostle John began his first epistle. Listen to what he said, and notice that it was not just his claim, but the testimony of all of the apostles. Cf. 1 John 1:1-4:

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

2 (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)

3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us:

and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

4 And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

The Bible doesn't always tell us everything that we would like to know, but it tells us all that we need to know, all that God intends for us to know. And we always make a serious mistake when we go beyond what is written. And we need to beware of those who claim to have knowledge beyond what is written. This should make us see the importance of Paul's prayer in Col. 1:9. (Read.)

January 30, 2001

The Apostle Paul called what those false teachers were doing as "intruding." This means that they were going into forbidden territory. This was adding to the Word of God, looking into, scrutinizing, investigating in minute detail those things which God had not revealed. In giving the Law the Lord had warned His people against doing this very thing. Cf. Deut. 4:2:

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.

This was repeated in Deut. 12:32: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." And this carries over to the last chapter of the Bible. See Rev. 22:18-19:

18 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

So what those false teachers were doing, was soundly condemned by the Word of God. And Paul said that they did it because they were "vainly puffed up by their fleshly mind." Cf. Eph. 2:3. What they did, they did in pride, and their teachings were the product of minds which were dominated by the flesh which Eadie said is "the name of unregenerate humanity" (p. 190). Some aspects of it may have sounded like the truth, but as a whole it was vain, meaningless, nothing.

But this did not mean that it was not dangerous. It was very dangerous, and most certainly would bring the judgment of God upon those false teachers, and upon those who accepted their teaching. The true Gospel and the teachings of these unregenerate false teachers, cannot dwell together. There never is any place for compromise with the truth.

February 5, 2001

Some of the MSS read in this eighteenth verse a positive statement, that they were "intruding," or *taking their stand on visions which they had seen*. Geoffrey Wilson reminds us that there was a form of Gnosticism which claimed foreknowledge of the future, and that this knowledge they had received from visions. And so this would point to the teacher who would say, "But I have seen, I have seen," referring to his visions. But Paul said that he was only puffed up, "inflated" (NASB), "by his fleshly mind" And Lightfoot says, "Their profession of humility was a cloak for excessive pride" (p.263). And so instead of being delivered from the flesh, they will held in greater bondage than before by the superior claims that they were making. This was a case where, as John Eadie said,

The "flesh" possesses and governs the "mind." The mind did not struggle with the carnal principle, but succumbed to it. It was wholly under the sway of a nature unchanged by the grace of God, and which therefore exercises its predominance to serve and please itself (p. 190).

We need to remember that religious people are not necessarily people who have been regenerated, and so are

capable to understanding the truth of the Word of God. If they are not saved, their minds are under the control of the flesh, and they will refuse to be controlled by the Word of God, but wander farther and farther away from it. Any system of teaching that claims to be the truth must be tested by the place that it gives to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me review this particular point for you before we go on into verse 19.

I hope you remember that in chapter 1 we saw that our Lord was the Creator, and that all of creation was held together and operated under the control of our Lord. So He is the Lord of creation. But then Paul moved on to say that our Lord is the Head of the Church. And at the end of verse 18 Paul stated why the Lord Jesus was the Creator and the Sustainer of the created universe, and why He is the Head of the Church. It was that “in all things He might have the preeminence.” This meant that God ordained that His Son would be first in authority and influence in creation, and also that He would be the One Who was first in authority and power in the church. This speaks of the absolute sovereignty of our Lord over the whole universe, and His sovereign authority in the Church. In creation the Lord gives us the four seasons. The Lord controls the movements of all of the heavenly bodies as well as the rotation of the earth. He controls the weather, not the fictitious Mother Nature. He makes the sun shine. He gives us rain, and wind, and earthquakes, and hurricanes. And that is why we need to think of what God is doing when there is any disruption in what we have come to understand as the normal way in which God does things.

Now the same is true of the Church, the Body of Christ. He is building His Church. He is keeping His saints. He is defending His Church against all who would rise up against it. The Devil has not been able to destroy the Church – and he never will!!! The Lord as Head of the Church has preserved for us His Word. He is claiming His elect. When in our day we see churches doing the most ridiculous things, let’s remember Who is the Head!

And so Paul said in his warning in chapter 2, verse 8, that we are to beware of anything that is “not according to Christ.” As angry as it makes people even today for us to say that Christ is the only way to God, any other teaching totally false. You can’t preach the Gospel without preaching Christ!

In chapter 2, verse 17, Paul tells us that all of the observances of the Law were but shadows, that the reality toward which they pointed was Christ.

And now in chapter 2, verse 19, we are told by the Apostle Paul that when people falsely humble themselves, and worship angels, and claim to have visions that go beyond what is written in the Word, that their error is apparent because they are “not holding the Head”! Who is “the Head”? Cf. 1:18. He is the Lord Jesus Christ!

2:19 “Not holding the Head” – The verb κρατέω which is used here is a Greek verb which speaks of having strength, power. Jacob was exercising this kind of strength when, after wrestling with the Lord all night, he told the Lord, “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me” (Gen. 32:26). He was holding on to the Lord. When in John 6 even many of the Lord’s disciples were offended by His teaching on salvation, we are told that many of them turned and walked no more with Him. But then the Lord turned to the twelve, and said, “Will ye also go away?” And the disciples responded by saying, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). And then they added: “And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God (John 6:69). They were holding on to Christ.

John Eadie pointed out that the form of the verb that is used here is a participle, κρατῶν, which “describes a firm grasp—a tenacious hold” (p. 191). In the Song of Solomon we have an illustration of what Paul was teaching here when the bride was seeking her lover and she asked the watchmen if they had seen her lover. And then we

read this in the Song of Sol. 3:4:

It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

And then you will remember how Peter and John were threatened by the Jewish leaders in the early days of the church. The record is given in Acts 4, verses 18 through 20:

18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard (Acts 4:18-20).

And you know as well as I do that there have been a countless number of believers throughout the history of the Church who have laid down their lives rather than relax their hold on Christ. The Lord holds us continually in His hand, but there come those times when we have to hang on to Him, when we refuse to let anyone release our grip on Him.

Even today there is a strong movement among many who profess faith in Christ to release their grip on Him, and to allow that it might be possible that there are other ways to God and to heaven besides Christ. So this is a present day matter that we need to face as the Apostle Paul faced it in his day. And at least one prominent Christian leader has said recently about those who think that there are other ways to be saved, "What if they are right?" I know of another Christian leader who openly taught that wherever people were who had not heard of Christ, they would be judged and could be saved if they had lived up to the light that they did have, even though they had not trusted in Christ. He was not "holding the Head."

But an even more subtle form of "not holding the Head" takes place when we as individual Christians seek to live and to please God in our own strength instead of trusting in Christ to enable us to be obedient to the Word of God.. Many Christians call upon the Lord when they are obviously in a situation that is too much for them, but they do not live in the realization that Christ is their life, and that without Him there isn't anything that they can do to please God.. The Lord Jesus said, didn't He, that "without Me ye can do nothing"? See John 15:5b.

And this is precisely what the Apostle Paul went on to say. (Read all of verse 19 again.)

In the NASB, verse 19 has been translated this way:

And not holding fast to the Head, from Whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God (Col. 2:19 - NASB).

Christ has the same relationship to His Church that our heads have to our bodies. We know that if we are truly saved, no one, not even we, can completely sever our relationship with our Lord. He won't let that happen. But it is true that to the extent that we fail on our part to maintain our fellowship with the Lord, and our dependence upon Him, not only do we fail to grow individually, but the growth of the whole body of Christ is affected as well.

You see, this is one reason, and a major reason, that the Apostle Paul said in the latter part of chapter 1 about the goal of his ministry was to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." (Read from the end of verse 27 to the end of the chapter.)

If anyone might feel that Paul was too strong in what he had to say, let me take you back to those two extremely important verses earlier here in chapter 2, verses 9 and 10. (Read.) If all the fulness of Deity is in Christ, and it is, and we are complete in Him, and we are, then let us turn a deaf ear and strong resistance to anyone who would seek to lessen our hold upon Christ.

Remember what Paul said to the Galatians church in Gal 1:6-9:

6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

I have already reminded you of a part of John 15:5, but let me read verses 4 and 5 of that chapter where the Lord was exhorting His disciples to hang on to Him.

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing (John 15:4-5).

The point that the Apostle Paul was making here, was certainly one major reason that our Lord in His prayer recorded in John 17 prayed so fervently for the oneness of His people.

And of course you remember how Paul touched upon this theme in his letter to the church at Ephesus. See Eph.4:11-16. (Read.)

If we really love the Lord Jesus Christ, if we are enjoying daily fellowship with Him so that He is more than just someone about Whom we read, the dearest of all to our souls, then we will cling to Him with all of our might, and refuse to be drawn away from Him just as strongly as we would if someone were to try to draw us away from our spouse. The first lesson for all of us to learn if we want to grow and to be strong as the people of God, is that we must never release our hold on Christ. Our growth comes from our relationship with Him, and only from Him.

So Paul proceeded by asking a question.

2:20 Paul goes back here to the truth which he loved, and which we should love too, our union with Christ. Here it is our union with Christ in His death.

February 6, 2001

The key to understanding this verse is to determine what the Apostle Paul meant by the prepositional phrase, “from the rudiments of the world.” Eadie said that the preposition “from” (ἀπό) “is here employed to intensify the idea, as if death were followed by distance or removal” (p. 195). In two verses, also from the Apostle Paul, we are taught that we died to the Law. Those verses are Rom. 7:4 and Gal. 2:19. Rom. 7:4 tells us:

4 Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. And Gal. 2:19 says: “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.”

When we add to this verses like Rom. 7:6 and Rom. 8:12 we see that Paul taught that we as believers “are no longer debtors to live according to the flesh, and that they have been discharged from the law, which once held them captive, so that they longer serve according to the old written code” (Wilson, p.61, quoting A. J. Bandstra). Rom. 7:6:

6 But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

And Rom 8:12: “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.”

And so it would seem that Paul was referring to the Law and the flesh when he spoke of being “dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world.” Those who are “in the flesh,” *i.e.*, “cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8), and also “by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). Apart from Christ man is left with only his flesh, his old nature, and the Law. The Law convicts man as a sinner, but his flesh can do nothing about it. We have already learned from Col. 2:14 that Christ by His death satisfied the demand of the Law that we die for our sins, and so now we are free from that condemnation and through Christ are enabled to live a life that is pleasing to God. And so Paul asks, “Why do we live in the world like we were still under the Law?”

2:21 The Law says, “Touch not, taste not, handle not.” But this does nothing to control or to do away with the power of sin. The Law only makes sin abound; it makes us more aware of sin and our inability to control it. To abstain from these things which according to verse 22 are to “perish with the using, *i.e.*, can never produce a holy life.

2:22 And so going back to verse 20 where Paul’s question began (and skipping the parenthesis in verse 21 and the first part of verse 22) we have the question: “Why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, . . . after the commandments and doctrines of men?” Paul was not saying that the Law was “after the commandments and doctrines of men,” but he was speaking of how both Jews and Gentiles were inclined to live according to commandments and ordinances, some which had been given by God, and others which were made by men. So neither God’s Law, nor any man-made laws, could either save from sin or produce a holy life. And the reason: because all man has apart from Christ is his sin corrupted and spiritually dead flesh.

2:23 Here Paul is willing “to give credit where credit is due.” But he is saying that what the teachers of the Law of God, or any other law, or the high-sounding teaching of the ascetics, appears to be good, but actually (as the marginal reading in my Bible renders the last part of verse 23) “are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh.”

In other words, it sounds good, and looks good in print, but it is no good. Any way of salvation that is dependent upon what man can do for himself, is worthless. And that is what every system is except the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we go back to Paul’s exhortation in Col. 2:6-7. It is only by the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our union with Him in His death, His burial, His resurrection, and even His ascension, that the penalty of our sin has been paid in full, and we have been delivered from the power of sin and death.

And follow Col. 2:6-7 with Col. 2:9-10. All of the fulness of Deity dwells in the Man, Christ Jesus, and we are “complete in Him.” So to seek salvation elsewhere is to have no salvation at all. We need to remember what Paul told the believers of the Galatian churches. And he did it with his full apostolic authority. Here is what he said: “Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing” (Gal. 5:2).

I often think of this verse in connection with the many people who believe that baptism is a part of their salvation. Paul did not say that these are harmless additions, baptism, circumcision, or whatever else we may add to the Gospel. But he said that the person who thinks that being circumcised is a necessary addition to what Christ has done, is a person who is totally without Christ. Does the same apply to baptism, or membership in a particular church, or submitting to the sacraments of a church? I would be afraid that it does. And if that were a part of the ground upon which I am standing for my salvation, I would go to God today and repent of my sin of thinking that I could add anything to what Christ has done, and I would tell God that my faith is in Christ, and Christ alone. Baptism has its place, but not as a condition for salvation. If you are not saved before you are baptized, you just go down into the water a dry sinner, and come up a wet one. How important it is that we all be able to sing from our hearts,

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' Name.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.

Another great hymn gives us these words:

My faith has found a resting place, not in device nor creed:
I trust the ever-living One, His wounds for me shall plead.

Enough for me that Jesus saves, this ends my fear and doubt;
A sinful soul I come to Him, He'll never cast me out.

My heart is leaning on the Word, the written Word of God,
Salvation by my Savior's Name, salvation through His blood.

I need no other argument, I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.

Let all of us make sure that we are not only trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation, *but trusting in Christ alone!*

**The Epistle of Paul the Apostle
to the
Colossians**

February 12, 2001 – Colossians 3:1-4:6

Intro: We come now to the practical section of the epistle. It is characteristic of the Apostle Paul's writing that he begins with the doctrinal and then moves on to the practical, the application of the doctrine, or teaching. Sidlow Baxter said, "'How you live' is always determined by 'what you believe'" (Vol. 6, p. 208). Thus it is impossible to overemphasize the importance of right doctrine. The false teachers were attacking the doctrine of the people of God as it is given to us in the Word of God, and the ultimate objective was to change their lives. This is one of the main reasons the apostles were so concerned when there was any deviation from the truth of God.

Bishop Moule, in his characteristic way, expressed the importance of the first four verses of Colossians 3, in these words:

This is one of the golden paragraphs of the whole Bible. To countless hearts it is one of their peculiar treasures. There is a celestial music for them in its very phrase and rhythm. It lifts the soul as with wings, till we get a glimpse of that exalted One sitting throned after death at the Right Hand of power, and in some sense realize that where He is we His people are, as to the true heart and basis of our regenerate being, and *know* that that basis is nothing less nor lower than HIMSELF, and stand upon that fact, and look out from it towards the coming glory, and turn to a renewed and joyful walk here, "in this present world," by faith in the Son of God (p. 189).

This is what John Eadie had to say about this new section of the epistle which we now come to:

The Apostle leaves his scornful flagellation [scourging] of the false teachers, and comes to a more congenial occupation. For though it is needful to refute error, it is more pleasant to inculcate [to teach and impress by frequent repetitions] truth. If the Colossian believers should act in accordance with their privileges—if they understood how the charge preferred against them by the Law had been met with a discharge on the Cross of Calvary—if the process of sanctification beginning in their hearts should work outward, and hallow and adorn their lives—if they felt that whatever blessings they enjoyed in part, or anticipated in fulness, sprang from union with Christ, then should they be fortified against every effort to induce them to sever themselves from the Head, and against every attempt to substitute reveries for truth, or human inventions for divine enactments. Then, too, should they learn that worship does not consist of superstitious invocations, and that sanctification is not identical with fanatical austerities. Let them move in a spiritual region lifted far above those earthly vanities, and let them look down on them as the offspring of a morbid and self-deceived imagination, or the craving and the nutriment of a self-satisfied pride (p. 212).

So just as a healthy body is a strong deterrent against disease, so a clear understanding of the doctrines of Scripture is the best defense against false teaching. And it is our personal conformity to the practical exhortations of Scripture that show that we have understood the doctrine of God's Word.

So let us move on now into the practical teaching of the Apostle Paul.

3:1 "If ye then be risen with Christ." Paul was not suggesting that it is possible to be a Christians without being "risen with Christ." He was not saying that this is a relationship with Christ that we need to seek. He was stating a fact, a positive teaching of Scripture which he had declared in chapter 2, verses 12 and 13. So, as many expositors have recognized, the "if" at the beginning of the chapter ought to be *since!* And notice that if we were risen with Christ, we had to be raised when He was raised. We don't enter into the enjoyment of it

until we are saved, but the fact that we died with Him, and were raised with Him, is further evidence that Christ died on the Cross for all whom the Father had given to Him, meaning all of the elect – all who would ever be saved.

The teaching of our union with Christ in His death and resurrection, is not confined to Paul's epistle to the Colossians. See Eph. 2:4-7 and Rom. 6:3-11. Gal. 2:20 also refers to our union with Christ in His death and resurrection. It should read, "I have been crucified with Christ . . ." Paul stated this in the perfect passive indicative, indicating that this was an accomplished fact. Self-crucifixion is an impossibility, and so those who teach that we are to crucify ourselves are trying to do something which cannot be done, nor is it necessary because we were crucified with Christ was crucified. But He did not remain in the grave! He arose, and we arose with Him. Consequently we now, in the words of Romans 6:4, are to "walk in newness of life." As I have said many times before, there is not such teaching in the Bible that a person can be saved and yet remain unchanged. We are changed the moment we are saved, but the changes continue as we walk with the Lord and as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord.

PSA. 27:4,5

So, since we have been raised with Christ, we are to "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." The verb "seek" is ζητεῖτε, which a present indicative active verb, which means that we must seek, and seek, and seek, and never stop seeking the things which are above," where Christ is. In other words, as long as we live, we are to be seeking those things which are above.

Christ is "above," in heaven. We are citizens of heaven. Cf. Phil. 3:20. We are not to seek the things of the world, but we are to be separated from the world. When the Lord Jesus prayed for His people in the prayer recorded for us in John 17, He said a lot about the world and the relationship that His people had to the world. We were "of the world" before we were saved, but the Lord chose us "out of the world," and yet we are still living "in the world."

Remember what the Lord said to His disciples about the world as they walked from the Upper Room toward the Garden of Gethsemane. His words are recorded in John 15:18-19:

18 If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

We are not to live like the people of the world live. We are not to talk like they talk. We are not to seek what they seek. Cf. Rom. 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; 1 John 2:15-17.

Instead, we are to "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Now this is just another way of saying that we are *to seek the things of Christ*, which means *to seek to be like Christ!* What is the goal of our salvation? To be sure it is to be in heaven with the Lord, but in addition, we are to be *like the Lord*.

Verse 2 says essentially the same thing.

3:2 In verse 1 the verb is "seek"; here in verse 2 it is, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." To "seek" means that which we strive for, that which is the primary goal that we have in life. It is that which we are constantly thinking about, that which we want more than anything else. On the other hand, *to set our affections on anything*, again emphasizes what we think about. Lightfoot says, "You must not only *seek* heaven, but you must *think* heaven" (p. 275). We are to set our minds on it *with feeling*. Perhaps we could change Lightfoot's wording to, "You must not only *seek* Christ, but you must *think* Christ." It is like David said in Psalm 16:8-9:

8 I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.

And in Psalm 17:13-15 David spoke again of the “men of the world” in contrast with his own hope:

13 Arise, O LORD, disappoint him, cast him down: deliver my soul from the wicked, which is thy sword:

14 From men which are thy hand, O LORD, from men of the world, which have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes.

15 As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

2:3 The reason is given here for the two preceding verses: “For ye died” (the better translation). It is an aorist which “denotes the past act” (Lightfoot, p. 275). “Is hid,” or better, *has been hidden*, a perfect passive which shows the continuing effect. “Hid” means that our lives are locked together with Christ in God. They are secure, and no one, not even the Devil himself, can break in and take us away.

We “died,” but in what way, and to what?

This takes us back to Paul’s words in chapter 2, verse 20. Lenski wrote: “You got away from every bit of religion that operated with material things and with doing this or that with them.” And then he asked, “What does it matter to a dead man what anybody does with material, earthly things whether these are a part of his religion or otherwise?” (p. 153).

We died to the penalty of our sin because we died in Christ and He perfectly satisfied all of the charges of the Law that were against us. We also died to the power of sin. Sin no longer has dominion over us. It is still possible for us to sin, but it is not necessary. We can sin, but we don’t have to sin. Neither are we under the power of the Evil One. He is our defeated Foe. He still goes about seeking whom he may devour, but “greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. We died to the ways of the world, and now our hearts are set upon pleasing the One Who sent His Son that we might live through Him. To state it briefly as the Apostle Paul did in 2 Cor. 5:17,

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (or, it is a new creation): old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

But what about the last part of verse 3: “And your life is hid with Christ in God.”

John MacArthur says that it means three important things. First, that we as “believers share a common life with the Father and Son” (p. 131). As unbelievable as this sounds, yet it is fully supported by Scripture. Christ is our life, as Paul went on to say in verse 4. Again referring to Gal. 2:20 where the Apostle Paul, speaking on behalf of all believers, said, “Christ liveth in me.”

Bishop Moule was in full agreement because he said this:

Here is St. Paul’s program, his prescription, for the blessed life, the transfigured life, at Colosse. Live in heaven, that you may really live on earth. Live in heaven, not in the sense of the poet but that of the believer. Live in recollecting and conscious union with Him Who is there, but who is at the same time in you, your Life. Live in the continual confession to your own souls that you died His death, and live in His life, and are with him—by the law of union—on His throne; and then bring *this* to bear upon the temptations of your path. Use these things. Take them as facts into life, exactly as life is for you today. You shall find that in them, that is to say, in HIM, you can be holy. You can walk in perfect liberty, and you can walk (with the same steps) in perpetual and delightful service (p. 194).

This passage teaches all of this, that we “share a common life with the Father and Son.”

But secondly Dr. MacArthur says that this statement, “and your life is hid with Christ in God,” means that our “new life is concealed from the world.” The Apostle John said in 1 John 3:1,

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not (1 John 3:1).

Dr. MacArthur cited 1 Cor. 2:14. (Quote.) The people of the world are incapable of understanding what a Christian is, what makes him live the way he does. They say that we are religious, or we are the way we are because we go to church. But they have no idea that Christ is our life. That being a Christian means to be in living union with our heavenly Father and with His Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. And, unfortunately, there are many Christians who do not really understand this truth. The true Christian remains a mystery to the world.

Thirdly, Dr. MacArthur says that this statement, “and your life is hid with Christ in God,” means, as I think I have already mentioned, that we “are eternally secure, hidden protectively from all spiritual foes” (p. 131).

Here we think of our Lord’s words in John 10:27-30:

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me:

28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

29 My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.

30 I and my Father are one.

Also, remember Rom. 8:31-39:

31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.

34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Dr. MacArthur also reminds us of that wonderful doxology at the beginning of the Apostle Peter’s first epistle:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Bishop Lightfoot used water baptism as an illustration of what the Apostle Paul was saying here. Listen to what he wrote:

When you sank under the baptismal water, you disappeared forever to the world. You rose again, it is true, but you rose only to God. The world henceforth knows nothing of your new life, and (as a consequence) your new life must know nothing of the world (Lightfoot, p. 275).

But this is not how things will always be, as we learn from verse 4.

3:4 Today, while the reality of all of these things is to a certain extent hidden from us, the day is coming when it all will be clear. At the present time Christ is seated “at the right hand of God,” our heavenly Father. And yet He lives in everyone whom He has saved. We can’t fully comprehend how this can be. It is as Paul said it was in 1 Cor. 13:12:

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Even the Apostle John, with all that he understood of the truth, wrote:

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

We know some things, but we don’t know everything, about what is yet to come. One thing we do know, and that is that Christ is coming. He is going to *appear*! “Shall appear” as it appears in the Greek text would be better translated, *whenever He is manifested*. We have His promise that He is coming again (see John 14:1-3), but we are not told when it will be. And the reason is that we will be looking for Him all of the time. And when He appears, then we will appear. The Apostle John was not just talking about the coming of the Lord as an event, but as a time when there will be a manifestation of the Lord Jesus, and also a manifestation of those of us who know Him. Then it will be clear to us, completely clear, what He is, and it will be fully revealed what we are by the grace of God.

But what about the world?

We do not know when the Lord is coming for us, but, from the way that things are going on the earth, we may not have much longer to wait. The Lord will come and remove His Church, and then there will be great tribulation such as the world has never seen. It is significant that all of the ungodliness that has become characteristic of the United States, is true also of most nations on the face of the earth. And so the world is ripe for the judgment of God. But when the Church is raptured, things will not only continue as they are, but will get worse. However, at the end of the Tribulation, then we are told that the Lord will come “with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). Even Enoch predicted this as we read in the epistle of Jude:

14 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,

15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him (Jude 14-15).

Zechariah tells us about the time when the elect of Israel will discover the glory of the Son of God. See Zech. 12:9-10:

9 And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

10 And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for

him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.

But the Apostle John is the one who wrote in particular about the manifestation of the Son of God. That account is found in Rev. 19:11-16:

- 11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.
- 12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.
- 13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.
- 14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.
- 15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.
- 16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Then, too, the world will be brought to see what *a saint* is. Many believers are in heaven today awaiting that day, and they certainly know more than we know. But much of that is still hidden from us. However, when the Lord comes for His Church, then it will become clear to us what salvation is and what it means to be a Christian.

And so we can read Col. 3:4, “And when Christ, Who is our Life, shall be manifested [as to Who He is], then we also shall be manifested in glory [our glorified state]

Geoffrey Wilson, whom I have quoted several times, quoted an expositor by the name of Beet, who wrote this:
At present the real dignity of the sons of God is hidden from the eyes of men and indeed from their own eyes, as Christ is hidden from mortal sight. In that day Christ in His essential grandeur [glory] will appear and with Him will appear also the grandeur with which He will adorn His servants (Beet, in Wilson, p. 67).

And so for the present we need to be able to say what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. We find his words in 2 Cor. 4:17-18:

- 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;
- 18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Those unseen things are the things of Christ which we will learn more about as we go on in chapter 3.

February 19, 2001

These four verses form a marvelous introduction to the practical exhortations Paul intended to give to the believers at Colosse. We need to read them over and over, commit them to memory, and seek continually from the Lord greater understanding of them. The Apostle Paul did not mean to indicate that we are to neglect or even forget the responsibilities that we have in this life. We will see in some of the exhortations that follow, as contradictory as it might seem to us, that a vital part of seeking the things which are above where Christ is, is in fulfilling our responsibilities here on earth. But we are to do them from entirely different motives than the people of the world do the same things. We are to seek to please the Lord in all that we do. See 1:10. We are

to do all that we do, even the menial tasks of the servant, in the Name of the Lord Jesus. See 3:17. And if Paul had intended for us to neglect our human responsibilities, he never would have spoken to wives, husbands and fathers, children, servants, and masters as he did toward the end of chapter 3, and at the beginning of chapter 4.

However, the people of the world, people who do not know the Lord, do many of the things that we do in daily life, but their motives are different. We are seeking to please God primarily. They are seeking to please themselves, or others, for various reasons.

Charles Simeon, that great Cambridge pastor of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century, said that among the things above that we are to seek, were three very important objectives:

- 1) We seek the approval of our God, the One we have all offended in the past.
- 2) We must seek special manifestations of His love for our souls.
- 3) We must seek to become more like our blessed Lord, seeking what Simeon called “the possession of His glory.”

I believe that we will understand verses 1 through 4 of chapter 3 in a greater way as we go through the exhortations that we will find from verse 5 on to verse 6 in chapter 4.

The first point in these exhortations is:

B. To mortify sin (Col. 3:5-11).

The verb that the Apostle Paul used here is the Greek verb νεκρώω. It is an aorist command meaning not only *to put to death*, but *to treat as dead*. Paul did not teach sinless perfection, but he did teach that the dominion of sin, its mastery, had been broken in the lives of believers by the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sin continues to be a problem in the lives of believers, but we are to treat it as dead.

There is a passage in the book of Romans where the Apostle Paul mentioned the mortification of sin. I am referring to Rom. 8:13:

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

Here Paul clearly taught that we do not mortify the deeds of the body in our own strength, but it is “through the Spirit,” that is, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our old nature is utterly corrupt. It is not changed when we are saved. That is the reason that we can still sin. But when Christ died He broke the power of sin for all of those who believe in Him. So by the Holy Spirit we know that we are no longer the servants of sin. And it is by His power that we can experience victory over sin.

Another passage in Romans which gives us help on this subject of the mortification of sin, is Romans 6. Please turn to that chapter, and follow me as I begin reading with verse 1. (Read verses 1 through 14.)

Paul here was dealing with the same truth that we have in Colossians and in Ephesians – the fact that we were united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. In God’s sight when Christ died, we died. When He was buried, we were buried. When Christ was raised, we were raised – raised, as Rom. 6:4 tells us that “we also should walk in newness of life.” *But on the basis of our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, we have responsibilities that we need to recognize, and these are stated in Rom. 6:11, 12, and 13!* (Explain.)

Verse 12 deals with the mortification of sin. We treat ourselves as being dead to sin. But, as we saw in Rom.

8:13, this is only possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. We can't do it alone; we do it through Him – the Holy Spirit!

In Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia he got into this subject of sin also. Cf. and read Gal. 5:16-26. And so this further emphasizes the fact that victory over sin is through the Spirit. In Galatians it means walking in the Spirit, walking in dependence upon Him.

Cf. also Rom. 12:1-2.

Now the word "members" is used in different ways in Romans and Colossians. In Romans 6:13 our members are the parts of our bodies – our eyes, our ears, our minds, our mouths, our hands, our feet, and all of the other parts of our bodies. But in Colossians our members are the sins which we are all capable of committing. And we need to keep both ideas in our minds.

Going back to our text in Colossians, notice the description which Paul gave to our members there: "your members which are upon the earth." Now take this back up to verse 2. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." So first in our text Paul is going to deal with our "members which are upon the earth." And these are the opposite of the things which are above. These are a part of our flesh, our old nature, and so in that sense they are our "members."

It seems that Paul used these words each including all sins in a particular category. "Fornication" is used here of any illicit sexual behavior – prior to marriage, adultery after marriage, plus all of the perversions that have become so commonplace in our day. Cf. Acts 15:20, 29. "Uncleanness" speaks of the impurity of morally lustful and profligate living. Thayer says that in 1 Thess. 2:3 it is used of impure motives. "Inordinate affection" is used in Rom. 1:26 (through verse 28) of homosexual behavior. "Evil concupiscence" is a craving a lust, for that which is evil. "Covetousness" is a desire to have more, making it a way of life, even if it means taking that which belongs to another. This is "idolatry," a form of worshiping a god. We need to remember what the Lord said in Luke 12:15,

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

We can see in our own country today how people give themselves so completely to the pursuit of what this world has to offer them. Cf. 1 John 2:15-17.

February 20, 2001

Lenski points out that the first four of these are sexual – the first two of which are outward; the second two are inward, in the heart. "Covetousness" usually has some connection with money. It finds it parallel in the OT where often even the Israelites often worshiped gods of gold and silver.

This is a short list. Paul mentioned more sins in verses 7 and 8. A longer list is in Gal. 5:19-21. Also cf. Rom. 1:24-32. Combine all of the lists and you have what Paul was referring to when he spoke of "your members which are upon the earth" (Col. 3:5). See also Rom. 3:9-18. When we add all of these together we have *total depravity*! This is the true picture of man – all men, all women, all young people, all children. When God told Adam regarding the forbidden fruit, "In the day ye eat thereof ye shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17), He was not only speaking of physical death (which is bad enough), but He was speaking of spiritual death, what it means to be "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1). And, according to Romans 1, the more that people reject God, the greater becomes their bondage to sin. We are seeing in our day that this bondage is not limited to adults, but can be seen in children from the time of birth. These do not describe man as he was created by God, but they

describe what man has become because of his rejection of God. The only remedy for sin is the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's Cross. Man who becomes concerned about his "sins," attempts to free himself by reformation. But that is never enough to satisfy God. The only answer is regeneration, new life, and the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of Christ. Look at the Cross. See Who died there. Realize that it took His death to atone for our sins, and you will never again be able to minimize the awfulness of our sins.

But verse 5 tells us that these sins have not been atoned for in the case of "the sons of disobedience."

3:6 "Covetousness" in verse ⁵ has the article "the" preceding it – "the covetousness." This sets it apart from the other sins which are mentioned in verse 5, and even intensifies the terrible nature of covetousness.

The word for "covetousness" in the Greek is *πλεονεξία*. There is another Greek word which is very much like it, but much more limited in its meaning, and that is the word which is translated in 1 Tim. 6:10, "the love of money." It is the word *φιλαργυρία*. Another form of the word (with an -ος ending) is found in Luke 15:14 and 2 Tim. 3:2. In Luke 16:14 it is translated "covetous," but it really means specifically *the love of money*. Reading verse 13 with it, this is what we have:

13 No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

14 And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him (Luke 16:13-14).

So Luke was saying that the reason the Pharisees "derided" the Lord, *scoffed at Him*, was because they were men who *loved money*! In 2 Tim. 3:2 we have the same word. Most of you will be familiar with the passage. Let me read to you 2 Tim 3:1-5:

1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

Paul said in verse 2 that men will *love money*. It is translated here "covetous," but it is the word *φιλάργυρος*. It has a more limited meaning than the regular word for covetousness, which is *πλεονεξία*.

The word which Paul used in our text here in Col. 3:5 is greater and even more terrible than *the love of money* (which is bad enough, and is terribly enslaving). The word in Col. 3:5, *πλεονεξία*, includes money, but as here, and in 1 Cor. 5:11 and in Eph. 5:3, 5, as well as here in our text, is "joined with sins of impurity" (Trench, p. 83). And here in Col. 3:5 is one place where "covetousness" is used "to designate . . . the root out of which" (*Ibid.*) sexual sins grow. It is "the fiercer and ever fiercer longing of the creature which has forsaken God, to fill itself with the lower objects of sense" (*Ibid.*), that is, all forms of sexual impurity. Trench also said that Plato likened this word to a sieve or any kind of a vessel with holes in it which men are always trying to fill to their own satisfaction, and yet never succeeding (*Op. cit.*, p. 84). And so Trench said that the meaning of this word "is summed up" in the "ever defeated longing of the creature, as it has despised the children's bread, to stay its hunger with the husks of the swine" (*Ibid.*).

Eadie wrote, "This desire of having more, and yet more, is idolatry. What it craves it worships, what it worships it makes its portion. To such a god there is given the first thought of the morning, the last wish of the evening, and the action of every waking hour" (p. 223).

So what Paul was saying here was that *the covetousness* of man is what makes him a sexual animal, one who perverts that which God intended for man's blessing, that which was to be satisfied within the marriage relationship. Cf. Eph. 4: 19 (NASB). Also Eph. 5:3, 5.

Now here in verse 6 we see that no one is going to get away with such covetousness. For the present God judges sexual impurity with great unhappiness, often with disease, never with true satisfaction, but this is not all. As Paul said, and it is still true, "For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience." The parallel passage in Ephesians says this:

5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

6 Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord (Eph. 5:5-10).

Proverbs 15:3 tells us, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Nothing can be hidden from God. Our Lord said while He was here on earth,

19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved (John 3:19-20).

But what ungodly men don't know, or if they know it, they try to forget it, is this:

11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee (Psa. 139:11-12).

The lights can be turned out, and the shades drawn, but the Lord sees everything just as clearly in the black of the night as He does in the light of the day.

But what did Paul mean by "the wrath of God"? It is that which is a part of the divine nature that God will punish sin. There is no question about that. God is love, but God is also holy, and He cannot tolerate sin. We can be thankful that God is longsuffering and God is very patient, but our verse says that *the wrath of God is coming*. But we can say even more than that. When the Apostle Paul was preaching in Athens on Mars' Hill, among other things he said this:

29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (Acts 17:29-31).

We are all "by nature children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). We were born under the judgment of God. And that judgment remains until God intervenes in our lives so that we seek repentance and the forgiveness of our sins through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Although the phrase, "upon the sons of disobedience," is not found in all the MSS, it is in some, and it is in Eph. 2:2. We are all "the sons of" Adam's "disobedience," and we are *sons characterized by our own disobedience to God*. We are given here also a definition of sin: *Sin is anything that is disobedient to God*. And ultimately the wrath of God is to be sent to hell, the place of eternal judgment.

And that is awful beyond anything that we are capable of understanding now. And in verse 7 the Apostle Paul reminded the saints in Colosse that “wrath” is what they all faced, and it is what we all faced.

The wrath to come was a part of the ministry of John the Baptist:

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance (Matt. 3:7-8).

And the Apostle Paul had in mind the coming judgment of God upon sinners as he wrote to the believers in Thessalonica, and said,

9 For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

10 And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

The work of the Lord in Thessalonica was well known in Macedonia and Achaia and in many other places, and how many had been delivered “from the wrath to come.”

When we speak of being saved, we need to have in mind what we have been saved from. We have been saved from sin’s power, but we have also been saved from sin’s penalty, “the wrath of God.” Christ is our Savior. He is the only Savior. He is the One Who has “delivered us from the wrath to come.”

3:7 Paul’s remarks here were designed to make the believers in Colosse feel compassion toward those who were still under the wrath of God.

John Eadie remarked on this verse and its two verbs:

The difference of meaning between the two verbs has been variously understood, but there needs no special definition. They once walked in such lusts, when they lived in them; that is they were utterly addicted to them, for they believed that life of happiness was to be found in them (p. 225).

How gracious God has been to show us His truth, that happiness is not to be found in sin – ever! It is to be found in Christ our great Savior from sin, Who has transformed us within and without.

February 26, 2001

Cf. also 1 Cor. 6:9-11:

9 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,

10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

11 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.

3:8 Paul had been speaking of what they were in the past; here he turned to what they are “now,” and the changes that should be very observable in their lives. Salvation is an *inward* work of God in our hearts, but the effect will be seen in our *outward* behavior and character.

The “ye” is plural and so is the “all.” So it means that *all* of them were to put off *all* of the following sins – no exceptions in either case. Paul was indicating that, as Eadie said, “a radical and extensive change had taken place” (p. 225).

The way Paul would have used these Greek words, “anger” is outward; “wrath” is inward. “Malice” is inward; “blasphemy” is outward. And, of course, “filthy communication” is outward. And it is important to notice that *the tongue* is involved in this series of sins. Let me explain.

“Anger” is a sudden outburst of rage. It describes what we often have in mind when we say that *a person blows his top!* We are not aware of what is going on inside of that person until suddenly there is an eruption of fury. But this is often because *inwardly* there is “wrath” boiling within. Or we can say that two different people handle their unhappiness in two different ways. One always blows up; the other is just as angry, but he keeps it all within himself.

The same kind of a contrast can be seen in “malice” and “blasphemy,” but in the reverse order from the first two sins in this verse. “Malice” is inward; “blasphemy” is outward. “Malice” has reference to the condition of a person’s heart. It is a strong feeling of ill will. It is what the law calls “malice aforethought,” that is, when it can be shown that a criminal had a deliberate intention to commit a crime. Of course it doesn’t have to involve a criminal act, but it is the feeling we all have had that something bad might happen to someone. It is enmity in the heart. But “blasphemy” is outward. This word which is often used in connection with God, has its application to people also. It is related to “anger” and “wrath” and “malice” also. “Blasphemy” is slander. It is when we falsely accuse someone, or to speak of a person with disrespect. It can include profanity and cursing.

The last words in this verse that are to be put off are “filthy communication.” This is any language that is foul, or indecent, anything that is obscene. This is what we have in mind when we say that a certain person has a dirty mouth.

These words ought to remind us of what James had to say about the tongue. (Read James 3.)

Bishop Moule had this to say about this section of Colossians:

“The Christian character is an unsinning character.” This is by no means to say that the man who is a Christian is an unsinning person. No, “if he says he has no sin, he deceives himself, and the truth is not in him” (1 John i. 8). But then, when he sins, he is out of character as a Christian. It is immensely important that he should remember this. Rightly remembered, it will both humble him and encourage him, with divine results (p. 209).

Now in reading a verse like this, and surely in taking the time to find out exactly what these words mean, we should not pass over the verse without taking some time to think about what the Apostle Paul was saying. These are not sins that were limited to the first century believers, but they are to be seen in believers in every generation. To some extent we are all guilty. Some are more of a problem to one person than they are to another. But we all have trouble with the feelings that we have in our hearts, and who has not felt guilty because he or she has said the wrong thing in anger, or in falsely accusing someone, or speaking disrespectfully of some other brother in Christ.

We must not think that we cannot denounce sin, or rebuke a brother or sister who is doing the wrong thing. But we need to be careful about our feelings and how we express ourselves. The Lord Jesus spoke in the strongest words against the scribes and Pharisees, but he was the Son of God! When we speak against sin, it must always be with a sympathetic heart, and with a desire to rectify that which is wrong.

But let us turn the focus upon ourselves. Do I recognize any of these sins as sins of which I am guilty at the present time? If so, by God’s grace and in the power of the Holy Spirit, they need to be “put off,” and kept off! The verb, ἀποτίθημι, lit. means *to put from you*, or *to lay aside* like old clothes. Robertson said that this

applies to “the whole bunch of filthy rags”(IV, 501) referring to the sins that are mentioned in this verse plus the one mentioned in verse 9: lying. Nor is it optional. This is a command from God Himself. “They are to “put off”—not merely to modify or reduce, but to put quite off from them—all sinning of the temper, all sinning of the tongue” (Moule, p. 212).

But let us not look at verses 5 through 8 as though they stand alone. Both the desire and the ability to put off these sins of the flesh come from our occupation with Christ, “Who is our life.” Having died with Christ, but also risen with Him, our lives have been transformed, and we cannot tolerate sin in any form.

But let us move on to verse 9.

3:9 Here Paul continued with a very common sin of the heart and the tongue: Lying. King David said in Psa. 58:3, “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.” He also said in Psalm 40, verse 4,

Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.

On one occasion when the Lord was speaking with Jews, He said to them, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.” And then He continued in the same verse to say, speaking of the Devil, “When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44).

I agree with Calvin who said that the Lord was speaking here of every form of deception. Abram told Pharaoh that Sarai was his sister (which was half true). They both had the same father, but not the same mother. But Abram’s purpose was to deceive Pharaoh as to their relationship, and so it was a lie. Jacob got the blessing from his father, Isaac, but everything that he told his father was a lie. He had to cover the first lie with another, and then with another, until it was all a bunch of lies.

The dictionary defines a lie as “anything that deceives.” Eadie quoted one of the Greek Fathers who said, “Falsehood ill became them who avowed themselves disciples of Him who said, ‘I am the truth’” (p. 226). And then he added that Paul’s “meaning is, in all your communications among yourselves never depart from the truth” (*Ibid.*).

Why should we not lie? Well, because the Lord said, “Thou shalt not bear false witness.” But added to that is the fact that we “have put off the old man with his deeds,” and then moving to verse 10,

3:10 “And have put on the new man . . .”

Calvin wrote that “*the old man denotes*—whatever we bring from our mother’s womb, and whatever we are by nature” (XXI, p. 211). Putting off the old man and putting on the new man is equal to what the Apostle Paul had said before about our having died with Christ and then raised with Him.

We put off the old man and put on the new man because we have been “renewed in knowledge,” lit., as Paul expressed it, *in a fuller and more complete and correct understanding of the truth*. Even though, as Paul said in 1 Cor.13:12 that “now we see through a glass darkly,” yet even that vision is far greater than the spiritual darkness and ignorance which characterized us before we were saved.. And Paul’s wording here which is translated “renewed,” is a present passive participle which lit. means, *is being renewed in knowledge*. And this is how it is translated in the NASB:

And have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him -- (Col. 3:10, NASB).

And so this means that the knowledge of the man in Christ, and his conformity to the likeness of Christ, is not an instantaneous work, but a progress work of God in the life of the believer.

I said a moment ago that the words “which is being renewed” was a present passive participle. Now if we remember what we were taught about what the passive voice means, we know that this means that the subject of the sentence is not doing the action, but *it is being acted upon*. This means that while we turn away from sin, yet the One Who enables us, and the One Who gives us this progressively greater knowledge, is God, or perhaps more accurately, God the Holy Spirit. Our renewal, our growth in the Lord, is not our doing (although there are things that we need to do), yet it is the continuing work of God.

“After the image of Him that created him.” The word translated “after” is the Greek preposition *κατά*, which means *according to, conformably to, after the fashion or likeness of*. So the object of this renewal is that we are being made like the One Who created us.

Do you know that there are two creations spoken of in Scripture? There is that original creation where God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” That is what man was created by the sovereign power of God. But the Apostle Paul tells us also about a “new creation.” We read of it in 2 Cor. 5:17:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

But the NIV translates that same verse this way: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

The parallel passage in the book of Ephesians helps us to know which creation Paul had in mind. Listen to what Paul wrote in Eph. 4:22-24:

22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;

24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

So Paul was not speaking here of the original creation of Adam and Eve, but the new creation of those who have been forever made new by the power of God in salvation.

Before we leave this verse, let me call your attention to the word “knowledge.” The Greek here is *εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν*. And lit. it means, *unto a full knowledge, a complete knowledge*. The thought in the verse is that we are to be making progress from what we have come to know as a result of our conviction and salvation, to the point when our knowledge will be complete. But that will never be in this life. But the question we need to ask at this point is, Where can we obtain that knowledge? And the answer which most Christians understand, or need to understand if it is not already clear to them, is in the Bible. Every day we need to be reading it, and every time we read we need to be praying that the Lord will help us to understand it. But the greatest profit comes when we obey it. This is what produces “righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24).

So while all three Members of the Godhead are involved in our learning and our growing into the likeness of God and of Christ, yet we are responsible to use the means that God has given us to reach the goal – which includes the Bible, prayer, obedience, attendance at church where the Word is taught, and the fellowship that we enjoy with one another in Christ. So there are these special things that we need to do, and God works through them to make us like Himself.

But let us move on.

3:11 This verse is a continuation of what the Apostle Paul had been saying in verse 10 and in the verses before that. And here he seemed to be answering the question, “But does this glorious truth have any limitations as far as the people of God are concerned?” The Gospel even then had spread to various nations and to people in all walks of life. Does every child of God have the same hope? Are the promises connected with salvation for all of us – the Gentile as well as the Jew, the uncultured as well as the cultured, those who were religious before and those who had no religion? Does it apply to the poor as well as to the rich? What are the limitations, if any?

Paul’s answer to those questions is in verse 11. (Read.)

The first pair includes all people on the face of the earth. All of us are either Gentiles or Jews. Are the same privileges and the same hope held out to Gentiles and Jews alike? Yes.

The second pair emphasizes different religious backgrounds – “circumcision and uncircumcision.” This also separated the Jews and Gentiles. This was a big issue in the early days of the church. The Jews were saying that unless Gentiles were circumcised, they could not be saved. Was this according to the truth so that if a Gentile refused circumcision, there was no salvation for him, no Savior? Perhaps you remember what Paul said in 1 Cor. 7:18-20:

18 Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised.

19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.

20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

The third pair is “Barbarian, Scythian.” Here Paul dipped down in the social scale. The term “Barbarian” was originally applied by the Greeks to those who did not know their language. Eventually it applied to those who were rude and crude, and even brutal. The Scythian was even lower than the Barbarian. It even came to mean a savage. In our day it would apply to the Auka Indians as they were before the Gospel reached them. So Paul was raising the question as to whether or not one who had been a vicious savage, perhaps a cannibal, would have the same opportunity in Christ that an educated Jew or Gentile with all of his culture and refinements. And the answer is, Yes.

The third pair emphasize the social differences – the master and his slave. This would point to two men like Philemon and Onesimus. Did Onesimus have as much in Christ as his master and owner, Philemon? And the answer was, Yes.

The Jew who was saved would always be a Jew. The Gentile who was saved did not become a Jew, but remained a Gentile. The Barbarian and the Scythian did not become cultured and refined as a result of being saved. They still would be limited by their background, although their standards would be raised tremendously. Likewise, the slave was not freed because he became a Christian, but he became a better servant to his master because he was saved, and his master become a kinder person because of what Christ had done in his heart.

So when you look at the cross-section of believers from Paul’s day to our, and even before Paul’s day, there are people from every tribe and tongue and nation. But all stand side by side, and shoulder to shoulder, with the same hope, and the same resources, to become conformed to the image of God and of Christ. And why is this? Because “Christ is all, and in all.” Draw whatever distinction you want to make among those who are in the Church. They come from every nation, they speak different languages, they have different levels of education

and ability. But Christ is in every one of them, and He is all that any of them will ever need to become like the Savior, and to be with Him for all eternity.

Augustus Toplady, who lived back in the 1700's, has been recognized for the hymns he wrote and the clear theology which they express. Bishop Moule quoted just a part of one verse of a hymn I want to read to you. It is #95 in our Trinity Hymnal, and really expresses what Paul was saying in this section of his epistle to the Colossians. Here are Toplady's words"

How vast the benefits divine which we in Christ possess!
We are redeemed from guilt and shame and called to holiness.
But not for works which we have done, or shall hereafter do,
Hath God decreed on sinful men salvation to bestow.

The glory, Lord, from first to last, is due to Thee alone;
Aught to ourselves we dare not take, or rob Thee of Thy crown.
Our glorious Surety undertook to satisfy for man,
And grace was given to us in Him before the world began.

This is Thy will, that in Thy love we ever should abide;
That earth and hell should not prevail to turn Thy Word aside.
Not one of all the chosen race but shall to heav'n attain,
Partake on earth the purposed grace and then with Jesus reign.

So Col. 2:9 and 10 apply to the Gentile as well as the Jew, to the uncircumcised as well as to the circumcised, to the Scythian as well as to the Barbarian, and to the bond as well as to the free! What a Savior Whose work at the Cross and now at the right hand of the Father avail for all of the redeemed. What one believer has in Christ, all believers have. And He is all for all of us.

March 5, 2001

3:12 Looking back from this point to the beginning of chapter 3, in the first four verses we have the general exhortations in verses 1 and 2, and the reasons for them in verses 3 and 4. These are followed by Paul's teaching regarding how we are to deal with sin (mortifying sin – v. 5), and putting sin off (like we would put off dirty clothes – vv. 8 and 9a). And in the latter part of verse 9 and in verses 10 and 11 he describes what salvation really is – a putting off of the old man, and a putting on of the new. And, as we saw last time in verse 11, every believer has equal resources in Christ Who "is all, and in all." So no believer has more than any other believer, nor does any believer have less than others. As we learned back in chapter 2, verses 9 and 10, all of the fulness of Deity dwells permanently in Christ, and we are complete in Him. Whatever we need to become like our Savior, our Savior Himself supplies to us.

Now in verse 12, and going down through verse 17, we have the positive side of the Christian life, just as we have had the negative side in verses 5 through 11.

Since "Christ is all, and in all," this is the hope that we can become and do (live) the way we need to live as the people of God. What we read about here in verses 12 and following, these characteristics are to be found in their perfection in Christ. These are "those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."

As an appeal and an encouragement for the Colossian believers to do as he is going to instruct them, the Apostle Paul called them, “the elect of God, holy and beloved.” As “the elect of God” they would have been reminded, as the Lord told His disciples in the words found in John 15:16, “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.” This does not mean that they had not chosen to believe in the Lord and to follow Him, but it means that He had chosen them first, and that their choice of Him was the result of His choice of them.

The same is true of us. We also are “the elect of God,” “chosen ... in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him” (Eph. 1:4). Paul also elaborated on this most precious doctrine in his second epistle to the church at Thessalonica when he wrote:

13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

The doctrine of election should be with us, as it was with the apostles, a subject of continual praise to God. By God’s choice of us He has called us out from the world and all of its sin, and He wants us to know that our present state, as imperfect as it may be, is due to what John Eadie called, “God’s eternal and gracious choice” (p. 239). The roots of our salvation are to be found in eternity past, born in the heart of God Himself.

“Holy” means *set apart* – set apart from the world, set apart for God as His own special possession. “Beloved” means that God chose us because He loves us. But in using this word Paul was not thinking particularly about what we were when we were chosen by God, but what we still are – right now! It may be hard for us to put these words in their proper order. There certainly was nothing in us that led the Father to choose us, but it is by His choice of us that we are now His holy ones, His beloved ones.

And it is because of what we are as God’s people that we need to “put on” new clothing. The thought is that this new clothing is provided for us, and we need to *slip into* it. And the words that the Apostle used in telling us what we need to put on, are all in sharp contrast with what we are by nature. Let us see what each one is.

“Bowels of mercies” and “kindness” seem to go together. When Paul used the word “bowels,” he was using an expression which was Jewish because they thought of the bowels (the internal organs) as “the seat of the tenderer affections” (Thayer, p. 584). We would say, as this expression is translated in the NASB, “a heart of compassion.” It speaks of the basic feeling that we have toward others. “A heart of compassion” was manifested by the Lord Jesus when from the Cross He prayed concerning the wicked people who were around His Cross doing everything that they could do to make His death worse than it usually would be. You will remember that He prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Both Matthew and Mark wrote about times when our Lord was “moved with compassion. Cf. Matt. 9:35-38:

35 And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.

36 But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

37 Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few;

38 Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

The Lord had compassion on the sick. There was always a tenderness about the Lord in His dealings with people. David said this about the Lord in Psa. 103:8, “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.” When the disciples wanted to send the multitudes away so they could get food for themselves, the Lord said to them, “They need not depart; give ye them to eat.” And this leads me to the second

word that the Apostle Paul used here in Col. 3:12, the word “kindness.”

“Kindness” is a word of action. The Lord Jesus could not stop with just a feeling of compassion, but wherever He saw needs, His heart moved Him to do something about it. That is why He couldn’t send the multitudes away without feeding them first. That is why, when the leper came to Him and said, “If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean.” And Mark tells us that our Lord was moved with compassion toward that leper, and so He responded by saying, “I will, be thou clean” (Mark 1:40, 41).

The Bible is an account of the compassion of God and of Christ, and then what they did to meet the needs that they saw. As we have seen on one occasion, our Lord told His disciples to pray. And sometimes that is all we can do, but if we have compassionate hearts, “bowels of mercies,” we will pray.

When we look at people, it is so easy for us to get disgusted and offended by what we see. There is nothing very attractive about people in their self-centeredness and godlessness. But, as the Apostle Paul said in Gal. 3:27, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ,” if we believe that, then it is going to make a difference in the way we react toward people.

But let us go on to the third word, actually three words: “humbleness of mind.” By nature we are inclined to be conceited and proud. By grace we are taught to have “humbleness of mind.” This is that attitude of mind and heart in which we remember not only that we are creatures of God, and utterly dependent upon Him, but that we are sinful creatures, transformed by the grace of God apart from any merit of our own. We are conscious that we have nothing in ourselves, but receive all things from God. See Trench, p. 150>

Even our Lord Jesus Christ manifested “humbleness of mind” as a Man. He constantly was conscious of His dependence upon the Father as to His humanity. And we have a great statement of that in Phil. 2:3-8. (Read.) Bishop Moule describes “humbleness of mind” for us (not Christ) as “the attitude of the soul ‘which has lost its pride in discovering the mercy of its salvation’” (p. 220).

The next word is “meekness.” This word is linked with “humbleness of mind” as “bowels of mercies” was linked with “kindness.” Bishop Trench has an excellent definition of “meekness” which I would like to pass on to you. This is how Bishop Trench explained this word:

It is that temper of spirit in which we accept [God’s] dealing with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting; . . . because it is only the humble heart which is also meek; and which, as such, does not fight against God, and more or less struggle and contend with Him (p. 152).

Concerning the relationship between “humbleness of mind” and “meekness,” Trench said further:

It [meekness] is a grace in advance of [humbleness of mind], not as more precious than it, but as presupposing it, *and as being unable to exist without it* (italics mine) (p. 153).

Bishop Moule calls “meekness,” “submission under pain and trial” (p. 221).

Note how Paul put these two words together in Eph. 4:2, although there they are translated at “all lowliness and meekness.” (Read Eph. 4:1-3.)

Moses is called “very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Num. 12:3). David was manifesting meekness when Shimei cursed him and threw stones at him. Do you remember how he answered his nephew Abishai who wanted to kill Shimei. The account is given in 2 Sam 16:9-13:

9 Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?

let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head.

10 And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?

11 And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him.

12 It may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day.

13 And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust.

One of the greatest examples of meekness is to be seen in the Lord in His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, and later as He was dying on the Cross.

The Apostle Paul also gives us an example of meekness in his words found in 2 Cor. 12:7-11:

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

11 I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.

The last word in verse 12 is “longsuffering.” This describes the attitude in which a person is subjected to provocations, injustices, and other unpleasant circumstances, but rather than giving way to anger, or retaliation, or even resentment, when he can, shows self-restraint, committing his circumstances to the Lord. This is a form of patience, but it differs from the ordinary idea of patience in that people are often forced to be patient because they are unable to do anything about their troubles. The Lord is our outstanding example of what it means to be longsuffering.

March 6, 2001

Geoffrey Wilson in his book on Colossians and Philemon, quoted a man by the name of L. H. Marshall who wrote a book entitled, *The Challenge of New Testament Ethics* in which he explained “longsuffering” with these words:

The real meaning of ‘longsuffering’ is better conveyed by ‘long-temperedness.’ It refers ‘to the endurance of wrong and exasperating conduct on the part of others without flying into a rage or passionately desiring vengeance. One of the great ethical qualities of God celebrated in Holy Scripture is that He is “slow to anger,” and Paul here suggests that the spiritual man shares in this characteristic of God (Wilson, G., p. 75).

Bishop Lightfoot reminds us in his commentary that we had this word “longsuffering,” Greek, μακροθυμία, in Col. 1:11 where it is included in Paul’s prayer. There it is used with ὑπομονή. Paul’s request in Col. 1:11 was this:

Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.

Paul used both of these words in 2 Cor. 6:4 and 6 where he was speaking of the characteristics of those who are “the ministers of God.” This is what Paul said in that passage:

4 But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

5 In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;

6 By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned (2 Cor. 6:4-6).

Also, in writing to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:10 Paul used these two words again (words treated by Trench as synonyms, or words which are very similar in meaning. Cf. 2 Tim. 3:10-11:

10 But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience,

11 Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me.

So there is no question but that as “patience” and “longsuffering” are needed in the life of every child of God, they are especially important for those like himself and Timothy who were ministers of God.

Let me mention one more passage where these two words are used: James used them in Jas. 5:10 and 11 although they are both translated patience in the KJV, and so the difference is not apparent in the English text. This is what James said in those two verses:

10 Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience (μακροθυμία).

11 Behold, we count them happy which endure (a first aorist participle from ὑπομένω). Ye have heard of the patience (ὑπομονή) of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy (James 5:10-11).

In both of these words we have the idea of *perseverance*. Lightfoot further distinguishes between the two in this way:

While ὑπομονή is the temper which does not easily succumb under suffering, μακροθυμία is self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate a wrong. The one is opposed to *cowardice* or *despondency*, the other to *wrath* or *revenge* . . . While ὑπομονή is closely allied to *hope* (1 Thess. 1:3), μακροθυμία is commonly connected with *mercy* (p. 206).

On this last statement regarding *longsuffering*, cf. Ex. 34:6-7 where the Lord was giving Moses the Law on the tables of stone for the second time:

4 And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone.

5 And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.

6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,

7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation (Ex 34:4-7).

We need to “put on” these traits because they are not natural to us. They are produced by the grace of God in us.

But now let us move on to verse 13.

3:13 “Forbearing one another.” It is clear that by using the words, “one another,” the Apostle Paul was writing primarily about our relationships with each other *as believers in Christ*. That seems to be clear from verse 15. (Read.)

There are three times in this chapter, and only in this chapter, that the Apostle Paul used these words in this epistle to the Colossians. See 3:9, and then in verse 16. (Read.)

We should not lie to anyone. Nor should we carry a grudge against anyone. But the Apostle would have us know that how we treat each other as fellow members of the Body of Christ, is especially important. Paul emphasized this in his letter to the churches of Galatia, chapter 6, and verse 10, when he said,

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10).

“Forbearing” can be described as *holding one’s self up*. And as Eph. 4:2 tells us it is to be done “in love.” (We will see the same emphasis here in Colossians in 3:14.) John Eadie says that this forbids the speaking of even the first angry word. And this must not be done in “coolness or studied courtesy” (Eadie, *Ephesians*, p. 270). That is, we cannot be hypocritical in pretending to exercise forbearance when actually we are angry and hope to see judgment on the one who has offended us. And the evidence that we are genuine in our forbearance, will be seen in our willingness to forgive our offender even before that person seeks our forgiveness (if that ever takes place).

The word which Paul used for “forgiving” here lit. means *to extend grace*. And this applies even when the situation develops into a “quarrel.” The idea here is that the person who has offended us is really to blame. Even then we are to be forgiving “even as Christ forgave you.” We all need to stop and think about what God would have done, and could have done, to us if He had given us what we deserve. In our relationship with God the blame has always been entirely on our part; never on His! How many, many times have you and I had to seek forgiveness from God for the same sins when our only appeal has been the grace of God.

While forgiveness seems in Scripture to be primarily the work of the Father, yet here Paul spoke of Christ as the One Who also forgives. Eadie said, “And if Christ forgive sin, He is entitled to do so, for He has made provision for it in His sufferings and death” (p. 243). And then Eadie added:

Christians are to forgive one another *because* (italics mine) Christ has forgiven them, for His example has all the force of a formal command. They are also to forgive one another *as* (italics mine) He has forgiven them— fully and freely, at once and for ever; not pardoning seven times, but demurring to the seventy times seven; not insulting him who has injured them by the rigid exaction of a humiliating apology, or stinging him by a sharp and unexpected allusion to his fault, not harbouring antipathy [dislike, disgust, hostility], but forgetting as well as forgiving; not indulging a secret feeling of offence, and waiting for a moment of quiet retaliation; but expelling every grudge from their hearts by an honest and thorough reconciliation (pp. 243, 244).

What an order! And how utterly impossible this is apart from the grace of God to us and in us! How important it is that we always remember how much, how often, and how graciously God and Christ have dealt with our sins, and at what cost to them! What an amazing amount of truth is in those last nine words of verse 13: “Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye”!

Now to verse 14:

3:14 Here the words “put on” are not in the text, but correctly brought down from verse 12.

“Above” is the Greek preposition ἐπί which means *upon*. Paul was saying that over all of these godly characteristics love (ἀγάπη) must be superimposed. Everything Paul commanded the people of God to do must be done in love.

I can’t think of this verse without thinking of 1 Corinthians 13. Remember what the Apostle Paul said in the first three verses of that chapter:

- 1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.
- 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.
- 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Whatever we do, either in the midst of conflict, or in the ordinary ways of life and service, if what we do is not motivated by love and an expression of the love that is in our hearts, it can never be sufficiently pleasing to God, nor will it accomplish what we want it to accomplish.

Note, as we have just seen, that in this passage the Apostle Paul was thinking particularly of the relationship that believers have with each other (although his words would be applicable also if the person with whom a Christian is having trouble, is not a Christian).

But Paul, after stating in 1 Cor. 13:1-3 how indispensable love is, went on to tell what the characteristics of ἀγάπη love are. And this is what he said:

- 4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,
- 5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;
- 6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;
- 7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.
- 8 Charity never faileth . . . (1 Cor. 13:4-8a).

These verses summarize the characteristics that we have been discussing in verses 12 and 13. Go down the list and I think that you will agree. So all of those characteristics have to be exercised in love, or they cannot be a true expression of what we are expected to do.

Most people who know the Lord know that there are two verbs in the NT which are translated with the word *love*. Those two words are ἀγαπάω and φιλέω. Our translators have not really tried to distinguish between them, but there is often a distinction to be made although there are similarities between the words as well.. The word φιλέω is the more emotional of the two, perhaps we could say, the more spontaneous. This does not mean that there is no rationale for φιλέω, but the thought, and reasoning which often goes with ἀγαπάω is not always present in φιλέω.

Obviously if “love” is something that we are to “put on,” the Apostle Paul was talking about more than human love. He was speaking about “the love of God” which “is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5). This, for us, was the electing and selecting love of God. And we are to remember, then, the Lord’s love for us, but also for the Lord’s love on the believer with whom we are having trouble. We are not only seeking to grow in the Lord ourselves, but we are to be doing that which will enable our brother or sister to grow in the Lord.

But what did Paul mean that “love” is “the bond of perfection”?

He was speaking of that which *unites*, or *binds together*, all of the graces of the Christian life. It is love which also which binds believers together, as Hendriksen says in his commentary, “causing them to move forward toward the goal of perfection (quoted by Wilson, p. 76). And Eadie said,

Perfection consists of many graces, each in its own place and relations, each in its own circle and sphere—but they are held together by love. Did they exist singly, or in separate clusters, perfection would not be enjoyed; were they fragmentary, and not coalescent, symmetry of character would be lost (p. 245).

And Bishop Moule had this to say about the importance of this verse:

[Love] makes and [love] maintains, as no other power can do, the “perfectness,” the wholeness, the sweet ripeness of Christian character, whether in the man or in the [church] (p. 221).

So these graces, bound together by love, are what brings us to spiritual maturity, or “perfection.” Cf. John 13:34-35.

March 19, 2001

As we look at these verses, let us remember that they were not written just for the believers at Colosse about 2,000 years ago. They have been binding upon believers in every generation, in every part of the world, from that day until this. Therefore, we all need to apply them to ourselves. We may be reminded of others as we read through these verses, either in a positive way, or in a negative way, but our emphasis needs to be toward ourselves. Am I making a practice of putting off those sins which the Apostle Paul has mentioned in verses 5 through 11? And am I concerned about putting on those virtues which are mentioned in verses 12, 13, and 14? It is not just in knowing what these words mean that we are going to be blessed, but in actually doing what the Apostle Paul has told us to do, and in refusing to do those things which he has told us to mortify, to put off. Real profit comes from our reading of the Word and our study of the Word when by God’s grace we seek to be obedient to the teaching that we have in Scripture. Let us never forget this. James said in his epistle what we need to be concerned about when we come to church, or attend a Bible Class, or when we sit down to read our Bibles by ourselves, or with our families. I am sure that most of you are familiar with his words, but let me read them to you so we can all be reminded of the importance of obeying the Word of God. Here is what he said:

- 19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:
- 20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.
- 21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.
- 22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.
- 23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:
- 24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.
- 25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed (James 1:19-25).

After the Lord Jesus had concluded that marvelous teaching which He gave in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, He concluded with these words:

- 21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.
- 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand:

27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

And then listen to the reaction of the people.

28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes (Matt. 7:21-29).

The Lord was not saying that we enter the kingdom of heaven by obeying His sayings, but obeying His sayings was evidence that a person was truly a child of God. Salvation is by faith alone, not of works. But godly living follows true salvation, and it is the validation that a person's profession of faith is genuine. Think of what this means where there is no such proof to be seen in the lives of thousands who profess to be Christians.

But let us go on to verse 15.

3:15 What the Apostle Paul seems to be saying here is that putting off those things which belong to the old man, and putting on the things which belong to the new man in Christ, adds up to peace. And, as Eadie said in his commentary, this is the Apostle Paul's idea of peace:

It is with him synonymous with happiness, that calm of mind which is not ruffled by adversity, overclouded by sin or a remorseful conscience, or disturbed by the fear and the approach of death (p. 247).

The word "rule" is a word taken from the world of athletics. It means *to act as an umpire*. And so it means *to govern, control, or govern*. This is, to borrow the title of a book by Miss Ruth Paxson, "Life on the Highest Plane." Many Christians are looking for some sensational kind of an experience that will lift them above the trials and testings of life. But there is no such experience. Instead, we are to live lives of obedience to the Lord, which all leads to peace, godly joy, about which the world knows nothing.

There is a textual problem regarding the phrase, "the peace of God." Some of the better MSS have "the peace of Christ." Actually the change from "God" to "Christ" does not make any difference as to the meaning because the peace of One is identical with the peace of the Other. Actually Paul began this epistle with his usual greeting, "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Col. 1:2b). Perhaps as we talk about this, many of you may be thinking of those words of the Lord Jesus found in John 14:27 where it is recorded that He said,

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

So Paul was not speaking of the world's peace which is shallow and present only when circumstances are right, but he was speaking of a divinely given peace "in your hearts," which exists regardless of what our external conditions might be.

But to "let the peace of God rule," govern, control, be the arbitrator, means that we are make our decisions based upon that which maintains the peace of God, or the peace of Christ, in our hearts. Lenski made this comment about this verse:

The Colossians are to listen to Christ's own peace speaking in their own hearts. Paul, as it were, personifies peace, for that peace speaks with Christ's voice (pp. 175,176).

And so we can say that the first matter of importance in knowing the will of God is to be living in obedience to the Word of God. This brings peace. Peace is the fruit of a right relationship with God and with Christ. That means salvation first, followed by obedience. Then our guidance is not a matter of having all of our circumstances in order (because they seldom are), but in having peace in our hearts.

“Called” in the latter part of this verse is a salvation word. Cf. Rom. 8:28-30; 1 Cor. 1:2, 9. 23-31. Gal. 5:13 says that we have been “called unto liberty.” Cf. Eph. 4:1, 4. We have been “called” to the peace of God. And we have been united in one body, which is the church, the body of Christ. And it is in the body of Christ that we are to enjoy a concentration of the peace of God. This is true fellowship.

“And be ye thankful.” In context this means that we are to be thankful for this peace, this life that we have in Christ. Eadie said,

For there is every cause of thankfulness to Him who had called them to the possession of such peace. If that peace dwelt within them, and reigned within them—if Christ had at once provided it for them, and summoned them unitedly to its enjoyment, surely profound gratitude was due to such a benefactor (p. 250).

Bishop Moule translated this present tense expression, “and be ye thankful,” as “**and be ye, become ye** (γίνεσθε) more and more, **thankful**; prompt to see your mercies, and to praise the Giver—sure and blessed secret for a tone of loving and generous sympathy towards all” (p. 222).

But if the peace of Christ is to rule in our hearts, it required that “the Word of Christ dwell in” them “richly in all wisdom.” And that is what we have in verse 16.

3:16 Dr. Ironside suggested in his comments on this verse that there are three exhortations in this verse which stand out clearly if we punctuate the verse differently. And this is the way that he would divide the verse:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly:
in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another:
in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

That is helpful, but the only objection I would have to that is that it does not make clear the fact that the “teaching and admonishing” that Paul was talking about was to be, at this point anyway, “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” There is to be such a close connection between the Word of Christ (or of God) and the music we sing, that the same thing can be accomplished through the right kind of music that is accomplished by the simple teaching of the Word of God.

“The Word of Christ” can be explained in a variety of ways. It can be the Word which reveals Christ. Or, the Word which belongs to Christ. But probably the meaning here is the Word spoken by Christ.

While the main emphasis would be upon the NT, yet it does not exclude any part of the divine revelation. But we remember that while the Lord was with His disciples for the last time of ministry to them (John 13-16), one of the things He said to them was this:

12 I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.

13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak

of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.

14 He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

15 All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you (John 16:12-15).

Notice in these verses that all Three Persons of the Godhead are involved in what the Lord said – He, the Lord Jesus; the Holy Spirit; and the Father. The Lord Jesus was the Speaker. The Holy Spirit was the One Who delivered the message. And what the Lord had was the Father's, and that was what the Holy Spirit would deliver to them and show to them.

The Lord was obviously speaking of things yet to be revealed, but there is also a sense in which it included all of the Word. Now this Word was to dwell in them richly. This means that their hearts were to be the home of the Word. They were not to treat the Word as though it were a stranger, not just what Eadie called "an occasional visitor." Their hearts were to be the home of the Word. The writer of Psalm 119, probably David, wrote, "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psa. 119:11). The heart of every Christian should be the home of the Word of Christ. And it should be there *abundantly*! Not little snatches of the Word, *but all of it*! Dr. Mitchell used to exhort us to saturate our hearts with the Word of God. This is what Paul had in mind.

"In all wisdom." The Word of God is not some kind of a fetish which is supposed to save us from harm, or to cure all of our diseases, or defeat all of our enemies. It is a living Word, the Word of God, by which we have been born again, which transforms us from within as we are filled with its wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to use the knowledge of the Word in the right and wise way. And so this means that to have the Word dwelling in us is to be growing in our understanding of the Word, and in the application of the Word to change us. And this is the work of the Holy Spirit.

As a result, we are able to teach and admonish one another. We help each other to learn what we all need to know. How sad it is when a condition exists like we find described in the latter part of Hebrews 5, verses 11-14. (Read.) Of those to whom the Apostle Paul referred in 2 Timothy 3:7 who were "ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." I am afraid that there is very little of the real teaching of the Word of Christ in our churches today.

What does "admonishing" mean? Paul used this word in Col. 1:28 where it is translated "warning." And this is what Paul did with the Ephesian elders as he said in Acts 20:31, "Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." We need both: teaching and warning, because there are always those false teachers who would turn us away from the sole and absolute authority of the Word of God.

As Paul went on in this verse he indicated that he was talking about a truly happy life which results in singing, not for entertainment, but for ministry: "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." We are to sing that which teaches, and that which admonishes, and that which causes the Word to dwell more richly in our hearts. "Psalms" are the Psalms of Scripture. It is significant that the largest book in the Bible is a book of Psalms. "Hymns" are directed toward God, designed for worship and to glorify Him. "Spiritual songs" describes music which is in accord with the Spirit of God, and that means that it must be in harmony with the Word of God. Anything carnal and worldly is definitely excluded.

It is interesting to see in this passage, as well as in Eph. 5:19. that the ministry of the Word and the ministry of music are brought together. Our knowledge of the Word will have a direct bearing and influence on what we sing. And we will look upon music, not as entertainment, but as an opportunity for further ministry to God and

to each other in the body of Christ.

And so this verse concludes with, “singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Again Paul’s emphasis has to do with the heart and the Lord. It is God’s grace which made us what we are, and it is by His grace that we are enabled to live to glorify Him. Grace also carries with it the idea of thanksgiving to God. “With grace” in the Greek is ἐν τῇ χάριτι, pointing specifically to all of God’s grace toward us.

March 20, 2001

Lenski had this to say in his concluding remarks on this verse:

The whole worship of true Christians is filled with the Word of Christ, its teaching and its admonition in psalms and hymns, all pure grace makes their hearts happy and joyful; the whole activity of this Christian life moves in the sphere of the name and revelation of the Lord Jesus, and they are filled with thanksgiving to God through Him. All superstition has disappeared. What can harm them when they are with this Lord? Only thanksgiving overflows from the happy hearts and lips, thanksgiving to God the Father (p. 180).

And then he went on to say,

Apply all this to ourselves today over against all errorists who in new ways want to foist upon us their human decrees and regulations for producing the complete Christian life. Away with fears about this and that. Christ’s Word and His Name are our delightful guide (*Ibid.*).

In these days when music has become such an issue in our churches, it is good for us, in fact, imperative, that we go back to what the Word of God has to say about music in the church and in the lives of believers. Bishop Moule, whose comments are always edifying, bringing us back to the Word of God, had this to say:

Nothing could be clearer than this Scriptural authority for hymn-singing and psalm-singing, as not merely a natural and pleasant thing, but a definite means of spiritual blessing. Full inspired sanction is given here on the one hand to the cultivation of God’s gifts of poetic and musical form, in the entire conviction that they *are* His gifts, and meant by Him for a purpose. On the other hand the Apostle lays it solemnly upon us to see that these rich resources are used “in spirit and in truth.” The great purpose of the holy melody, next to its being “unto the Lord,” is to be the “instruction and admonition of one another.” The psalm, the hymn, the song, if it is to be of the right kind, and rightly used, must be calculated for no mere ear-pleasing ends; it must be such as to convey eternal truth, strong, tender, uplifting, searching, directing; carried with felt delight into the inmost mind, as Christians hear Christians singing with them (pp. 226, 227).

In the light of a verse like this, it must be very displeasing to the Lord for music in our churches to be designed to please the unbeliever, and the carnal believer, by copying the world, and thinking more of the pleasure people get from the music rather than if it is pleasing to God and edifying to the people of God. We often look upon music in the church as up to what people want. But it, like everything else in our lives as the people of God, must be in complete agreement with the Word of God. In many, many churches, and, in fact, in the lives of believers, music has become man-centered, not God-centered and Bible-centered. We can’t control what others do, but we can make sure that what we do is pleasing to the Lord, and we can only know what is pleasing to the Lord by learning it from the Word which God has given to us.

Most of us who are reading our Bibles through again this year, have just completed reading that great book of Deuteronomy. And we learn that one of the last things that the Lord did with Moses was to give him a song which he was to teach to the people, and which the people were to teach to their children, a song that was to be handed down from one generation to another, a song of teaching and admonition. And this song was to serve

as a preventative against the sinning of the people, but also as a means of restoring them when they had turned away from the Lord. See Deut. 31:16-32:52. Nothing could more strongly indicate how important the right kind of music is intended by the Lord to be in keeping His people from sin and encouraging them to walk in fellowship with the Lord.

Bishop Moule quoted this brief verse in his commentary:

Sing till we feel our hearts
Ascending with our tongues;
Sing till the love of sin departs,
And grace inspires our songs.

I hope this verse will have a lasting effect upon all of us. But be sure to notice that it is the result of all that has gone before in this third chapter of Colossians.

Before we leave verse 16, let me point out a very important fact of Scripture which Dr. Ironside mentioned in his commentary on Colossians.

We all know that there is a great deal of similarity between the Ephesian epistle and the Colossian epistle. Paul's letter to the Ephesians was longer, but the language of the two epistles is very similar throughout, giving us further evidence that they were written nearly at the same time. But when we compare Col. 3:16 with its companion verses in Ephesians, 5:18 and 19, we learn a very important truth. In Ephesians Paul preceded his comments on singing with "be filled with the Spirit." Here in Colossians his comments on singing are preceded with "let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom." And so Dr. Ironside's comment is this:

By comparing the Ephesian passage with this it will become evident that we have the same result from being filled with the Spirit there (*i.e.*, in Ephesians), and filled with the Word here (*i.e.*, in Colossians). *A Word-filled Christian is a Spirit-filled Christian* (italics mine); that is, a Christian who is so controlled by the Word of God that it dominates his entire life, manifests that he is filled with the Holy Spirit. A careful consideration of these two passages might save from a great deal of fanaticism and misunderstanding in regard to the fullness of blessing which every truly converted soul cannot but crave (p. 153).

3:17 But what the Apostle Paul has just said about music, applies to every detail of our lives – "whatsoever ye do in word or deed," that is, in whatever we say and in all that we do. Speech has a tremendous influence upon behavior. Read again the third chapter of the epistle of James, noting what he said about the tongue, particularly "if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body" (Jas. 3:2b). This is a tremendously important verse, and we need to pay more attention to it than we do.

This verse is very similar to what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians church in 1 Cor. 10:31: "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Quoting Bishop Moule again, he said that what Paul was saying here in Col. 3:17 ought to be "the deepest instinct of your lives that in everything and for everything you belong to Him" (p. 226), the Lord Jesus.

But what does it mean to "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus"?

It is to recognize that Jesus is our Lord, and that all that we do must be done to please Him. Wilson quoted a man by the name of R. P. Martin who said that this expresses our act of allegiance to the Lord Who saved us that our lives are to be lived in recognition of "Christ's Lordship" (p. 78). And Wilson himself said that this is a brief but "comprehensive guide to Christian living" (p. 78, 79). Eadie said that strictly it means to speak and

act “by His authority.” It is to say what we say, and to do what we do, knowing that we have His approval. And this is why it is so important for us to have the Word of Christ dwelling in us richly. To pray in the Name of Christ is to pray as He would pray. But this applies not only to what we do when we are in church or in the company of the Lord’s people, but wherever we are! It is to be our concern in all aspects of our daily lives – when we are conducting our business in the world, as much as when we are in the quiet of our own homes, or worshipping the Lord at church.. It is not that we always talk about doing things in the Lord’s Name, but that we do it, that such behavior is our rule of life. The Apostle Paul was always very careful about the way that he referred to the Savior, and it is very significant that in this verse he said, “the Lord Jesus.”

See Col. 4:5-6 as an example of what it means to do all things in the Name of the Lord Jesus.

Those verses which we have as an insert in our hymnals, are an excellent reminder of what it means to say all things, and to do all things, in the Name of the Lord Jesus: “In the sweet fear of Jesus . . . (Insert C). And then Paul concluded this verse by referring again to our need to be thankful to God, not just thankful, but “giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.” Even our thanksgiving to be acceptable must be “by Him.” Cf. Heb. 13:15. “Blessings come through Him, and through Him thanks are to be rendered” (Eadie, p. 256).

At this point the Apostle Paul began to write of individual relationships in which we as believers need to know how to be pleasing to our Lord. I have called them the Apostle’s application of the truth to special groups. They are:

- 1) Wives and husbands in Col. 3:18-19.
- 2) Children and fathers in Col. 3:20-21
- 3) Servants and masters in Col. 3:22-4:1.

So from here we move on to the next division in the epistle.

March 26, 2001

This point in the outline is **D.** under **IV.**

IV. The Apostle’s Application of the Truth (Col. 3:1-4:6).

D. For special groups (3:18-4:1).

And the first of these four groups is:

1. Wives and husbands (3:18-19).

When we think of the similarity between Ephesians and Colossians, it certainly must occur to us to ask why we don’t have the same detail in Colossians that Paul gave in Ephesians. A most probable answer is that the Colossians would have had access to the Ephesian epistle. There is some thought that the Ephesian letter was a letter that was circulated among the churches in the Roman province of Asia (where both Ephesus and Colosse were located). This circulation probably included all of the churches which are mentioned in Revelation 1 and 2, and possibly even more churches. If this were the case, one of the churches which would have received the Ephesian letter would have been the church at Laodicea. If so, since Colosse and Laodicea were close together, there are those who feel that when Paul in Col. 4:16 encouraged the Colossians to make sure that their letter was read also in the church of Laodicea, and that they also read the letter from Laodicea, that Paul was referring to the letter to the church at Ephesus. This would have meant, therefore, that the Colossians had access to the Ephesian letter, and they would then have had access to the fuller account of what Paul had to say about these special groups which was in the Ephesian letter, and so he would not have had to repeat himself. We have to

treat this as a possibility instead of something that is absolutely certain because there are those who do not think that this is what “the epistle from Laodicea” was. If it were not the Ephesian letter, then we do not have any other possibility about what that “epistle from Laodicea” might be. We have no special letter that was written just to Laodicea. The idea that it was the letter to the Ephesians seems very likely and it has the support of many good expositors.

Everything that Paul wrote of a practical nature from 3:1 to this point 3:18, was for all of the people of God. And it is implied by the Apostle Paul that, in addressing these special groups, they should have learned, or were at least attempting, to live out the truth which the Apostle Paul had taught in 3:1 to 17. We always have trouble with the specific directions that are given to us if we have not learned the truth that applies to all believers. If we are right in thinking that they would have the opportunity of hearing what Paul wrote in the Ephesian epistle, then the brief statements that he made to wives and husbands, etc., in this section, would have been to meet certain special needs with which the Apostle Paul was acquainted. He followed the same order here that he did in the Ephesian letter, *i.e.*, wives, then husbands, and so on.

3:18 For this section, cf. Eph. 5:22-6:9; 1 Peter 2:18-3:7 (although the teaching of this passage actually begins with 1 Pet. 2:11); Titus 2:1-10.

Submission calls for humility, and that is what the Apostle Paul included in the teaching of 3:12. “Submit” means that they were to place themselves under the authority of their husbands. This does not mean that the wives in the Colossian church were refusing to be submissive, but, as Lenski explained in his commentary, it means that what they had been doing is what they should continue to do. The Apostle Paul had explained that this was the will of God in his letter to the church at Corinth when he wrote these words:

2 Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.

3 But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God (1 Cor. 11:2-3).

And so in the home the husband is the one with the greatest authority, and as was indicated at creation, the wife is to be her husband’s helper, supporting him and working with him. But there is no suggestion in these verses that the husband rules the home like a tyrant. He, too, is responsible to live according to the foregoing teaching of the Apostle here in Colossians 3.

“As it is fit in the Lord” – This means that this is the way it should be for those who are “in the Lord,” those who have been united to Him in a living relationship, and whose highest purpose in life should be to please the Lord. There is also the suggestion that “in the Lord” wives will find all of the needed strength and blessing to do that which is pleasing to the Lord. “Wives” are a real key to harmony and joy in the home, although not exclusively responsible. Husbands have their God-given responsibility also.

3:19 Here the husbands should refer back to 3:14. And husbands need to memorize and continually review the truth of 1 Corinthians 13. In Ephesians the Apostle Paul likened the husband’s love for his wife to the love that Christ has for the Church. And husbands need to remember that it will be the delight of wives to be submissive to a husband who loves her as Christ loves the Church. Paul is therefore suggesting that husbands study of love of Christ for His Church and how all of our lives have been enriched because of the love that Christ has for us. Eadie goes so far as to say that “the submission of the wife is gained by the love of the husband” (p. 258).

But the one thing that husbands need to be prepared to resist is *bitterness*. *Bitterness* is a form of anger. And so husbands need to look back at 3:8. Husbands are not to be cruel, critical and condemning in their words, or

It is used again in Acts 2:42:

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Paul used it in Rom. 12:12 where we read Rom 12:12, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer." Lightfoot, who was an excellent Greek scholar, paraphrased verse 2 in this way:

Be earnest and unceasing in prayer; keep your hearts and minds awake while praying: remember also (as I have so often told you) that thanksgiving is the goal and crown of prayer (p. 298).

Bishop Lightfoot also suggests the translation, "*cling closely to, remain constant in*" (p. 299).

Paul used the verb in the present imperative plural, and so he meant that they were all to *keep on persevering in prayer*. Whether we are thinking of our own fellowship with the Lord, or of our need to pray for each other in the body of Christ, or of our ministry to those who do not know the Savior, nothing surpasses the importance of prayer. There are other things that are equally important which the Apostle Paul will mention, but nothing that is more important!

"Watch" means *to stay awake*, and it can be used literally or figuratively. This is the word that the Lord Jesus used with the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane when He told them to "watch and pray," and later rebuked them by saying, "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" Cf. Matt. 26:38, 40, and 41. Of course the Lord's use of the word was both literal and figurative. They actually went to sleep instead of praying, but just being awake is not enough because often our heart, our minds, our attention can be diverted in many ways. That is why Bishop Lightfoot paraphrased "watch" as "keep your hearts and minds awake while praying." This is only possible by the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit. This is a part of what it means to *pray in the Spirit*. Cf. Eph. 6:18 and Jude 20. To fail to watch is really an affront to God. Bishop Moule called it "sin."

And then the Apostle Paul added "with thanksgiving." Bishop Moule said,

Too often is thanksgiving forgotten, especially when the believer is under trial; let him recollect its preciousness and power, and never pray without it (p. 255).

Be sure to note how thanksgiving is such a prominent theme in this epistle. Cf. 1:3; 12; 2:7; 3:15, 17. See also Eph. 5:4, 20; Phil. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:18. This suggests that worship is always to be a part of our praying.

John Eadie, in his book, *The Divine Love*, had this to say about prayer, all of which was taken from Scripture:

Human entreaty has shut up heaven, and has again opened it. At the voice of a man the sun stood still. Prayer has sweetened the bitter fountain, divided the sea, and stilled its waves. It has disbanded armies, and prevented conflict; it has shortened battle, and given victory to right. It has conferred temporal abundance, as in the case of Jabez; and given effect to medical appliances, as in the case of Hezekiah. It has quenched the mouths of lions, and opened the gates of the prison-house. As Jesus prayed by the river, the dove alighted on Him; and as He prayed on the hill, He was transfigured. The glory of God was manifested to Moses when he asked for it, and the grace of Christ to Paul when he besought it. Not a moment elapsed between the petition of the crucified thief, and its glorious answer. Ere Daniel concluded his devotion, the celestial messenger stood at his side. The praying church brought down upon itself Pentecostal effusion (quoted in Colossians, p. 274).

What a pity it is that we pray so little, and that when we pray we often fail to pray in faith. Concerning this verse John Eadie also said,

They were never to suppose that prayer was needless, either because their desires had been gratified, or [because] God had bestowed upon them all His gifts. But as they were still needing, and God was still promising, they were still to persist in asking. This perseverance was a prime element of successful prayer, as it proved their sincerity, and evinced the power of their faith. They were to pray and wait, not

even in their attitude. Eadie's comment here is very valuable for both husbands and wives. He said, "Wives are to submit, not to guard against a frown or a chiding, but to insure a deeper love" (p. 259).

Tertullian who lived in the second century after Christ, and who was a true believer in Christ, wrote about marriage to his wife in the following "glowing terms":

How can we find words to express the happiness of that marriage which the church effects, and the oblation confirms, and the blessing seals, and angels report, and the Father ratifies. What a union of two believers, with one hope, one discipline, one service, one spirit, and one flesh! Together they pray, together they prostrate themselves, and together keep their fasts, teaching and exhorting one another, and sustaining one another. They are together at the church and at the Lord's supper; they are together in straits, in persecutions, in refreshments. Neither conceals anything from the other; neither avoids the other; neither is a burden to the other; freely the sick are visited, and the needy relieved; alms without torture; sacrifices without scruple; daily diligence with hindrance; no using of the sign by stealth; no hurried salutation; no silent benediction; psalms and hymns resound between the two, and they vie with each other which shall sing best to their God. Christ rejoices on hearing and beholding such things; to such persons He sends His peace. Where the two are, He is Himself; and where He is, there the Evil One is not" (quoted in Eadie, pp.259, 260).

In any home where the husband and wife are walking with each other in the Lord, living to please God and to become like the Lord Jesus, that home will be a foretaste of heaven on earth.

3:20 The next pair, children and their fathers.

Not only were Christian marriages vastly different from pagan marriages, but so were the relationships between parents and children. Here Paul singled out fathers because they were chiefly responsible for the discipline and training of the children. But Paul addressed the children first.

I strongly recommend the book of Proverbs as an excellent book by which to raise children. You will not find all that Solomon had to say about parents and children in one part of the book. He scattered it throughout the book so that we would have to read it all to get what applies to raising children.

Paul said that children are to be taught to obey, not just once in a while, but all of the time – "in all things." A child who is taught to obey his parents, and who is brought up to know and love the Lord, will have a much easier time in his walk with the Lord if he had been taught obedience at home. Obedience to parents is in preparation for obedience to the Lord. And there is nothing more important in our lives as Christians than daily obedience to the Lord. Obedience to parents is "well pleasing to the Lord." And, as the Lord often disciplines us when we are not disobedient to Him, so parents need to use discipline when children are disobedient. Our children are like we are, sinners by nature and often sinners by choice, and so our greatest concern for our children is to see them come to the Lord. That calls for godly living on our part, and much prayer and much teaching of the Word of God. We must not turn the training of our children over to someone else. We brought them into this world, and they are our primary responsibility.

3:21 One thing we as fathers have to guard against is being too tough on our children. We must never give them the impression that it is impossible for them to please us. We must never be unjust with them, falsely accusing them or mistreating them before others. We don't want to discourage our children, but we should be their greatest encouragers. "Discouraged" means to become disheartened, sometimes even to the point of giving up. This is when children become withdrawn and unreachable. Our nation is suffering today from a lack of discipline with our children. Our problems stem from a failure in our homes. We have turned

away from God, and a part of the fruit of godless living is to be seen in the children. Most parents have never discovered their own need of God and salvation, and so they spend their lives dealing with symptoms in the lives of their children instead of recognizing that the basic need of their children is to become new creatures in Christ. Even those of us who are Christians often fail to remember the power of a godly example as we live our lives before our children.

Illus: Dr. Redpath with his daughter during an air raid by the Germans during World War II, and her prayer after he prayed during the raid. “Dear Lord, when I grow up, make me big and strong like my Daddy.”

3:22 The longest section in this part of the epistle dealing with special groups, is addressed to “servants.”

We don’t live in a society where we have bondservants and masters, but what the Apostle Paul said here does apply to employees and employers. It should be noted that the Apostle Paul never even suggested that the servants should seek their freedom, but instead he laid upon them the divine responsibility that they had to serve their masters knowing that in serving their masters, they were serving the Lord, and that the Lord accepted that as service done unto Him, and he would reward them.

March 27, 2001

Lightfoot explained this extended section for servants as having arisen out of his contact with Onesimus, the slave of Philemon. Onesimus, who had run away from Philemon, had gone to Rome which Lightfoot called “the common sink of all nations, probably as a convenient hiding place, where he might escape detection among its crowds and make a livelihood as best he could” (p. 33). Providentially, Lightfoot suggested that it may have been through the intervention of Epaphras, Paul and Onesimus met. Paul preached the Gospel to Onesimus. Onesimus was saved, and he was “transformed . . . from a good-for-nothing slave into a ‘faithful and beloved brother’” (*Ibid.*).

So the counsel that Paul had given to Onesimus, he repeated here because it was very common for slaves to run away from their masters. Paul wanted all Christian slaves to know that their behavior toward their masters should be completely different from slaves who did not know the Lord. And the same would apply to believing wives, husbands, children, parents, and masters. When a person comes to Christ, whoever he or she might be, “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17). We are not to follow the world in our behavior, but to take our guidance from the Word of God.

Notice that Paul gave the same teaching to bondslaves that he had given to children: their obedient was to extend to “all things” – there were to be no exceptions!

But Paul established a truth with servants in those days, those who knew the Lord, and it was that their masters, whoever they might be, even a believer like Philemon, were only their “masters according to the flesh.” Their “real master was the Lord Christ” (Eadie, p. 263). Continued rebellion on Philemon’s part would have let his bitterness remain, would have brought reproach upon the name of Christ, and would have given people the wrong idea of what it means to be a Christian. On the other hand, submission to his master, the kind of submission that the Apostle Paul was talking about, would have brought peace and comfort to his own heart, and would have made others ask him for a reason for the hope that was in him. When we do the will of God, we are the first to benefit, but then everyone else is benefitted, and, most important of all, God and Christ are glorified!

“Not with eyeservice” – Lightfoot believed that the Apostle Paul here coined a word because no previous use of such a word has been found. The only other place it is used is in Eph. 6:6. It has reference to the way a

servant serves his master when his master is watching him. But if his master is not watching him, he would seek to make it easier on himself, and not to please his master. Often even Christians today have gotten themselves into trouble because they have forgotten those words of Solomon in Proverbs 15:3, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”

“As menpleasers” – Paul did not mean that a servant should not seek to please their masters. In fact, that was the very thing that he was teaching servants that they should do. But Paul meant that they were not just to please men, especially only when they were watching, but their main purpose was to please the Lord (as he went on to say). And they were to do this “in singleness of heart, fearing God.” As Lenski said, “Paul condones no wrong of any kind on the part of any slave” (p. 183).

Lenski also pointed out that the Roman Empire was full of slaves. While some were very low in the social scale, others were educated, trustworthy, and given great responsibilities by their masters. And Lenski made this insightful observation in his commentary on Ephesians about slavery in the Empire:

Christ and the apostles did not denounce slavery and call for its immediate abolition. Christianity followed a deeper, more thorough method. It undermined slavery with the spirit of Christianity by destroying it within” (Ephesians, p. 652).

But what did Paul mean by “singleness of heart”? He meant that with real sincerity they were to serve their masters because they feared God. That is, they were motivated by a desire to please the Lord. In their situation they could not please the Lord if they were displeasing to their masters. Wilson, on p. 82, quoted Beet who wrote:

Where the all-seeing Master is forgotten, we seek as our highest good the favour of men: and our service sinks down to the external forms which alone lie open to the eye of man. Thus fear of the Supreme Lord saves even the slave from degrading bondage to man.

We all need to remember what the Apostle Paul told the church at Corinth:

20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

21 Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.

22 For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.

23 Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

24 Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God (1 Cor. 7:20-24).

For slaves, for masters, for wives and their husbands, for children and their parents, it is still true, as Solomon said so many years ago, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy [One] is understanding” (Prov. 9:10). See also Prov. 1:7. We need to show the Lord the reverence and honor that is due Him, and to seek in all things to do what is pleasing in His sight. We are to “glorify God in” our “body, and in” our “spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20). Outwardly and inwardly, not only bondservants, but all believers, are to seek to please God as our primary purpose in life. This is what Paul brought out in the next verse in our text.

3:23 Everything that a Christian slave did, was to be done “heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.”

“Heartily” is lit. *from the soul*, but our translators were correct in linking this with the heart because the soul is the seat of our feelings, desires, affections, as well as our aversions, according to Thayer.

So a slave was not just to be concerned about outward conformity to the will of his master, but he was to

respond to his master's desires and commands *with his whole being*. His outward behavior was to be a true reflection of his desire to do the will of his master. And yet their service was not just to their human masters, but "to the Lord" in heaven.

And then Paul continued in verse 24.

3:24 "Knowing" – This word combines the ideas of *being aware, being certain, understanding*, even cherishing the certain and future prospect of "the reward of the inheritance."

We need to remember that when Paul expressed how he was praying for the Colossian believers in chapter 1 of this epistle, he was including the slaves, and it is worthwhile to read that prayer with slaves in mind. But in that prayer in verse 12 we read these words:

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Slaves had been bought by their masters here on earth, but they had also been bought by their Master in heaven. And the price that had been paid was the precious blood of Christ. They had been "bought with a price." But more than that, they had been brought into the family of God. They were heirs, and joint heirs with Christ. And so an inheritance awaited them. *That inheritance was glory, conformity to the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who Himself was a Servant – the Servant of the Father.* This was their hope, and they were to keep that constantly before them.

"For ye serve the Lord Christ." The Apostle Paul could not have raised the bondservants, the slaves, to a higher level than this. And this applies to whatever work, which we often call "secular," but which in reality is "holy," that any child of God may be involved in (providing it is honorable work). What blessing this must have brought to the heart of Onesimus when the Apostle Paul first taught him this great truth.

But the Apostle Paul concluded his comments to servants with a word of warning which we find in verse 25.

3:25 Expositors differ as to whom the Apostle Paul was directing this verse. Some say that it referred to the slaves, which seems reasonable in the light of the fact that in every other instance in this list of people, Paul has concluding his remarks to one before he has moved on to the other. On the other hand, the point in this verse naturally leads into what the Apostle was going to say to the "masters" in 4:1. Eadie thinks that it is directed primarily to the "masters." Lightfoot says that it applies to both the "servants" and their "masters." Lenski seems to apply it to the servants. I am inclined to think that Paul continued to address the "servants."

A servant must not think in terms of retaliation, or of holding over his master the threat, "If you mistreat me, the Lord is going to mistreat you." As Lenski said, "That idea is unchristian" (p. 185). The Apostle Paul wanted servants to know that they served the Lord Christ, and that the Lord would bless them for faithful service, but also that the Lord would judge them for wrongdoing. The words of the Apostle Paul to the churches of Galatia, would certainly apply here:

7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:7-10).

These are good words for all of us to remember, wives and husbands, parents and children, slaves and masters. We are all responsible ultimately for what we do, and so our purpose in life should be to please the Lord.

When we please the Lord, we have His blessing

And now Paul's words to the "masters."

4:1 The tendency on the part of all who are in a place of authority, is to misuse that power. Roman law assumed that servants had no rights and so masters could easily overstep the limits of their power. But with God it was different. The masters needed to remember that they were servants also, servants of their Master Who is in heaven. And so they were to treat their slaves in the way they wanted the Lord to treat them. The preceding exhortations in chapter 3 applied as much to them as to their servants, and most masters would have been husbands and fathers as well as the owner of slaves. So most of the masters would have been included in 3:19 and 21. If a master were careful about pleasing the Lord as a husband, and as a father, it probably would be a great help to him in the treatment of his slaves. The point is that our relationship with the Lord is to affect in a positive and good way all of the relationships that we have with people.

Masters were to exercise that which was "just and equal." "Just" means *righteous*, which in turns means that their behavior needed to be according to what was right in God's sight, not just what was allowed according to Roman law. "Equal" means *fair*, not, as some have suggested, that they were to be treated as equals socially. Lightfoot says, speaking of the Greek word translated "equal," "When connected with τὸ δίκαιον, the word naturally suggest an even-handed, impartial treatment" (p. 296). A master was to treat all of his slaves with the same righteous and impartial treatment, rewarding them for the same things, and punishing them regardless of their standing in the household.

So we conclude this part of the epistle, knowing that when we combine what Paul had to say in Ephesians coupled with what he had to say in Colossians about these various groups of believers, we have the truth that is necessary for happy homes and for real harmony and blessing in the workplace.

April 2, 2001

This point in the outline is as follows:

IV. The Apostle's Application of the Truth (Col. 3:1-4:6).

E. Concluding exhortations (Col. 4:2-6).

With these verses, 2 through 6, the Apostle concluded the practical section of the epistle. A reading of these five verses shows that they have to do with Paul's ministry, as well as the ministry of the Colossians, with a special emphasis upon the world. I mean by this he was appealing to the Colossians about the need for a powerful and faithful witness "toward them that are without" (v. 5), *i.e.*, those who were outside of Christ, outside of salvation, and so not a part of the Church, the body of Christ. The Greek word is ἔξω, which lit. means, *out of doors*. They were not in the fold of salvation. And so it is very important to see and understand the emphasis that the Apostle Paul was making.

The first is upon prayer.

4:2 The Greek word for "continue" basically means *to persevere*. It is used in connection with prayer in Acts 1:14 where after mentioning the apostles who were in the upper room following the ascension of the Lord Jesus we are told:

14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren (Acts 1:14).

to be discouraged, but still to hold on—wrestling in the spirit of him who said, “I will not let thee go except Thou bless me (p. 272).

I trust that this verse will encourage us to pray if we are not praying, or to pray more if we have been praying. But now let us look at verse 3.

4:3 Here is Paul’s request for himself. In considering how he might have requested prayer as far as his circumstances were concerned, we would not have been surprised if he had requested prayer for his release. But instead he asked prayer for his ministry while he was a prisoner of Rome, “that God would open unto us a door of utterance,” lit., *a door for the Word*. Paul had served the Lord long enough to know that he was the One Who opens doors for the Word, that is, who gives us the opportunity to speak “the mystery of Christ,” which, of course, was the Gospel.

Perhaps you remember how the Lord address His letter to the church of Philadelphia in Rev. 3:7 and 8. This is what the Lord said,

7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;
8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name (Rev. 3:7-8).

With all of his experience in preaching the Gospel, the Apostle Paul knew that he was not the one who opened doors for the Gospel. That, he knew, was the work of the Lord, and that the Lord opened closed doors in answer to prayer. He believed in the providence of God. It made no difference to him that he was in prison for preaching the Gospel. That was his calling, and the fact that he was in prison did not change his calling.

In Eph. 3:1 and also in Philemon 1 and 9 Paul referred to himself as “a prisoner of Jesus Christ.” By this he meant that although he was a prisoner of Rome, yet he looked beyond what anyone could see to the fact that he was in that Roman confinement because the Lord Jesus had placed him there. And since the Lord had placed him there, he knew that the Lord had a work for him to do there. It is very interesting that when Paul was concluding his letter to the church at Philippi, he said, “All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar’s household” (Phil. 4:22). How they came to Christ, we do not know, but perhaps it was under Paul’s ministry while he was in prison in Rome. At any rate, Paul had some contact with them as he wrote to the believers at Philippi.

However, Paul was not just concerned that the Lord would open doors for him to speak to people who did not know the Lord, but he had another concern which is brought out in verse 4. Let’s see what it was.

4:4 “That I might make it manifest as I ought to speak.” Paul was not only concerned that the Lord would open a door for him, but he was also concerned about how he spoke the message after the door was opened.

When I was a student at Baylor University, a group of us invited Dr. Harry Ironside to come down to Waco to speak to us. He was in Dallas for special lectures, and so he only had about a hundred miles to come instead of all of the way from Chicago where he was the pastor of the Moody Memorial Church. And he came! And I never will forget his text. It was Acts 14:1. That text tells of Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey when they arrived at Iconium. This is the text:

And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed (Acts 14:1).

He was speaking to many of us who were preparing for the ministry, but there were also some of the women students there also. But this was the gist of what he had to say: “If it was possible for Paul and Barnabas to so speak ‘that a great multitude both of Jews and also of the Greeks believed,’ it would also have been possible for them so to speak *so that no one would have believed!* And then he went on to speak on the importance of holiness in the life of one who is to be a servant of the Lord. And he spoke of a minister’s personal relationship with the Lord – in the Word and in prayer – and how what we are spiritually is the key to the blessing of the Lord upon our ministry.

When he was finished, he offered to take questions, but instead of asking him about his own prayer life and his study of the Word, they asked him about his church building, how many it would seat, and if his choir wore robes or not. He very patiently answered their questions. But then as he prepared to close the meeting, he said something like this: “I came here today to talk to you about more important things than church buildings and choir robes. I have answered your questions not because that is what I came to do, but because of the questions you asked me.” He was clearly disappointed in the response he got.

Paul knew that there was more to the ministry than just to have an open door. And he knew that there was more to the ministry than just having your message prepared. He knew that there needs to be preparation of heart! There needs to be much prayer. The pastor or whoever brings the message needs to make sure that his heart is right with the Lord, and that he has taken the time to apply his message to himself before he presents his message to others.

That is what the Apostle Paul was talking about here: “That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” When I first began to hear Dr. Mitchell when I was at Dallas Seminary, he used to tell us *the easier it is for us to speak, the harder it would be for us to trust the Lord*. Seminaries will offer usually more than one course on how to preach, but no course on how to pray, or how to walk with the Lord. And the words of Paul at this time in his life when he called himself in his letter to Philemon, “Paul, the aged,” shows that, if anything, as he got older, his realization of how much he needed the Lord every time he even spoke to another individual about Christ, was deeper than ever before.

Paul told the Corinthian church this, and you will find his words in 1 Cor. 8:1-3:

1b Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

2 And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

3 But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

A seminary or Bible school education often makes you feel that you are ready to serve the Lord. But then as you get into the work of the Lord, you find that you don’t know anything the way you need to know it. And so the Lord puts you through trials and testings which teach you how to love the Lord so that the Lord’s blessing can be on your ministry. It is our love for the Lord that causes the Lord to make us useful servants.

I doubt if there would have been many people who would have prayed for Paul the way he wanted them to pray for him if he had not given them this prayer request. Take this request for me, if you will, and pray it like Paul said to pray in verse 2 of this chapter.

It seems like all of this reminds me of my own seminary days. Let me give you another example of what I believe must have been in the heart of the Apostle Paul as he wrote these concluding words to the epistle. Dr. Mitchell told us one time when he was in Dallas giving Bible lectures, that a group of graduates were in California waiting for a ship to take them to Japan as missionaries. And they sent a telegram to Dr. Mitchell asking them what they should tell the Japanese. And he wired this message back to them: “Just sit at the feet of the Lord Jesus, and tell the Japanese what you see!” Our love for the Lord needs to be so great in our lives that

our ministry is full and overflowing with Him.

April 3, 2001

“That I may make it manifest” – The word “manifest” is used here of the Gospel as a revelation. We know that God *revealed* all of the truth to all of the writers of Scripture. God reveals what cannot be made known or understood in any other way. The Bible is not the result of man’s research, but of God making known truth which otherwise would remain unknown. But Paul’s use of the word “manifest” indicates that what is contained in Scripture has to be *made known* to those who read it, and to those who hear it preached. And it is the work of God, the Holy Spirit, to do this work. And this usually comes in answer to prayer. So preaching is not just one person talking to another person, or a preacher speaking to a group, but it is a time when the Word of God is proclaimed, and the Holy Spirit is opening people’s understanding to the message that is being taught. Paul’s request here is that he might speak, or write, with this in mind, and that he, too, would be trusting the Spirit to use him to get the message into the minds and hearts of his hearers, or his readers.

“As I ought to speak” – “Ought” is that very important little word, δεῖ. It is often translated as “must.” Paul was under a divine obligation to preach the Gospel, but he was asking prayer that he might not deviate from the message, but also that he should do it knowing how greatly dependent he was upon the help and blessing of the Spirit of God if people were to understand and receive the preaching of the Word.

Paul never outgrew this need, nor this calling that he had. And neither do we. God does not give us revelations like he gave to Paul, but we are to take what he revealed to Paul and to the other writers of Scripture, seek the Holy Spirit’s help in understanding it ourselves, and then preach it, praying that those who hear will also be taught by the Spirit so they can understand the message, and believe it in their hearts.

Again John Eadie helps us to understand what Paul meant when he gave this request to the church at Colossae. He wrote:

For it might be surmised that what Paul had suffered for the Gospel had lessened his love for it, and modified his views of the office which he held. And may we not suppose that the apostle wished the world to understand, that if he were liberated, there would be no abatement of his zeal, no subduedness of tone in his speech, no mutilation of his message, and no accommodation of it so as to avoid the recurrence of the penalty, but all his old fervor and power, all his former breadth of view, and all his uncompromising hostility to Jewish narrowness—“that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak.” The form of the request presented to the Ephesians is even more pointed. He twice asks them to pray for him, that he may speak with boldness, and he graphically depicts himself as an ambassador in chains (pp. 277, 278).

But in the spread of the Gospel, there is another point that Paul made in verse 5, and still another in verse 6.

4:5 It has to do with our “walk.” This, as we have seen many times before, speaks of the way we live. The Greek places “in wisdom” first – “*In wisdom walk.*” It means more than that we should walk discreetly or with mere prudence. It includes that, but the primary meaning is that *we must live our lives according to the Word of God.* That is where we find the wisdom that we need. Eadie stated it this way:

The world’s Bible is the daily life of the church, every page of which its quick eye minutely scans, and every blot on which it detects with gleeful and malicious exactness (p. 279).

However, on the other hand, when we as the people of God are careful and consistent in our obedience to the Word, and doing it with both joy and love, that is what the Spirit of God uses to win for us a hearing of the Gospel.

As I have explained before “them that are without” are, as Lenski says, “all non-Christians” (p. 193). To quote Eadie again, he said,

Those without should be surrounded with every inducement to come in. No barrier should be thrown in their way, but the attractive nature of Christianity should be wisely exhibited to them. And as the life and practice of those within the church is what they especially look at and learn from, so the apostle says, “walk in wisdom—*πρός*,” in reference to them (pp. 278, 279).

We are not to live like they live in order to win them to Christ, but we are to live like the Word says we should live, like God wants us to live. It is not being like them that will impress them and bring conviction to them, but it is when they see the unique difference in our lives as the people of God.

And then Paul added, “redeeming the time.” By this he meant that we are to make the most of every opportunity to present the Gospel, both by the way we live, and by what we say. Time is always important. Often we rebuke ourselves because of the way we have failed when the door of opportunity was open to speak the Gospel or to demonstrate how differently a child of God responds to an evil situation. And let us always remember that *our walk talks*.

4:6 On the other hand, a major part of our walk, is our talk. We are not just to be careful about what we say, and how we say it, when the door of opportunity is opened, but we need to be careful about our speech *always!* The grace of God in us should make us gracious in our speech. The Apostle Paul told Timothy,

24 And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

25 In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

26 And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

“Seasoned with salt,” not to preserve it (which is one use for salt), but to make it palatable, tasty, as salt is used to bring out the taste in our food. The behavior of Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail was what the Holy Spirit used to bring the jailor to the point where he asked them, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). And it was the gracious manner of the Lord Jesus that caused the woman of Samaria to say to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw” (John 4:15). And again let me remind you of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:1 who “so spake that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.”

So the Apostle Paul was telling the Colossians that preaching the Gospel, telling others about Christ, combines both what we say and how we say it. Often the Gospel is not effective, not because we are not telling the truth, but because of the manner in which we proclaim it.

Again the word “ought” is the same word that Paul used in 4, the word *δεῖ*. Thayer defines this word as expressing “that constraint which arises from divine appointment” (p. 126). So our testimony to the world requires that we give the true message, and that we do it with grace. The Apostle Peter has a good word for us here:

15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ (1 Peter 3:15-16).

If our main concern in our lives is to be pleasing to the Lord, then there will be an attractiveness to our message that the Holy Spirit will use to draw the lost to Christ. Holiness of life is a “must” if we are to be effective servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, seeking to reach a lost world with the Gospel.

**The Epistle of Paul the Apostle
to the
Colossians**

April 9, 2001 – Colossians 4:7-18

Intro: Now we come to the Conclusion of the epistle. And it has three parts. In our outline it is as follows:

V. The Conclusion (Col. 4:7-18).

- A. Tychicus and Onesimus, the letter carriers (4:7-9).**
- B. Salutations (4:10-15).**
- C. Paul's Parting Words (4:16-18).**

It is good for us to be reminded as we come to the final verses of this epistle, that they carry the same mark of divine inspiration as we recognize in the main body of the epistle. And so there are things here for us to learn, ways in which we can profit even from a "conclusion." The Apostle Paul had written this letter to "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are Colossae" (Col. 1:2). So the epistle commends to us the importance of keeping in touch with each other. There is a real ministry in letter writing. Today we also have the advantage of the telephone, and many correspond using e-mail. I have sent e-mail letters to Tim Huggins in Japan, and have gotten an answer *the same day!* Paul did not have the privilege of such quick correspondence. Even our mail system is so much faster than what they had in the first century. We can thank the Lord for the means we have of keeping in touch with each other, *but let us be sure that we do!*

We also learn from the Apostle Paul's correspondence that we need to pray and then write so that our letters will be a blessing. I don't mean that we should "preach" in our letters, although there may be times when it is necessary to write about doctrinal matters. But just think of what it meant to the believers in Colossae to hear from the Apostle Paul, and even to have the privilege of reading letters which he had sent to other churches. It must have been a very exciting time when the believers were called together to hear a letter from the Apostle Paul.

So there are always lessons to be learned from the conclusions of the NT epistles. Now for the first point in the conclusion:

A. Tychicus and Onesimus, the Letter Carriers (4:5-10).

4:7 Tychicus (pronounced tik'-i-cus) is mentioned five times in the NT: Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21-22; here in Colossians; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12. Luke, in Acts 20:4, said that he was from Asia, which probably means that he was a Gentile. He delivered the Ephesian epistle to Ephesus (cf. Eph. 6:21-22), and also the epistles to the Colossian church and to Philemon who lived in Colossae.

But we could hardly have a better commentary on his character than the three terms which the Apostle Paul used here in Col. 4:7:

- 1) "A beloved brother."
- 2) "A faithful minister"
- 3) A fellowservant in the Lord."

In calling him "a beloved brother" Paul, even though he was an apostle, did not hesitate to identify himself as a brother of Tychicus. They were equally members of the family of God. "Beloved" means not only that he loved Tychicus, but that he trusted him. The fact that he trusted Tychicus is also brought out by calling him in the second term: "A faithful minister." The word "minister" in the Greek is *διάκονος*, and it means *one who*

serves another. He was a great helper to the Apostle Paul, and probably to others as well. Implied in the word “minister” is the idea of subordination. And “faithful” means that he could be trusted to do whatever he agreed to do. He was probably the kind of a person who did not need to be told what to do, but was always looking for ways that he could assist others. The fact that the Apostle Paul did not use the word “my” in speaking of Tychicus probably means that Tychicus would help anyone who needed help. He obviously was in Rome because he knew that Paul would need him. As a “fellowservant in the Lord,” Paul meant that Tychicus stood side by side with him as a bondservant of the Lord, committed to serve the Lord by doing His will.

All of these titles showed how qualified Tychicus was to convey information about Paul, telling the believers in Ephesus and Colossae all about the Apostle Paul.

4:8 But Tychicus was going to Colossae not just to inform them about Paul, but to find out how they were, and to comfort them, to encourage them. The situation with Paul was very serious, and so believers throughout the Empire were greatly concerned about him. It was typical of the Apostle Paul that he would be thinking of others, and he did not want them worrying about him.

4:9 Onesimus was also going with Tychicus. We will find out more about Onesimus when we get to Paul’s epistle to Philemon. Paul’s comment about Onesimus, “who is one of you,” had a double meaning. He was one with them as a former resident of Colossae, but at this time he was more than just a Colossian; he was one of them in Christ. Onesimus had run away from Philemon as an unbeliever; he was going back as a believer. He had been saved, and it is very likely that it was Paul who had led him to Christ.

Paul used two of the same adjectives to describe Onesimus that he had used to describe Tychicus – “faithful and beloved.” He and Tychicus must have made a great team to serve Paul, and in serving Paul, to be serving the Lord. The epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians and to Philemon, were in good hands.

At this point Paul began to give several:

B. Salutations (4:10-15).

4:10 Evidently Aristarchus had been imprisoned by the Romans as well. In Acts 20:4 and 27:2 we learn that he was a native of Thessalonica. S. F. Hunter, in an article written for ISBE, said that he and Gaius “were probably seized to extract from them information about their leader Paul, but when they could tell nothing, and since they were Greeks, nothing further was done to them.”

“Saluteth you” simply means that he was sending them greetings, and figuratively was embracing them in his arms. So “saluteth” was a term used to express love.

“Marcus” also sent them greetings. This was John Mark, the writer of the second Gospel. He was a nephew of Barnabas, a citizen of Jerusalem, and therefore Jewish. He had gone with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but left them at Perga, and returned to Jerusalem. We are not told why, but it was significant enough that Paul refused to take him with them when he and Barnabas were preparing to leave on their second journey. The result was that Barnabas and Paul broke up their team, and Barnabas took John Mark with him, but Paul took Silas. However, there evidently had been a reconciliation between Paul and John Mark. And so Paul was encouraging the people of Colossae to receive John Mark if he came to them. Later, when Paul had been imprisoned in Rome for the second time, he wrote to Timothy and said, “Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11). That is one of the encouraging stories of the NT.

4:11 We do not know who “Jesus, which was called Justus” was, except for the fact that he was a Jew. And when Paul said, “These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God,” he was speaking of the three men mentioned in verses 10 and 11 as the three who were closest to him at the time. They had been an encouragement to Paul.

4:12 You may remember that Epaphras was mentioned in chapter 1, verses 7 and 8, where Paul said that Epaphras was for them “a faithful minister of Christ.” That, combined with the statement here in 4:12, that he was one of them and “a servant of Christ,” has led many to the opinion that he was the pastor of the church in Colosse, or if not the pastor, he surely was the one who had brought the Gospel to Colosse, and probably to Laodicea and Hierapolis (see verse 13) as well. In Paul’s letter to Philemon, he had this to say about Epaphras: “There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus” (Ph. 23).

What Paul had to say about Epaphras could not help but be a great encouragement to the believers in Colossae. In addition to calling him *a bondservant of Christ*, and sending greetings from him to them, he could tell them that Epaphras was “always laboring fervently for [them] in prayer, that [they] might stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

“Laboring fervently” is the translation of the Greek verb, ἀγωνίζομαι. It was a word that was used for combatants in the public games. It spoke of fighting an adversary. Paul used this word in Col. 1:29. It is the kind of prayer that Paul was describing in Ephesians 6:18-20 (although this verb was not used there). Those early Christians considered prayer for each other like hand to hand conflict with the Enemy. And they prayed to win.

John Eadie said,

Though he was absent, he did not forget them. The best scene of memory is at the throne of grace. In proportion to the fervor of one’s affection will be the importunity of his petition. Love so pure and spiritual as that of Epaphras will produce an agony of earnestness. There will be no listless or fitful asking—but a mighty and continual wrestling of heart (p. 292).

John Calvin wrote,

Here we have an example of a good pastor, whom distance of place cannot induce to forget the Church, so as to prevent him from taking the care of it with him beyond the sea. We must notice, also, the strength of entreaty that is expressed in the word *striving*. For although the Apostle had it in view here to express intensity of affection, he at the same time admonishes the Colossians not to look upon the prayers of their pastor as useless, but, on the contrary, to reckon that they would afford them no small assistance (XXI, 229).

“That ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” This was the burden of Epaphras’ prayer for them. Standing is persevering, to be unwavering. Lightfoot, in his paraphrase of the Greek text, renders this phrase, “that ye may stand firm in the faith, perfectly instructed and fully convinced in every will and purpose of God” (pp. 301, 302).

Epaphras was praying for their spiritual maturity (“perfect”) and that they might be brought to the goal of their salvation (“complete”) “in all the will of God.” As a bondservant of Christ, Lenski said,

This true slave of Christ had no will of his own as the Judaizers did, no false completeness and fake assurance for the Colossians, but brought them God’s will according to which they should shape their faith and their life (p. 203).

The NASB translates the burden which Epaphras had as “that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the

will of God.

4:13 Therefore, it should not be surprising to read that here Paul put his stamp of approval upon Epaphras, mentioning his “zeal.” This meant that he had an especially deep concern, even to the point of pain, or *painstaking*. And it was not only for the believers at Colossae, but also for the believers in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Bishop Moule made some comments about Epaphras that showed a great lack among believers in his own day to the effect that every generation needs its Epaphrases. His words are well worth our consideration. After recognizing that there were many good works being done in his day, Bishop Moule’s day, he then continued along this line:

But it is to be much feared that the “wrestling” and the “painstaking” of *Epaphras* are not abundant in proportion; and we cannot possibly do without them. Let us pray that we may pray. Let us give our hearts no rest till we know what it is do what Epaphras did for the converts of the Lycus Valley. He bore their souls upon his soul. He yearned with the deepest longing that they might be holy in the sense of a single-hearted and thorough loyalty to the Lord. And he carried this yearning continually and urgently to God in Christ, resolved to reach Colossian lives by way of the Throne. Shall not each of us begin, or begin anew, the same “painstaking,” for home and household, for parish, for church, for school, for college, for mission, for the Christian world? (pp. 265, 266).

In the same part of his commentary Bishop Moule expressed this hope which ought to be the prayer of every one of us: “May our Master grant more followers of Epaphras to His Church.”

4:14 The word “greet” here is the same word as “saluteth” in verse 10. And so it is not only a greeting, but an affectionate greeting. Remember that lit. it means *to enfold another person in your arms*.

“Luke, the beloved physician” – The writer of the Gospel which bears his name, and also of the Acts of the Apostles. The Apostle Paul is the only one who mentions his name. In addition to this verse, Paul mentioned him in Philemon 24 and in 2 Timothy 4:11. A. T. Robertson said in his article in ISBE that “the clear implication of Luke 1:2 is that Luke himself was not an eyewitness of the ministry of Jesus.” It seems from the reference here in Col. 4, where it seems that Paul distinguished him from those who were “of the circumcision,” that Luke was a Gentile. Eusebius stated that he was a native of Antioch.

Luke first joined the Apostle Paul at Troas in Acts 16:10, and we can follow those periods when he accompanied the Apostle Paul by what has been referred as the “we” passages.” When Paul sailed from Troas to Macedonia, Luke accompanied him and went with him to Philippi. But he was not involved with Paul and Silas when they were persecuted and imprisoned in Philippi. Toward the end of Paul’s third missionary journey he returned to Philippi, and there it seems that Luke joined him again and sailed with him back to Troas. From that point on Luke was with Paul when he went back to Jerusalem, and he was with Paul on his trip to Rome, and stayed with him during that first imprisonment. That is as far as the book of Acts takes us. During Paul’s second imprisonment in Rome, Paul wrote to Timothy saying, “Only Luke is with me.” So during the latter part of Paul’s ministry Luke was a close companion of the Apostle Paul, and a great affection developed between the two men. Tradition has it that Luke eventually suffered martyrdom for his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but this is not absolutely certain.

Paul’s comment that Luke was “beloved” was interpreted by Moule to mean that Luke was “loved and loveable, tender and true” (p. 267). John Eadie had this to say about Luke:

He is styled “the beloved physician,” either to distinguish him from others of the same name, or to

specify the peculiar office in which he had endeared himself to the apostle. The health of the apostle, as they might know, had been signally benefited by his medical skill, and that this might be at all times available to his patient, Luke attached himself to his person, accompanied him in several of his missionary tours, was with him in his voyage to Rome, and remained with him in the Italian metropolis (pp. 294, 295).

But when we pass from Timothy to Demas, we pass from a man who was a delight and an encouragement to the Apostle Paul, to one who became one of Paul's greatest disappointments. Some feel that, because of Paul's brief reference to Demas, he may have already been showing some signs of his declension. In 2 Tim. 4:9 and 10 Paul wrote to Timothy saying, "Do they diligent to come shortly unto me: For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" [age]. Luke was with him; Demas had forsaken him.

Charles Simeon, whom I have mentioned before, and who had a tremendous ministry many years ago now at the University Church at Cambridge, preached a very thought-provoking sermon on those first words of 2 Tim. 4:10, not so much condemning Demas, as to learn from his defection that we might not follow in his way. Simeon pointed out that Demas' departure at that point in Paul's life, was especially to be deplored because there probably was no time in Paul's life when he needed all of the help and encouragement that his fellow laborers could provide for him. And Simeon pointed out also that if Demas has failed in some particular, or even had grown cold in his zeal, we might understand that because we are all human and liable to fail at any moment. But for Paul to have write that Demas had *forsaken* him, and at such a time when Paul was facing martyrdom, meant that he had also forsaken the Lord Jesus Christ. Demas was like those disciples during the ministry of our Lord who turned away from the Lord, "and walked no more with Him." See John 6:66.

And then Charles Simeon proceeded in his message with these words:

Whence could this proceed? To what shall we trace an even so calamitous, so unforeseen? We are not left in doubt respecting it: the Apostle, at the same time that he announces the fact, declares the reason of it: "Demas hath forsaken me, *having loved this present world*" (italics mine). Alas! Alas! What did he find in this world worthy of his affections? Had he never known any thing of spiritual and eternal objects, we might account for his attachment to the things of time and sense: but we are amazed, that, after having once tasted of living waters, he could ever afterwards find satisfaction in the polluted streams of this world.

But supposing him to love this present world; is there any thing in that to draw him from Christ, and to make him cast off all concern for his eternal interests? Yes: the love of God and of the world are incompatible with each other; insomuch that, "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Light and darkness are no more opposed to each other than are the things of this world, and the things of God. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," what have they to do with heavenly-mindedness? "The person who liveth in pleasure, is dead whilst he liveth": "the cares and indulgences of this world choke the good seed, and render it unfruitful": and the seeking honor from men, instead of seeking it from God only, is absolutely incompatible with a saving faith. The cross of Christ, if duly valued, would crucify us unto the world, and the world to us.

Here we see whence this deplorable evil proceeded. Demas had yielded to a concern about his carnal ease and interests. This gradually weakened his anxiety about his spiritual and eternal welfare. Then he became remiss in secret duties: then his strength to resist temptations declined: then his natural corruptions regained their former ascendant over him: then the Spirit of God, being grieved, and quenched, left him to himself: then he became the sport of temptation, and the prey of Satan: and then his abandonment of Christ and of his Gospel followed (Vol. 19, p. 83).

At this point Charles Simeon pointed out three important lessons that we can learn from the experience of Demas.

The first of these is that expressed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 10:12 when he was discussing how grievously the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord in their journey from Egypt to Canaan: “Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” And he pointed out that if David had been told that he would ever sin like he did against Bathsheba and Uriah, her husband, he would have responded with Hazeel, “Is thy servant a dog, that he would do such things?” See 2 Kings 8:13. And we know how Peter felt when the Lord told him that he would deny Him. So we need to beware. If David and Peter, such men of God, could fall, then none of us can boast about our faithfulness to the Lord. Simeon said, “To every man among you, though he were as eminent as St. Paul himself, I would say, ‘Be not highminded, but fear’” (Rom. 11:20). See Vol. 19, p. 84).

Simeon’s second warning was that all of us “must watch with all carefulness against the first beginnings of spiritual decay” (Vol. 19, p. 84). We need to beware when we first start to neglect the reading of the Word. We need to beware when we feel that we can get through any day without calling upon the Lord in prayer. And then we start to neglect to meet with the people of God as frequently as we used to. And the world begins to look more attractive, and we still feel that we would never be like Demas. It has happened over and over again, and we need to pray that it will never happen to us. Dr. Ironside used to pray when he was in his seventies that he would get home to heaven without dishonoring his Lord. And the Lord graciously answered that prayer. Simeon said, “To the latest hour of your lives adopt the habit of St. Paul, who ‘kept under his body, and brought it into subjection, lest, after having preached to others, he himself should be a castaway’” (Vol. 19, p. 84). He was referring to 1 Cor. 9:27.

The third thing that Simeon said was that, “if we have unhappily forsaken the Lord, the door of mercy is not yet closed against us” (Vol. 19, p. 85). We don’t know what happened to Demas. But we do know what happened to David and to Peter and to John Mark. On the latter, cf. Col. 4:10 and 2 Tim. 4:11. The story of the prodigal son was given by our Lord to encourage those who have departed to go back home.

As we return to our text in Col. 4:14, remember that the word Paul used in connection with Demas, that he sent *greetings* to the believers in Colossae, is the same word which is translated earlier, “saluteth.” How easy it is to use the language of the saints while our hearts are far from the Lord, or at least moving away. He joined Luke in sending loving greetings to the church at Colossae. Demas stands on the pages of Scripture as a warning to all of us.

At this point we come to the last point in our outline:

C. Paul’s parting words (Col. 4:15-18).

4:15 Here the Apostle Paul used that loving word again, this time for himself toward the believers at Laodicea – ἀσπάζασθε, a second person plural aorist imperative. He was asking the whole church to convey his loving greetings to all of the brethren at Laodicea, as special greetings to Nymphas. Some versions of Colossians would seem to indicate that Nymphas was a woman, “but αὐτοῦ seems to have the highest authority” (Eadie, p. 296). So “his house” is the preferred translation. We know that churches meeting in houses, were very common in those days.

4:16 Paul wanted this epistle to be read in the church of the Laodiceans after it was read to the church at Colossae. And then the Colossians were to read “the epistle from Laodicea. There have been many

different ideas about this letter, but since Paul said that it would come to them “from Laodicea,” not that it was written specifically *to* Laodicea, seems to indicate that it probably was the circular epistle which was sent first to Ephesus. We can’t know for sure, but this seems to me to be the most likely.

However, I think some expositors have gotten so involved in trying to identify “the epistle from Laodicea,” that they have missed the important part of this verse. And that is that it has to do with *the reading of the Word of God!* And this verse shows, as Geoffrey Wilson pointed out in his commentary, that the epistles of the NT were intended for a wider circulation than just for the churches who received the original correspondence. But the point of this verse is that the epistles were to be read!

How thankful we should be that each of us can have his own copy of all of the epistles! What a difference it would be if we had to wait until we come together as a church to hear the reading of the Word of God! And so when you pick up your Bible to read Colossians, or Ephesians, or any other part of the Bible, first lift your heart to God in thanksgiving that you have *all of the Bible as your own possession*, and not in the original Greek, but in the language that we all know: English! *But the point is that we need to read it, and read it, and read it over and over and over again!* Read it. Believe it. Obey it. Memorize it. Meditate on it. But never stop reading it! Read all of it! Be like Job who said,

Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food (Job 23:12).

Remember, too, what the Apostle John said at the beginning of the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ:

Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand (Rev. 1:3).

Paul told Timothy to “give attendance to reading” (1 Tim. 4:13). It is a blessing just to think of how intently the believers in the early church must have listened as the Word of God was read to them. The reading of the Word was always a major part of the services even in the synagogues.

4:17 Archippus is only mentioned twice in Scripture, here and in Philemon 2. There are some who understand from the reference to Archippus in Philemon, that he was the son of Philemon and Apphia, and that he had the responsibility of ministering to the church at Colossae perhaps as the pastor, while Epaphras was in Rome with Paul. At any rate, it was a ministry which the Apostle Paul considered that he had “received in the Lord”! And he encouraged him to “fulfill it.” Moule translated that expression, “that you fill it full.” And then Bishop Moule added,

Take it as it were a vessel into which is to be poured all your life, all your powers. Act up to it all round. In private conduct, in public diligence and fidelity, in witnessing, in teaching, everything, let the circle of your “works” be “found perfect before God” (see Rev. iii. 2) (p. 271).

We all should notice that this exhortation was directed to Archippus, *but through the church*. In the earlier days of the church, not only was the pastor considered as one to keep the church faithful to God and to His Word, but the church had the responsibility of encouraging the leadership as Paul was encouraging the church to do in this verse. Paul was not censuring Archippus, but encouraging him to greater diligence in teaching the Word and in exposing the error of the false teachers who were seeking to change the course of the church. His ministry was not only one of the public ministry of the Word, but of the private ministry of prayer for every believer in that Colossian fellowship.

Paul wanted Archippus to be able to say at the end of his life, what Paul said about his own ministry in his second epistle to Timothy:

7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall

give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

4:18 And now the Apostle Paul has finished his letter to the church at Colossae. He has poured out his heart to them, and now he has no more to say, trusting that the Spirit of God would use his words as an encouragement and guide to those believers whom he had never seen (for the most part), but whom he loved with a deep and abiding affection.

“The salutation by the hand of me Paul” – John Eadie made this comment:

Having employed an amanuensis [a secretary] in writing the previous portion of the epistle, the Apostle authenticates it by adding his salutation in his own hand. Cf. 1 Cor. 16:21; 2 Thess. 3:17. What associations and feelings that handwriting would excite! Many an eye would be moistened as it gazed upon it (p. 302).

“Remember my bonds” – again quoting Eadie:

Every possible form of remembrance they were besought to cherish. With every mention of his name, or allusion to his work, his chain was to be associated. Every picture which their mind’s eye formed of him was to be that of a prisoner. When they felt their obligations to him as an apostle, they were to think of his captivity. Their freedom of religious observance was to suggest to them, by the contrast, his incarceration. When they asked a blessing on their spiritual benefactors, they were not to forget the fetters of him—the apostle of the Gentiles. “Remember my bonds.” When his right hand penned the salutation of the previous clause, no wonder he felt his bonds so keenly, and spoke of them, for at the same moment his left hand was chained to the right arm of the Roman soldier who kept him (*Op. cit.*, pp. 302, 303).

These words should remind us of what we read in Heb. 13:3,

Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

The chains of the Apostle Paul were to remind the believers in Colossae that they, too, were living in a world and among many people who had hearts full of hostility toward the Gospel, and that others might also know what it was to be in chains for the sake of the Gospel.

But his parting words, like his first words in this epistle, were a prayer: “Grace be with you. Amen.” We all need the grace of God every day to strengthen and support us as we seek to live for Him in a world where people are total strangers to the grace of God.

Lenski pointed out that Paul actually said, *the* grace, meaning specifically *the grace of God*, “the infinite favor *Dei*, this be with you in Christ” (p. 207).

In Bishop Moule’s conclusion to his commentary, he summarized what we have seen in the epistle to the Colossians in these words:

Our “Studies” have dealt with a subject-matter “which liveth and abideth for ever,” for it is nothing short of Jesus Christ. In the Epistle before us we have been all along “considering Him.” He has been the answer to every question, whether of truth or of life. We have gazed upon the majesty of His Person, on the mysterious glory of His Headship alike over Nature and over the Church, on His redeeming blood, on His life-giving life, and His enthroned rest above, on His promised return. We have seen in Him the inmost “Secret of God,” disclosed for us. We have had a glimpse of the pure eternal gold of “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” heaped and stored in Him, yes, of “all the fulness of the Godhead, dwelling body-wise in Him.” We have seen Him as the mighty Basis of the Christian’s standing; He has blotted out the handwriting that was against us, nailing it to His Cross; he

has embodied us into Himself. He is at once the Power and the Law of the Christian life; He is the Peace of the Christian of the Christian heart; He is the Lamp and Hearth of the Christian home. It is He Who binds souls together, or rather as it were fuses them into one, till people as distant as possible in race and association, like Paul and Onesimus, know and love each other as more than brothers. He is all things, and in all (pp. 273, 274).

The “Amen” does not have good textual support. It may have been added by one who copied the original as his heart was overwhelmed with the truth, and his prayer in the “Amen” an expression of his hope that the truth of this epistle would find its way, by the grace of God, into the heart of all who would ever read it.

The comment at the end of the epistle, while not a part of the epistle, is probably very true.