

Colossians

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Introduction

- 1) The letter to the Colossians was written by Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome. It is grouped together with his letters to the Philippians, Ephesians and Philemon which are known as the Prison Epistles.
- 2) Paul was visited in prison by Epaphras who was a minister to the Colossians. He informed Paul as to the status of this church. It was this visit that prompted this letter to the Colossians.
- 3) The theme of the letter is to exhort the Colossians to persevere in the truth. Paul warns them of the doctrines of the Judaizers and of the danger of mixing former pagan beliefs with Christianity. The letter also gives a vote of confidence to Epaphras, labeling him as a true minister of Christ and one who is concerned about their welfare.
- 4) This letter was probably sent along with the letter to the Ephesians and the letter to Philemon. Tychicus is the deliverer of this letter along with the letter to the Ephesians. (Col. 4:7-9; Eph. 6:21) Onesimus was the deliverer of the letter to Philemon. (Phil. 10-12) So the two probably departed from Rome and proceeded on to Ephesus and then on to Colosse. Onesimus then continued on to the house of Philemon.
- 5) Colosse was an inland city located in Asia Minor in the Roman province of Phrygia. It was in close proximity to the cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. Ephesus was about 100 miles west of the three cities. Today, the city would be located in the country of Turkey.
- 6) A controversy among commentators revolves around the question as to whether Paul was the founder of this church. It is a question that cannot be answered with any certainty.
- 7) A visit to this city is not mentioned in the book of Acts, however, Paul passed through the general region on at least two occasions. (Acts 16:5-6, 18:23) Many believe the church was founded at this time.
- 8) Opponents of Paul being the founder of this church point to Colossians 2:1. They interpret this as meaning Paul had never been to this city. They believe that Epaphras and others heard Paul preach in Ephesus and then took the gospel to Colosse. However this verse is ambiguous at best.

v.1:1. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus [our] brother,

Paul begins this letter by stating that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. An apostle is by definition a messenger or an ambassador. He was given the authority to speak in the behalf of the One who had appointed him to this office and the One whom he represented, namely, Jesus Christ.

- a) His calling and appointment to this office was in accordance with the will of God, for he had received his commission directly from God. (Acts 9:3-7) His knowledge was given to him by revelation. (Gal. 1:11-17) He was actually in some form taken up to heaven. (2 Cor. 12:1-4)
- b) Not being one of the twelve, and because of the special circumstances surrounding his appointment, Paul needed to frequently defend his apostleship against the attacks of those who would try to discredit him. This is a reoccurring theme in his letters to the Corinthians.
- c) Paul begins most of his letters stating his apostolic authority. The exceptions are his letters to the Thessalonians, his letter to Philemon, and his letter to the Philippians.
- d) Paul includes Timothy in the greeting of this letter. Timothy was with Paul in Rome and may have even physically written this letter as it was dictated. This church was probably familiar with Timothy for he is affectionately referred to as our brother. (Phil. 1:1)

v.1:2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace [be] unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Looking at their standing before God in Jesus Christ, Paul addresses these believers in Colosse as saints. They are called and set apart by God, washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, sharing in the righteousness that is of God, and so saints.

- a) In relation to Paul and to each other, they are faithful brethren. In Christ they are brothers; faithful to the gospel message, to Paul, and to each other. They were indeed faithful, having been bombarded with all sorts of false doctrine and yet standing in the truth.
- b) Paul prays that grace, that is, the unmerited favor of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, would be upon them, as well as His peace. False doctrine can be unsettling to the mind and heart, so God's grace and resulting peace was the perfect remedy.

v.1:3-4 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love [which ye have] to all the saints,

Paul, along with Timothy, give thanks to God for these faithful saints at Colosse. They are thankful that they had accepted the gospel message and that their faith was being manifested in love. (John 13:35)

- a) Paul looked not only for a profession of faith, but also for the resulting fruit in a true believers life. This was proof to him that they had embraced the gospel and he was thankful that the "seed" in this case had fallen on good ground.

- b) Their thanks is directed to God, as the Father of their Lord Jesus Christ. This shows the Godhead as the author of their salvation with Jesus Christ being the means of their salvation.
- c) Paul informs the Colossians that they are on his prayer list. He constantly petitions God in their behalf along with the other established churches. Paul knew that only through God's grace and mercy could these churches grow and flourish. (Phil. 1:3-4)

** These verses suggest that Paul was not the founder of this church, but he very well could have preached in this city and left before he knew if the word had taken hold. He now knows however, that an organized church exists in Colosse and offers thanks to God and petitions Him on their behalf.

v.1:5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

Based on their faith and love, Paul thanks God for the reward that is reserved for them in heaven. This also serves as a reminder to the Colossians of this sure hope that is theirs.

- a) In this life the rewards of heaven are ever the believers hope, however, it is a hope based on the promises of God and secured by the blood of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:3-5)
- b) This was indeed a reminder, they had heard it before. It was the coming glory of the gospel message they had received.
- c) When true faith and love are present there is hope. It is the sure hope from which they can draw courage and strength. A hope in which they can persevere.
- d) Paul testifies to the Colossians as to the truth of the gospel which they had received. Yet another reminder as to the source of their faith, love and hope that had delivered them and changed their lives.

** The words of Paul usually have multiple objectives. Here he offers thanks to God in prayer, but at the same time sets certain reminders before the Colossians as he begins to set up a comparison between the truth in which they were established and the error they were now being exposed to. Paul knew the pattern. The gospel would be presented and a church established. Shortly thereafter the "dogs", as Paul calls them in his letter to the Philippians, would come in as scavengers to prey on the new converts. (Phil. 3:2; Gal. 3:1; 2 Peter 2:1)

v.1:6 Which is come unto you, as [it is] in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as [it doth] also in you, since the day ye heard [of it], and knew the grace of God in truth:

The gospel message had come to them. They were not looking for it, but it nevertheless came to them. It was delivered to them according to the goodness and mercy of God.

- a) Not only in Colosse, but the truth was sweeping the gentile world. It was a truth meant for all and that applied to all. It was the universal truth of God. (Acts 19:10, 20)

- b) The Colossians could observe its effects. It came with power. It changed hearts and lives. It liberated people from darkness and superstition. (Acts 17:6)
- c) Most importantly they had experienced the power of the truth. From the day they had heard and understood the great grace and mercy of God, which is the gospel message, the fruit of the Spirit was evident in their lives.

** Paul wants them to remember and reflect on the fact that it was the simple message of the gospel that had a profound effect on their lives and had changed the world.

v.1:7 As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

Paul continues to remind and to re-establish the Colossians in the truth of the gospel, in light of the error currently being introduced into this church. He gives Epaphras, a minister of the Colossian church, a vote of confidence.

- a) Epaphras was with Paul in Rome when this letter was penned. He informed Paul of the true faith and love being exhibited by this Colossian church. He no doubt also informed Paul of those who would try to undermine this church.
- b) Paul labels Epaphras as a “dear fellow servant and a faithful minister of Christ”. In so doing, he puts his stamp of approval upon Epaphras and the message he proclaims.
- c) Those who oppose Epaphras and reject his message, therefore reject Paul, who as an apostle is a directly appointed minister of Jesus Christ. (v.1)
- d) So Epaphras could return to Colosse with Paul’s blessing and confront those in error, now being backed by an ambassador of Jesus Christ. Epaphras, however, secured for the Colossians something even more precious.

v.1:9. For this cause we also, since the day we heard [it], do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

The visit of Epaphras and what he had declared to Paul concerning the Colossians, had secured the prayers of Paul and his associates on their behalf.

- a) Did Paul know a vibrant church existed in Colosse prior to this visit by Epaphras? Did he specifically pray for this church in the past? All we know is that the visit from Epaphras peaked Paul’s interest. The Colossians were now at the top of his prayer list along with the other churches.
- b) Paul shares one of his prayers with them. It is a prayer that will continue for the next eleven verses. It is a prayer of petition, of thanksgiving and at the same time used as a teaching tool.
- c) Paul desires that they be filled with the knowledge of God’s will. This means that His will, His ends, His agenda is to be ever on their minds; to ever be their desire. Implied is a dying to self in light of the knowledge of the will of God.

- d) He desires that accompanying this knowledge will be a proportionate amount of wisdom, that is, that they may know how to carry out His will in each and every situation. Wisdom is the application of knowledge.
- e) Paul asks that they also be blessed with understanding the will of God. That they will view things through the “eyes of God”. That they will have the mind of Christ through the spiritual insight given by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 2:14-16; Rom. 12:1-2) A similar prayer is offered on behalf of the Ephesians. (Eph. 1:17-19)

v.1:10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Paul prays that any knowledge, wisdom and understanding given to the Colossians would not lie dormant, but would be reflected or manifested in their lives.

- a) They should strive unto all pleasing or perfection. Seeking to glorify God in every aspect of their existence, thus living worthy of their high calling in Jesus Christ. (Phil. 3:12-14)
- b) They are to be fruitful by walking in the good works prepared for them. (Eph. 2:10) Good works are a necessary manifestation of true faith. (James 2:17-18)

** It was the manifestation of love through unnamed works that testified to Paul that this was a true church. (v. 4, 8)

- c) Paul prays that all of the above will lead them to an ever increasing knowledge of God. Not only a knowledge of His will (v.9), but a knowledge of His ways, His attributes and His reasonings. Through being fruitful and pleasing God they will gain an experiential knowledge of Him. (Prov. 4:18)

v.1:11 Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

To walk worthy of the Lord and to be faithful they must rely upon the Lord’s strength. Trials and temptations of all sorts will come against them as they seek to fulfil their Christian duty and to seek unto all pleasing.

- a) So Paul prays they will be strengthened with all might, that is, given more than enough grace to meet and to beat any specific trial or temptation that may come their way.
- b) His grace and strength is sufficient for it is according to His glorious power. It is an inexhaustible source constantly at the believers disposal, distributed to them by the Holy Spirit through the Word and through prayer. (Eph. 3:16; Phil. 4:13)

“Where there is spiritual life there is still need of spiritual strength, strength for all the actions of the spiritual life. To be strengthened is to be furnished by the grace of God for every good work, and fortified by that grace against every evil one: it is to be enabled to do our duty, and still to hold fast our integrity.” Matthew Henry

- c) The Christian worker is on a “24/7” shift, while trials and temptations batter against him relentlessly. Paul’s prayer is that the strength of God will lead them to all

patience or endurance; every kind of endurance in every kind of situation and circumstance.

“Endurance is the grace to bear up under, the bravery of perseverance in the performance of one’s God-given task in spite of every hardship and trial, the refusal to succumb to despair and cowardice”. Hendricksen

- d) Longsuffering is just that. It means to suffer long or to persevere. Many times it is simply waiting on the Lord to answer a prayer or remedy a situation. Even waiting requires the strength of the Lord.
- e) Patience and longsuffering are to be practiced with a spirit of joyfulness. They are called to perform their duty happily. (Phil. 2:14) They are to be content knowing that they are called to suffer. (1 Tim. 6:6; Phil. 11:29)

v.1:12. Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

Paul gives thanks that these Colossians were partakers of the inheritance and so saints. In changing “ye” to “us” Paul includes himself with them showing he himself is ever thankful for his position in Christ.

- a) In thanking God in such a specific manner, Paul will reaffirm to them the basic tenants of the gospel message, which is the cause of their new found position in Christ and the source of all graces and blessings.
- b) Paul also gives them a pattern for prayer instructing them by example to offer prayers of praise and thanksgiving to God. Once again we see the multiple objectives of Paul's writing.
- c) Paul points to God in the person of the Father as the author of salvation. (John 3:16) It is He that made them fit or qualified to be partakers in the inheritance.
- d) Through Jesus Christ they are adopted by God. They are sons and so heirs, made worthy by the power of God to receive the inheritance. (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:5-7)
- e) Paul refers to them as “saints in light”. Light in the scriptures is symbolic of holiness, truth and knowledge. Jesus Christ is called “the light of men”. (John 1:4) He called His followers “children of light”. (Luke 16:8)

v.1:13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated [us] into the kingdom of his dear Son:

The opposite of “saints of light” is captives to “the power of darkness”. This was their former state from which they had been delivered.

- a) Darkness in the scriptures is symbolic of sin, error and death. They dwelt in the realm of Satan. (1 Peter 4:3) The word translated “delivered” means ‘rescued’, and implies the former state as utterly hopeless and miserable, and so, the rescue a great and difficult action.

- b) Not only rescued from darkness, but transplanted into the kingdom of His dear Son which is the kingdom of light. (1 Peter 2:9)
- c) The word “translated” means ‘transplanted’ in the sense of removing a people from one country to another. In this case from an earthly to a heavenly.

“It means here, that they who are christians have been transferred from one kingdom to another, as if a people were thus removed. They become subjects of a new kingdom, are under different laws, and belong to a different community. This change is made in regeneration, by which was pass from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light; from the empire of sin, ignorance, and misery, to one of holiness, knowledge, and happiness.” Albert Barnes

v.1:14 In whom we have redemption through his blood, [even] the forgiveness of sins:

Paul continues his prayer in behalf of the Colossians, while at the same time reaffirming to them the basic tenants of the faith. Having stated that they, as believers, had been delivered from the power of darkness, he now reminds them of the means by which this deliverance was accomplished. (vs. 12-13)

- a) They were redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. This was their deliverance. The word redemption refers to a price or a ransom paid to set free a captive or a prisoner.
- b) They were captives to the power of darkness, that is, to their fallen natures and slaves to sin. They were, however, purchased for a price, that being the precious blood of Jesus Christ. He gave His life to redeem us. (1 Cor. 6:20; Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 1:18-20)
- c) Captives to the power of darkness, yes, but even deeper, captives of the justice of God. It was His justice that the ransom satisfied and sin could now rightly and justly be forgiven. (Matt. 26:28)

v.1:15-16 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: 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:

Paul confirms the deity of Jesus Christ, demonstrating why the shedding of His blood was acceptable to the satisfying of the justice of God and the forgiveness of sins.

- a) In Jesus Christ the invisible God is seen. He is a perfect representation or manifestation of God. All of the attributes of God are seen in Him. (Heb. 1:3)

“God is invisible. No eye has seen him, or can see him; but in what Christ is, and has done in the works of creation and redemption, we have a fair and full representation of what God is.” Albert Barnes

- b) He holds rank and privilege over every creature, for all things were created or came into existence by Him. In this respect Jesus Christ is the firstborn, not that he himself was created, but that He was before all, the creator of all, and having pre-eminence over all.

- c) Jesus Christ, as the image of God, manifests God through the exercise of creative power. So there will be no misunderstanding, Paul provides examples of things created by Him.
- d) He created all things that are in heaven. This means everything other than the earth. It includes all of the stars and heavenly bodies, what we would call the universe, as well as the place or realm where God and other heavenly beings reside.
- e) He created the earth and everything in it. All of the plants, animals, mountains and waters. He created the sky above and the hidden fires below.
- f) Everything that can be seen and observed was created by Jesus Christ as well as the things that cannot be seen. The physical realm as well as the spiritual realm was all created by Him.
- g) Thrones, dominions, principalities and powers refer to ranks of angelic beings that also were created by Him. Beings far superior to man and invisible to man, yet created by Him. (Eph. 1:21)
- h) For emphasis, Paul repeats that all things were created by Him, but adds the phrase “for Him”. He created all things for His pleasure and His purposes. Creation is His stage or His theater through which He desires to manifest His attributes, His glory and His purpose.

v.1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Seeing He created all things, Jesus Christ had existence before anything was created. Just as the word “firstborn” describes His pre-eminence over all, here Paul tells us that Jesus Christ, in himself, is eternal; existing before time began. (John 1:1-4; Rev. 22:13)

- a) He is not only the creator, but also the sustainer. All things are literally held together by Him. All things are kept in existence by Jesus Christ.
- b) It is this power that holds atoms together and that keeps the stars and the planets on their course. The laws of physics and the laws of nature hold because of Him. Jesus Christ brings order and harmony to what would be chaos.

“It is the Son of God’s love who holds in His almighty hands the reins of the universe and never even for one moment lets them slip out of His grasp.” Hendricksen

v.1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all [things] he might have the preeminence.

Having given glory to God and at the same time having instructed the Colossians as to the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ in creation, Paul will continue his prayer of praise as he will present Christ as being pre-eminent as to redemption.

- a) Paul often compares the church to a living body. Each member or part is important in its own right and so all parts must work in harmony for the body to function properly (1 Cor. 12:12, 14-18)

- b) Here, Paul identifies Christ as the head of the body, which is the church. Jesus is the church's Ruler, Guide and Protector. Without Him all bodily functions would cease; there would be no growth, no harmony and no life. (John 15:5)
- c) Salvation was in Jesus Christ before the world began. (Rev. 13:8; Eph. 1:4) He remains the only means of salvation; the only one who can satisfy God's justice, and so, is truly the beginning of redemption.
- d) His rank, power and privilege will extend into the next life and He will hold this place forevermore as the firstborn from the dead. It was He who defeated death and also holds power over it. Jesus rose by His own power and is the champion or leader of all who will follow. (1 Cor. 15:20, 55-57)
- e) By once again announcing the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ in all things, Paul leaves no room for argument or dispute. With the specific descriptions of His place, rank, and power there can be no doubt as to what Paul teaches and believes.

v.1:19 For it pleased [the Father] that in him should all fulness dwell;

It was the plan of the Godhead, represented here by the Father, that this exalted position of pre-eminence be held by Jesus Christ. It pleased the Godhead. It was good.

- a) The phrase "all fulness" points to the deity of Jesus Christ. It both summarizes and emphasizes what has already been said concerning His relation to all other things.

"That in Him there should be such dignity, authority, power, and moral excellence, as to be fitted to the work of creating the world, redeeming His people, and supplying everything needful for their salvation." Albert Barnes

v.1:20 And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, [I say], whether [they be] things in earth, or things in heaven.

This verse does not teach universal salvation as some over the centuries have suggested, but simply places Jesus Christ as the place where God and man as well as heaven and earth meet or are joined.

- a) Because of sin man was alienated from God. There could be no harmony between the heavens and the earth. A great gulf existed which was bridged by Jesus Christ. His blood satisfying the justice of God, He is the agent of peace. In Him is the union between God and man and between heaven and earth.
- b) Believers are called citizens of heaven. In Him, through His blood, this blessed society exists in principle; men and angels worshipping God. Through His work Satan has been defeated. Death is destroyed. He is seated at the right hand exercising all power until His enemies are put under His feet. (1 Cor. 15:24-26; Phil. 2:10-11)

v.1:21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in [your] mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled

Paul reminds the Colossians that they had come under subjection to Jesus Christ. They were formerly alienated and enemies, but He had reconciled them. They had crossed over, so to speak, experiencing the peace and harmony effected by the blood of His cross.

- a) They had been separated from God and enemies, that is, they were by nature hostile toward God. Sin had taken its course within them and their very minds or intellect had been corrupted.
- b) As gentiles, they had ignored the revelation of God in nature and in history. They were given over to the evil desires of their hearts. (Rom. 1:18-25) The truth, in this natural state, was foolishness to them. (1 Cor. 2:14)
- c) Their works were a manifestation of their darkened minds and hearts. Wicked works did not make them evil, but was simply a product of their corrupt nature. (Eph. 4:17-19)
- d) But now, they were reconciled. Their hearts had been changed. The spirit of Christ had taken up residence in them. Their hearts and minds were now in harmony with that of God. They had experienced His peace. (Heb. 10:16-17)

v.1:22 In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight:

Paul had reminded the Colossians that they were formerly alienated from God. They were enemies of God and the enmity existed in their very nature. Now, however, they had been reconciled and Paul will now elaborate on the means of this reconciliation (v.21)

- a) They were reconciled “in the body of His flesh”. Having already stressed the deity of Jesus Christ in this prayer, Paul reminds the Colossians that Jesus Christ was also a man. It was “the body of His flesh” that enabled Him to suffer and die, so making atonement for sin and satisfying the justice of God. It was “the body of His flesh” that made reconciliation possible. (Phil. 2:6-8)
- b) The purpose of the atonement, the purpose of their reconciliation, is that they might, in the fullness of time, be presented to Him as the redeemed and a part of His church. (Eph. 5:27)
- c) As a result of His work they will be holy, that is, free from all sin. They will be blameless, that is, spotless and without blemish. Every stain of sin having been removed. Finally, they will be unproved, that is, no one or nothing will be able to bring any legitimate accusation against them. This is how God will view their condition.

v.1:23 If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and [be] not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, [and] which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;

They will be so presented if they continue in the faith. Perseverance is the greatest proof that ones faith is genuine. It is not their perseverance that will save them, but their salvation that will cause them to persevere or continue.

- a) If they are grounded and settled in the faith, they will not move away or abandon it when presented with the doctrine of the false teachers who were now among them. Grounded and settled have to do with a building anchored to a firm foundation. (1 John 2:19)
- b) The Colossians had heard the gospel, they had experienced the hope it had produced in them, and they had observed its far reaching effects in a relatively short time. Whether they continued in it or else were moved away would prove if it had taken root in their heart; if they were anchored in the faith.
- c) Paul begins to present himself as an example of one who is grounded and settled; of one who continues in the hope of the gospel. He was made a minister. He was an ambassador of Christ (v.1). He was giving his life to make the gospel known to every creature under heaven. (Eph. 3:7-9)

v.1:24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

Paul's faith was genuine as was his love for them. The sufferings that he endured were proof. It is his sufferings to which he now appeals. He rejoiced in his sufferings for they benefited the Colossians as well as the entire church.

- a) Jesus Christ was hated by the world. He was rejected and persecuted for living a holy life and proclaiming the truth of God. These were the afflictions of Christ that Paul now endured in his flesh. He was hated, persecuted and imprisoned for proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ.
- b) Paul was destined to suffer for the sake of Christ. (Acts 9:15-16) He viewed his sufferings as filling up or fulfilling the full measure of these "afflictions of Christ" which he was called to bear in his flesh
- c) In his letter to the Philippians he prayed that he would know "the fellowship of his sufferings, being made unto his death". This was an area in which he saw himself as still lacking or being behind; an area in which he had not attained or been made perfect. (Phil. 3:10-14)
- d) The word translated "afflictions" is never used in reference to Christ's death. It does not mean that the Christian has to contribute in some way to fulfilling or completing his salvation. The word has to do with pressure, distress or trouble. The type of affliction the Christian experiences in the world.

As Hendricksen puts it, "*The apostle is undergoing these hardships in the place of Jesus, since Jesus himself is no longer here to endure them.*" He goes on to say that "*Christ's afflictions overflow toward us.*" (Matt. 10:25; Mark 13:13; John 15:18-21; 2 Cor. 1:5) However in a very real sense, Christ present in the church suffers with it. As the Head, when one member suffers, He suffers, for the bride is still being made ready. He still has enemies and they will be put under His feet.

v.1:25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

Paul was made minister of the gospel. (v.23) It follows that he was the minister or servant of all who embraces it, who collectively are the church, the body of Christ, for which he suffered.

- a) Dispensation here means stewardship. He was appointed by God to minister to them. God had entrusted Paul with bringing the gospel message to them and to be their servant.
- b) Paul is probably setting himself against the false teachers who harassed the Colossians, who made all sorts of claims based on no authority but their own. Paul was commissioned by God specifically for their benefit. (Rom. 15:16)
- c) Paul was commissioned to fully preach, that is, to fully reveal or fully disclose the word of God. (Acts 20:20-21, 26-27) The Old Testament was draped the truth in symbolism, shadows and prefiguring, but Paul now was to bring the truth to light. (Rom. 15:19)

v.1:26 [Even] the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

Paul disclosed what had up until this time been a mystery. It was hid from the countless ages and generations that make up the Old Testament economy. A mystery is something once hidden but now revealed.

- a) It was not a mystery that the gentiles would obtain mercy and be blessed of God. (Hosea 1:10, 2:23; Amos 9:11-12) The mystery was how this would be accomplished. The mystery was that the gentile would be a fellow heir with the Jew. The church was the mystery, for in the church there is neither Jew or gentile. (Gal. 3:28) These concepts were unimaginable under the old economy. They were hidden.
- b) With the coming of the Holy Spirit the church was born and the means now available for the plan of God to be fully accomplished. Through Paul and through a lesser extent, the other apostles, the things that had been hidden for so long were now being made known or manifested to the believer.

v.1:27 To whom God would make known what [is] the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

God had chosen, according to His good pleasure, to now reveal these things hidden for so long. He chose to reveal now the riches of the glory of this mystery. According to His will, He chose to reveal these things to the gentiles directly. Jew and gentile were now His saints. Both Jew and gentile had to come through Jesus Christ.

- a) The fact that God had chosen to reveal this mystery to the gentiles who were afar off, being aliens and strangers from the commonwealth of Israel, is proof that a new testament was in place. Through and in Jesus Christ a dramatic change had taken place. (Eph. 2:11-22)
- b) The essence of this mystery was Jesus Christ dwelling in you gentiles; Jesus Christ the hope of your eternal reward. Jesus Christ was previously described by Paul in all of His glory. (v.13-20) This same Jesus dwelt in them! He was the means by which

all nations would be blessed in the fulfillment of the prophecies.

- c) They were “without hope and without God”, but now God dwelt in them. He was their sure hope of everlasting life. Sure, because they had experienced, as believers, the “down payment” of their future inheritance which is the Holy Ghost. (Eph. 1:13-14) This same Spirit that raised Christ would likewise raise them. (Rom. 8:10-11)
- d) This mystery was richly abundant and glorious in that God came directly to man. All could have an intimate relationship with their maker. All had access without a birthright, intermediate priesthood or sacrificial system. All could come on the merits of Christ alone.

v.1:28-29 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Paul, as well as his associates in the gospel, proclaimed this message of “Christ in you to” all men. Specifically, they endeavored to warn or admonish all men in light of their error and ignorance. They also instructed in the truth all who would listen.

- a) They did this in all wisdom, that is, conforming their methods to meet particular situations or circumstances. They were non-threatening and yet firm, but could also be harsh when the situation dictated. (1 Thes. 2:5-12)
- b) Their goal or aim was to one day be able to present all men, to whom they had preached the word, complete in Christ and blameless before the throne of grace.
- c) Paul especially, labored in the gospel to these ends. The word “striving” is an athletic term that basically means ‘agonizing’. He always gave everything he had as concerning the Lord’s work. Yet, he ever realized he could accomplish nothing on his own, but he labored and strove in accordance with the graces God gave him. (1 Cor. 15:9-10)

v.2:1. For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and [for] them at Laodicea, and [for] as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

Chapter one concluded with Paul telling the Colossians that he labored wholeheartedly in the work of the Lord of which he was a minister. He here informs the Colossians that they were very much a part of this work. He labored and strove as a minister of Christ in their behalf. (vv. 1:28-29)

- a) Paul sincerely tells the Colossians that he cares. He wants them to know or he longs for them to be able to understand the great concern that he has for them.
- b) The word “conflict” is yet another term referring to the agony experienced by a runner as he pushes himself to win a race. Paul wants them to understand the depth of feeling behind the words of this letter.

“It refers here to the anxious care, the mental conflict, the earnest solicitude which he had in their behalf, in view of the dangers to which they were exposed from Judaizing Christians and pagan philosophy. This mental struggle resembled that which the combatants had at the public games.”
Albert Barnes

- c) Laodicea was a little south of Colosse, so Paul reaches out to those of this church with the same sincerity and passion. They experienced the same spiritual dangers. Paul would later command these two cities or churches to share these letters of warning and instruction that he wrote. (v. 4:16)
- d) Paul includes another group which is defined as, “as many as have not seen my face in the flesh”. It is this group that would have the greatest problem comprehending the “conflict” that Paul had for them.
- e) It is these who never heard him instruct and preach. Those who had never heard him confront those in error. They never observed the sincerity, passion and diligence that he put into his work. These had never experienced the presence that he must have commanded.

v.2:2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

As Paul is currently in prison, his striving and agonizing for them is probably being done in prayer and by letter. He expresses his concerns and lists his goals for the church. These are most likely the areas where they had proven to be vulnerable and the areas where the false doctrine being introduced was undermining them.

- a) Many of the Colossian believers were becoming unsettled. They were troubled by the words of the new teachers that had come onto the scene. They were confused and began to entertain doubts.
- b) Paul’s desire is that they would find comfort, that is, that they would be reassured, encouraged and strengthened.
- c) They could find all aspects of this comfort in one another, but every member of this local body of Christ must come together and be one body. They must be united in one mind, with one heart and purpose. (Phil. 1:27, 2:2)

- d) Such a “knitting together” was only possible if they had a fervent love one for another. True love for one another was the manifestation of God in them. (1 John 4:7-8) It would lead to humility and unselfishness which would foster true unity. Love is cement.

“Now when believers welded together in love, are confronted with the danger of errors and lies, let them unitedly pray about this and discuss it among each other on the basis of God’s special revelation.” Hendricksen

- e) United in love and with comforted hearts, Paul desired these believers to come into great riches. This treasure of inestimable wealth was “full assurance of understanding”. Paul sees this as an invaluable possession.
- f) Such understanding as to be totally and completely convinced. Understanding that would render their faith unshakeable. As Hendricksen puts it, *“Through, rich gratifying insight into spiritual matters ... the ability to distinguish the true from the false.”*
- g) Finally, such understanding leads to acknowledgement, that is, admission and expression of the thing understood. They would acknowledge the mystery of God.
- h) The mystery is essentially the gospel message that now was clearly and plainly revealed. The specific aspect of this message that Paul here concentrates on is God as the Father and God as the Son or the Christ.
- i) It was previously unknown that the Godhead existed in multiple persons. The Father represents the Godhead while the Christ is the manifestation of the Father and so the manifestation of the Godhead itself. (v. 2:9)

v.2:3 *In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

Paul dwells on Christ, who is the focal point of the gospel message. Christ, who through the Holy Spirit, lives within them providing a sure hope of eternity with God. (v. 1:27)

- a) As the manifestation of God to man everything that can be known of God by man is in Him; both in His person and in His teachings. He is the treasure house where every man must go to obtain true wisdom and knowledge. (John 14:6)
- b) These things are hid to the natural man yet readily available to all who come to Him as the source. (1 Cor. 2:10-14) Jesus Christ is the treasure and the pearl of great price. (Matt. 13:44-46)
- c) In Christ all fullness dwells. (v.1:19) Paul specifically mentions wisdom and knowledge. Jesus Christ is truth and so possesses all knowledge. His will is the perfect application of truth and so He is the possessor of all wisdom.

“Observe, the treasures of wisdom are hidden not from us, but for us, in Christ. Those who would be wise and knowing must make application to Christ. We must spend upon the stock which is laid up for us in him, and draw from the treasures which are hidden in him. He is the wisdom of God, and is of God made unto us wisdom.” Matthew Henry (1 Cor. 1:30)

v.2:4. *And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.*

Paul had written these things reminding them of the fullness or completeness of Christ in order that they would not be taken in by the arguments or false wisdom of the teachers who had come onto the scene.

- a) They would seek to beguile them, that is, to deceive them with arguments that would appeal to them in some way. Their arguments were enticing or alluring, tending to capture them in some way. (2 Cor. 11:3)
- b) Their arguments tended to add to the simple message of the gospel, promising a superior wisdom through mysteries meant only for the enlightened.

“The basic attack of all false systems throughout history has been to deny either Christ’s deity, His sufficiency to save and sanctify or both. Any group or person doing so is guilty of teaching ‘doctrines of demons’. (1Tim. 4:1) As purveyors of another gospel, they are accursed. (Gal. 1:8) Believers need to have a settled conviction about Christ’s deity and sufficiency to be able to withstand the onslaughts of such false teaching.” John MacArthur

** Every letter in the New Testament deals with false teachers or their ideas in some way, shape or form. Peter tells us that such has always been the case. (1 Peter 1:21-2:1) Paul tells us it will continue to be so. (2 Tim. 4:34)

- c) A parallel passage exists in the letter to the Ephesians. In it Paul also mentions unity, knowledge, completeness and the fullness of Christ as the believers defense. (Eph. 4:13-15)

v.2:5 For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

Before continuing his warning, Paul wants the Colossians to know that he is aware of their stand in the truth and joys over them because of it. He also wants them to know that he is present with them in spirit.

- a) Epaphras had told Paul of the faith and love present in this church. (vv. 1:4, 7-8) Paul was the apostle to the gentiles and knew firsthand the trials and tribulations their stand for Christ would bring their way.
- b) In this way he could identify with them. They were bound together in the spirit with a common faith and love. Although absent, he stands with them.
- c) Paul specifically mentions their order, meaning that they were disciplined. They remained in their ranks like a line of soldiers. Up to this point they had not “broken ranks” chasing wild ideas and abandoning their unit. This came from an inward steadfastness or firmness of faith. They were stable in the truth and in this he rejoiced.

“The more steadfast our faith in Christ is, the better order there will be in our whole conversation; for we live and walk by faith.” Matthew Henry

v.2:6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, [so] walk ye in him:

Having commended the Colossians for their discipline and firmness of faith, Paul goes on to exhort them to conduct themselves in every aspect of life, according to the doctrine

they had received concerning Jesus Christ.

- a) Jesus Christ had been presented to the Colossians either by Paul himself or by another. At that time they received Jesus Christ and believed unto salvation. Paul now assures them that the message they heard and the Jesus they had received had not changed.
- b) The message they had received had not changed. It was not altered. It had not evolved. The same gospel they had received unto salvation would continue to sanctify them and lead them to perfection. The message they had received was the one they were to continue to walk in.

v.2:7 Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

The Colossians, on that day they believed, were firmly rooted in Christ. They were intertwined with Him. He was the source of their life and nourishment. He provided everything that they needed to grow.

- a) They were in turn growing, that is, being built up in Him. They were becoming more and more like Him. They were standing on higher ground. The progression is as follows; being rooted in Him, as we walk in Him, we are built up in Him. (Acts 20:32; Eph. 4:13; 2 Peter 3:18)
- b) The result is becoming established to a greater and greater extent in the faith or in their belief. Being unshakeable, having full assurance of understanding. They had been taught these things and this was the course they were to continue to follow.
- c) As they walk in Him, are built up in Him, and are established in Him, they are to all the while be overflowing with thanksgiving. For the truth they have received and the way they have been taught, they are to continuously be thankful. Such thanksgiving puts these truths ever before them making it more unlikely that they will turn from them.

“Gratitude is that which completes the circle whereby blessings that drop down into our hearts and lives return to the Giver in the form of unending, loving and spontaneous adoration.”

Hendricksen

v.2:8 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.

If they continued in the Christ they had received and in the things they had been taught, they would not follow after the false ideas now being presented to them. Paul continues with the warning he issued in verse four. The warning is stated more emphatically with the word “beware”.

- a) False teachers would attempt to carry them away as spoil or as trophies of war. They would strip them of their assurance and their hope. Those who were free in Christ, they would seek to again enslave.
- b) Their weapons were philosophy and vain deceit, that is, elaborate systems of

speculative thought that made them appear wise or enlightened. These systems were a fallacy. They could never lead to the truth and so were nothing but an elaborate deception. (2 Cor. 11:13-15; 2 Tim. 3:13)

- c) These systems of thought were based on traditions of men and upon worldly principles. Tradition means “that which is given from one to another”. It is usually based on something that cannot be traced or proven, and so is simply perpetuating superstition and error. (1 Peter 1:18)
- d) Worldly thinking and principles tend to cater to the flesh. They inevitably promote the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Worldly principles and wisdom are in opposition to that of Christ. They cannot be reconciled. (1 Cor. 1:18-19)

v.2:9-10 For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

Paul’s arguments point to the opposition as being Judaizers as well as Greek philosophers. Possibly some even mixed the two. His answer to all false thought however is Jesus Christ. For in Him is the fullness of the Godhead.

- a) There is no other source of truth. There is no where else to look and nothing else to consider. As Hendricksen puts it, “*All the fullness of the indwelling essence of God is thus completely concentrated in Christ*”. (vv. 1:13-18)
- b) It follows that in Him they are complete. There is no other salvation, no other wisdom, and no other source of sustaining grace. Nothing can be added to Christ. Nothing outranks Him and nothing can influence Him.
- c) If they think otherwise, they are mistaken and have been deceived. Paul puts a curse on anyone who would attempt to add to Christ or change the gospel message. (Gal. 1:8)

Paul makes a specific reference to an error being propagated when he states the fact that Christ is supreme over all principality and power. Principality and power represents spiritual beings or angels.

- a) Some Jews as well as Greek philosophers looked to the spiritual realm for beings that could provide additional wisdom or enlightenment; beings that could influence their lives. Paul does not deny spiritual beings exist, but his argument is that even these beings are subject to Christ. He is their Head. They cannot act against His will. (Heb. 1:4-8)

v.2:11 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ:

Those in error promoted physical circumcision as a means of subduing the flesh and attaining the full measure of salvation. This doctrine of the Judaizers taught that salvation was in Christ, but sanctification and security in the law. (Gal. 3:3)

- a) The above is implied. Paul simply reminds them of the truth, again proving that

what they already possessed was superior then what was being offered.

- b) Their circumcision was the work of the Holy Ghost for it was an inward circumcision of the heart. (Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:2-3) In their circumcision it was a cutting off or a separation from sin through the work of Christ. They already possessed what the physical circumcision of those in error merely symbolized. Their's was the physical circumcision fulfilled!

v.2:12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with [him] through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

Paul continues to remind the Colossians of their superior position, of being in Christ. By the grace afforded them, through their faith in Christ, their former selves were crucified with Him and they were no longer slaves to sin. In effect, they were buried with Him.

- a) In baptism, they were symbolically identified with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Their baptism was a symbol of a spiritual reality that had taken place when they had put their faith in Christ.
- b) The symbolism is as follows: going into the water is an act of humility showing the forsaking of the old man or old life, it is the old self going on to its death; going under the water symbolizes the death and burial; rising up from under the water is the resurrection to a new life. (Rom. 6:1-7)
- c) The spiritual reality of this symbolism lies in their faith in the working power of God proven by the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. They know these things are true because He lives! (1 Cor. 15:1-8, 12-18, 20-23)

v.2:13. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

Paul contrasts the Colossians former position as gentiles with their present reality in Christ, once again, with the aim of demonstrating the superiority of what they had been given, over what was now being presented to them. The argument is, and has been, that they would be taking a giant step backward by giving credence to the doctrines of the false teachers.

- a) As men, they were dead in their sins. As gentiles, they were without a remedy for their condition, being apart from the covenants of God. They were without God and even worse, without hope. (Eph. 2:11-12)

“To be spiritually dead means to be devoid of any sense, unable to respond to spiritual stimuli, just as to be physically dead means to be unable to respond to physical stimuli. It is to be so locked in sin’s grasp that one is unable to respond to God. The Bible and spiritual truth make no sense to one in such a state. Those who are spiritually dead are dominated by the world, the flesh, and Satan and possess no spiritual, eternal, life.” Joh MacArthur

- b) Their situation, through the mercy of God and in Christ, had been turned completely around. They were no longer spiritually dead, but quickened or made alive. All of their sins had been forgiven. God now dwelt in hem providing them a sure hope. (Eph. 2:4-10)

v.2:14 *Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;*

The wages of sin is death. The Colossians were dead in their sins, but now, alive in Christ, for He had forgiven them their sins. (v. 13) Furthermore, the handwriting of ordinances, which is the law, was wiped out or taken out of the way.

- a) The law was against them; both Jew and gentile. It was the yoke of the Jew, the insurmountable obstacle that they could never overcome. To the gentile it was the middle wall of partition that they could never scale. (Eph. 2:14-15) It was the law that held man in bondage; the certificate of their indebtedness. (Gal. 3:10)
- b) Christ removed the obstacle of the law breaking down the middle wall of partition. That which eternally separated man from God, that which was against man and hostile or contrary to man was taken out of the way. It was nailed to the cross with Jesus Christ. Its power over man broken.

“God annulled the law when his Son satisfied its demand of perfect obedience, bore its curse, and fulfilled its shadows, its types and ceremonies. It was nailed to the cross with Jesus. It died when he died. And because of the substitutionary nature of Christ’s sacrifice believers are no longer under the law but under grace.” Hendricksen

v.2:15 *[And] having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*

Finally, Christ stripped the power from those beings who because of the law had authority over them. Principalities and powers represent Satan and his demons, that is, the evil angelic beings who were the personal accusers of men before God. (Rev. 12:10)

- a) These beings through the power of the law kept men in darkness and captivity. Jesus Christ, taking on flesh and blood, successfully resisted the power of Satan, going to his death and rising up again delivered His brethren from bondage. (Heb. 2:14-18; Eph. 4:8)

“The Savior, by his death, wrested the dominion from them, and seized upon what they had captured, as a conqueror seizes upon his prey. Satan and his legions had invaded the earth, and drawn its inhabitants into captivity, and subjected them to their evil reign. Christ, by his death, subdues the invaders, and recaptures those whom they had subdued.” Albert Barnes

- b) “Spoiled” is a military term referring to the position a victorious army holds over a conquered country. Christ utterly disarmed them; completely subdued them; stripped them of their power. There was nothing left on which to base their accusations in light of His cross. (Rom. 8:38-39; 1 John 3:8; Eph 1:20-21)
- c) Satan and his hordes were judged and cast out. (John 12:31; Luke 10:18) They were disgraced and found wanting before a watching universe. The image painted is that of a general parading a conquered enemy through the streets. (Eph. 3:10)
- d) The triumph was in the cross just as the blotting out of the law was in the cross. The cross effectively subdued man’s impersonal accuser (law) as well as our personal accuser (Satan and his angels).

v.2:16. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath [days]:

In view of what had been accomplished by Christ, Paul commands the Colossians not to let any man judge them in the observance of laws that no longer apply. They are not to allow any man to judge them as to their salvation or position in Christ. They are not to allow any man to judge them as inferior or lacking based on criteria that God Himself had blotted out.

- a) Also implied is that they are not to allow anyone to claim that they have the right or have been empowered as ministers to decide for them as concerning these things, and so, impose upon them burdens which God had removed. (1 Cor. 4:3-4)
- b) The specific examples Paul lists points to the Jewish aspects of the heresy bombarding this church. Eating and drinking probably refer to the Old Testament dietary laws although there were few prohibitions concerning drinking.
- c) Also mentioned are the various feasts and festivals which were observed under the Old Testament system such as the Passover. Certain sacrifices and observances were practiced on the first day of the month or with the new moon. Even the Sabbath is included, the observance of which the Jews had taken beyond reason.
- d) Searching for justification or even sanctification in these outward observances constituted a lack of faith in the truth of the gospel message. Putting faith in the things mentioned was a denial of the all sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ. (Rom. 10:4)

v.2:17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body [is] of Christ.

Paul explains that the things mentioned above in respect to the law were merely shadows of things to come. Now, the reality that cast the shadow, namely Christ, had arrived.

- a) Jesus Christ was present throughout the Old Testament in the law, in the feasts and in ordinances. Everything in some way pointed to Him or foreshadowed Him. Christ literally walked through the ages of the Old Testament, the light of God's love shining forth from eternity past at His back, with His shadow stretching forth through time extending out to Calvary's cross.
- b) The manna given to the Israelites in the desert was Jesus Christ. The Passover lamb was Jesus Christ. Every sacrifice offered from the time of Adam to those offered under the Levitical priesthood was Jesus Christ. He was the "rest" prescribed and provided in the Sabbath. All of these shadows prepared the way for Jesus Christ while providing hope to a waiting world.
- c) The word "body" in this verse means 'substance'. In other words it is the object that was casting the shadow. Paul tells them that Christ is that object. He has arrived and can be seen clearly. His argument is, with the coming of Christ the shadows are gone. They now dwell in the light. The shadows cannot be re-created and to attempt to do so is foolishness and a rejection of the reality which is Christ.

v.2:18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

The phrase translated “beguile you of your reward” has to do with the unjust decision of a referee. The idea is the Colossians were not to let the false teachers act as referees or judges and strip them of the prize that in reality belonged to them.

- a) In verse 16 the command was not to let men judge them. Here, the command is not to let men belittle them, that is, not to let men make it appear that they are the unenlightened ones when in reality they, the Colossian believers, are the true holders of the truth.
- b) These false teachers approached them in false humility that was tied to a system of angel worship which they had devised. Although the particulars are not given their argument was probably some variation of the following. “We are not worthy to go directly to God, but must approach Him through His ministering spirits which are the angels.”
- c) This would make the Colossian believers appear to be the bold and arrogant ones believing that they could go directly to God and that they were indwelt by Him. Paul condemns these teachers telling the Colossians that there is no basis for these teachings. They are intruding into a realm that they know nothing about.
- d) In reality these false teachers are the ones that are proud and arrogant pretending to understand things that they have not seen nor has God revealed. They have imagined these things in their own minds according to the flesh. They have falsely assumed that the spiritual is like unto the flesh.

** These same ideas are prevalent within Catholicism. In false humility an elaborate system of works, prayers and intercessions has been set-up. The saints and especially Mary can influence the hand of God. For this influence, prayers are offered to these various saints. The logic to this system is based upon human relationships and emotions. In doing this they have intruded into those things which they had not seen. Their supposed humility is likewise arrogance.

v.2:19 And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

The problem is, these individuals fail to hold or cling to Christ as the sole source of all wisdom and knowledge. They fail to recognize Him and Him alone as the source of their salvation and growth.

- a) Paul uses this analogy of the church and the human body to demonstrate that Christ is the Head from which comes all support, nourishment and growth. (Eph. 4:15-16; John 15:4-5) To look outside of Christ is foolishness.

v.2:20-22 Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

In summary, Paul puts the question to them one more time hoping that they will, in light of what he has here presented, see that subjecting themselves to the systems of religion proposed to them by the false teachers is illogical, irrational and foolish.

- a) In Christ, they were dead to the elements and principles of the world. They were identified with Him in His death and resurrection. They were made alive and their sins forgiven. The law was abolished and the powers behind it subdued. (vv. 12-15)
- b) If this was true how could they be required to abide by ordinances which had their source in the faulty reasoning and rationalizations of men? It was a deception perpetrated by men who would carry them away from the truth as an army carries off the spoils of war. (vv. 4, 8)
- c) Don't touch! Don't taste! Don't handle! These commands characterize the ordinances they were being pressured to follow. It was probably some form of then Jewish law, but taken to the extreme. How can they base a hope of salvation or even sanctification on things that by their very nature are perishable and meant to be consumed? (1 Cor. 6:13; Matt. 15:17)

v.2:23 Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

These systems of behavior do indeed have the appearance of wisdom in the voluntary worship it proposes, in the humility it promotes, and in the denial of the flesh it supposes. These individuals seem to be doing more than what is required and so appear to be pious.

- a) In reality these things are of no value. They were not ordained of God and so merely satisfy the flesh it pretends to deny.

“The effect of these observances, on which so much stress is laid as if they would promote piety, is merely to gratify pride, self righteousness, the love of distinction, and the other carnal propensities of our nature. There seems to be a great deal of humility and piety in them; there is really little else than pride, selfishness and ambition.” Albert Barnes

v.3:1. If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

Paul has most recently told the Colossians what, as believers, they should not do. If you are dead with Christ, he proclaimed, do not put your faith in physical or man-made systems and remedies. (vv. 2:20-22) Do not pursue things that you as a believer are dead to.

Later in this chapter it will come to light that the Colossians were beset by many old behaviors. They had been pagans. Gross sin and indulgence, in their former state, was considered worship. Old habits are hard to break and the holiness they were now called to seemed far off. The answer of the false teachers was the law and rigid systems of behavior which Paul has thus far emphatically refuted.

- a) Here Paul proclaims that Jesus Christ is the answer they seek. He not only saves, but sanctifies. If they were risen with Christ they will seek guidance from Him who is seated in the heavens at the right hand of God.
- b) Jesus Christ is able to meet all of their needs for He dwells in the heavens possessing all power, majesty and glory. It is He who has ascended and gives gifts to men. (Eph. 4:7-8)
- c) He is able for He is the only one in a position to help them. They can come boldly before His throne of grace making their requests known unto God. (Heb. 4:16; Phil. 4:6-7)

v.3:2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

You will not seek after something you don't really want to find, and so the command to set your affections on the things above. Desire the things above and set your mind upon them. As the commentator Lightfoot remarked, "*You must not only seek heaven, you must also think heaven.*"

- a) The things above that they are to seek and desire are love, mercy, peace, wisdom, understanding, patience, forgiveness and all similar gifts and virtues of the Holy Spirit. These are the things of the Spirit and of the heavenly realm that will subdue the flesh.
- b) The things of the earth, that is, the physical and temporary, they are not to love, seek and desire. (1 John 2:17)
- c) Paul's formula for a successful Christian life was to saturate himself with goodness or the things above. (Rom. 12:21) In this way there would be no room or time for the flesh. (Rom. 13:14) The flesh would be put down and the mind filled with the things of God. (Gal. 5:16; Phil. 4:8-9)

v.3:3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

The reason they are to seek and desire the things above is that they are indeed dead. Dead with Christ to the elements of the world. (vv. 2:20) No longer in the form of a question, Paul emphatically states their relationship to the world in Christ.

- a) The word used has the sense of once and for all, so they are dead to the world in accordance with their identification in the death of Jesus Christ. This is their true position as believers. Their best interests no longer lie in the physical and temporal, but in the heavens, that is, in the spiritual and eternal. (Gal. 6:14)

“In what sense has the believer died? In the sense that the penalty for sin has been paid. The wages of sin is death, so we must die. By union with Jesus Christ, we die the required death in Him, thus the penalty is paid and sin can never claim us again. We have thus died to sin in the sense of paying its penalty. Its presence and power still affect us – but it cannot condemn us.” John MacArthur

- b) The spiritual life of the believer has its source in the heavens where it is hidden or concealed with Christ in God. Jesus has returned to the heavens and sits at the right hand of the Father once again hidden from the world. Our life, in turn, is with Him there, for we are one with Him. (John 17:21; 1 Cor. 3:23; 2 Peter 1:4)
- c) Our true life is hidden from the world for it cannot be comprehended by the world. The world views this manifestation of our life in Christ as foolishness. (1 Cor. 2:14) Our life in a very real sense is that of Christ as we lose our identity in Him. (Gal. 2:20)
- d) When something is hidden safety and security is also implied. This life is secure for it is held in the hand of God. (John 10:28) It is reserved for us and kept or guarded by the very power of God. (1 Peter 1:4-5; Rom. 8:38-39)

v.3:4 When Christ, [who is] our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

Jesus Christ is our life and when He appears His life in us will no longer be concealed, but fully and completely manifested in those that believe.

- a) We will appear with Him. (1 Thes. 4:16-17) The fullness of this glory is hidden even from the believer. (1 John 3:1-2) We will share in His glory as this spiritual life will be extended to our bodies. (Rom. 8:18, 23; Phil. 3:21)

v.3:5. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

The word “therefore” refers back to what has just been stated by Paul in the last several verses. In other words, they are dead to the law and its penalty. They are risen with Christ to a new life. This life is hidden with Christ in God and so secured. They will appear with Christ in glory. Therefore, they should put to death the desires of their bodies which reside on earth.

- a) It is true that the believer’s life is with Christ in the heavens, that is, his future, his destiny, his hopes and strengths are all secured above. It is equally true however, that our bodies exist upon the earth. This is the believer’s battleground; his spiritual position (in the heavens) versus his human condition (on the earth). (Gal. 5:17; Eph. 6:12)

- b) The Christian is commanded to fight this battle putting the flesh under the subjection of the spirit. The believer is empowered with the Spirit of God and is well armed for the battle. (Zech. 4:6; Eph. 6:13-18) They are to “work out their own salvation” bringing their condition in harmony with their position in Christ. (Rom. 6:11-13, 12:1-2)

Those who do not have new life in Christ, that is, an unregenerate man, does not see or understand this battle or why it must be waged. His first impression when presented with the truth of a new life in Christ and freedom from the penalty of the law is to want to run headlong into sin. “You mean if I’m saved I can do anything I want?” is a question we all have been presented with. It is the human response to God’s grace. (Rom. 6:1-2, 15) The result of such thinking is to turn the grace of God into a thing of evil. (Jude 4)

Paul gives a list of sins, that is, deeds of the body that are not in harmony with their position in the Spirit. The members of the body must be mortified in respect to these deeds that they perform. (Rom. 8:13-14)

- a) This list is obviously not all inclusive, but has to do with sins of a sexual nature. He begins with the act and moves backward through various related sins until he reaches the source or root evil.
- b) Fornication is unlawful sexual intercourse including any illicit sexual act. Sexual immorality was prevalent in pagan cultures and in many instances even tied to their religious beliefs. It was probably the most difficult sin to contend with and to eliminate, yet a sin that could quickly destroy them.
- c) Uncleanliness is evil thoughts or impurity. It is the springboard of evil deeds. Such thoughts are also sinful in themselves. (Matt. 5:28) Passion (inordinate affection) and evil desire (concupiscence) have to do with the intents and disposition of the heart from where comes the seemingly uncontrollable cravings.
- d) Paul reaches down even deeper when he lists covetousness or greed. It is the root from which all the sins above are born. It is selfishness, that is, wanting what is forbidden by God, the Supreme Authority.

“Paul mentions greed or covetousness, last because it is the evil root from which all the previous sins spring. It is also mentioned last in the ten commandments. It is the insatiable desire to have more, to have what is forbidden. Because it places selfish desire above obedience to God, greed amounts to idolatry. Covetousness is the root cause of all sin.” John MacArthur

v.3:6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:

Before continuing with another list of sins representative of what they, as believers, should avoid, Paul wants them to understand that God hates sin. The great mercy of God they have experienced does not give them license to sin, but should be their motivation to put sin to death in their members.

- a) God’s wrath is the reaction of His holiness to sin. He is light and there is no darkness within Him. He can never accept sin for the moment He does He would no

longer be perfect. It took the death of Jesus Christ to satisfy His justice and pacify His wrath for the sins of those to whom he would extend His mercy.

- b) Unbelievers are under the wrath of God because of their sin and disobedience. The tense of the verb used indicates that this wrath is so certain that it is as if it has already arrived. God's wrath is sort of a divine reflexive action to sin. (John 3:18; Rom. 1:18, 2:5)
- c) This is the way the one who has delivered them from wrath looks upon and feels about sin, so it should consciously be put to death in them. Sin in their lives will never bring them blessing or happiness, but will stunt their growth in Christ at the very least. It will bring only chastisement upon them. (Heb. 12:5-6)

“Paul is not warning us that if we sin we will feel the furious wrath of God. Rather he is saying that those who are Christ's, who have been made one with Him, who love Him and serve His glory, would certainly wish not to participate in those kinds of behaviors and thoughts that are characteristic of those who feel His eternal wrath. The children of God would certainly not want to act like the children of wrath.” John MacArthur

v.3:7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

Having told the Colossians that God hates sin and that His wrath is as a reflexive action to sin (v. 6) Paul reminds the Colossians that they, in the not to distant past, walked and lived in disobedience. They had been deserving of the wrath of God.

- a) The word “walked” refers to their former behavior, while the word “lived” refers to their former inward disposition. So they were inwardly corrupt and driven to sin. They were indeed children of disobedience. They lived a life of which God could never approve, doing things that He could never excuse. Their lives had been literally repulsive to Him. (Eph. 2:1-5)
- b) This is another reason why they should put sin to death in their lives. They never found satisfaction in sin. They never found peace or fulfillment, but had renounced their former lives when they came to Christ. The underlying question once again is, “Why do you want to go back or continue in behaviors that you have renounced?”

v.3:8. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

Paul gives another list of behaviors that are not in harmony with their position in Christ. While the first list dealt with personal sin and inward corruption, this list is comprised of behaviors directed against others. It is interesting to note that the order of this list is reversed, that is, beginning with the motivations and ending with the acts they bare.

- a) The phrase “all these” or “the whole of these” refers back to the former list as well as the new. He literally tells them to take these behaviors off as one would remove dirty clothes. These are the “clothes” of the former life or of the past. They should no longer have them on.
- b) Anger and wrath are to be “take off”. Anger is a general attitude of hatred. It is a disposition that motivates outbreaks of wrath which is the manifestation of anger. Anger is to powder as wrath is to the explosion.

- c) Malice is ill will toward others. It is anger focused and deliberate with a goal to harm. In the context it is manifested in slander (blasphemy) and abusive speech (filthy communication). Blasphemy is evil speaking, railing, and reviling, so as to injure one with speech. Filthy communication is generally all foul language. It is lewd and abusive speech.
- d) Again, this list is not all inclusive. Anger, wrath and malice can also be manifested in physical violence, but such behaviors are not mentioned. It would seem that the “garments” they did not want to throw away were sins of the tongue. (Matt. 12:34-36)

v.3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;

Paul adds to the list a prohibition against lying. Included would be all manner of deception and hypocrisy which was prevalent within pagan cultures.

- a) Lying and deception are of Satan. (John 8:44) He lied in deceiving Adam and Eve. God on the other hand is truth. He cannot lie. (Titus. 1:2) The believer is to manifest the attributes of God’s Spirit within him. Lying is contrary to the Spirit of God.

“For it is contrary both to the law of truth and the law of love, it is both unjust and unkind, and naturally tends to destroy all faith and friendship among mankind.” Matthew Henry

- b) Laying aside these vices is consistent with their position in Jesus Christ. They had put off the old man which is representative of their former way of life, included is worldly reasoning, philosophies and deeds. They were spiritually circumcised and also buried with Christ upon belief and acceptance of the gospel message. (v. 2:11-12)
- c) Consistent with their position in Christ, they had shed “the body of the sins of the flesh.” To continue in the fleshly vices mentioned presented a contradiction between position and practice. Their behaviors needed to be in harmony with what was true to them spiritually.

v.3:10 And have put on the new [man], which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

Just as they had put off the old man they had also put on the new man. The “old garment” is not merely washed or repaired, but it is discarded and a “new garment” provided by Christ is put on.

- a) The new man is a brand new creature. (2 Cor. 5:17) The old man is of the flesh represented by Adam, but the new man is of the Spirit represented by Christ. (1 Cor. 15:45-48; Gal. 3:27)
- b) The new man is being renewed in knowledge. The verb is in the present tense indicating a process of continuous renewal. Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, the new man is gaining a deeper and deeper knowledge of God. With each trial overcome we gain greater insight, strength and confidence. This is experiential

knowledge of God. As our physical body weakens our renewed spirit should grow stronger. (2 Cor. 4:16)

- c) This renewal in knowledge is designed to make us more like Him. The new man is cast in His image so as to resemble Him who is the Creator. (Eph. 4:24; Rom. 8:29)

“It was the honor of man in innocence that he was made after the image of God; but that image was defaced and lost by sin, and is renewed by sanctifying grace: so that a renewed soul is something like what Adam was in the day he was created.” Matthew Henry

- d) As much as the new man, spoken of here, is similar to Adam before the fall, the new man is still infinitely superior for he possesses a knowledge that Adam did not, that being the redemptive love of God.

v.3:11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond [nor] free: but Christ [is] all, and in all.

The old man distinguishes himself by race, religion, culture and social circumstance, but the case is not so with the new man. All of these labels are gone in principle and should likewise be put-off in practice. All men have sinned and all are in need of a Savior. (Rom. 3:23, 10:11-12)

- a) The contrast between Greek and Jew represents racial distinctions while circumcision versus uncircumcision represents the religious. Barbarian and Scythian are representative of the uncultured or unlearned. The Scythians were a savage people representing the grossest example of a barbarian. Finally, slave versus free represents social distinctions.
- b) Jesus Christ transcends all such barriers. He renews all those who believe, and in His own image. All are one in Christ. It is He who dwells in all. (Gal. 3:28-29)

v.3:12. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

Just as Paul had listed motivations and behaviors associated with the old man that they had taken off and should therefore put these to death in their members, so he now provides a list of behaviors and virtues associated with the new man they had put on and which they should now incorporate and practice in their lives.

- a) The new “garment” had been put on and now they must wear the proper “accessories” that go with it, for they are the elect of God. They were chosen of God to manifest His Spirit in the world. (Eph. 1:4-5) This truth has now been made known in the believer. The new man had now been put on. (2 Tim. 1:9-10)
- b) As far as they are true believers, they are holy and beloved. Holy means set apart. They are separated from those of the world unto the work of God. They are beloved of God, that is, recipients of His special favor and love.
- c) As such, they are to put on bowels of mercies which can be translated as true heartfelt compassion. It is a deep feeling of love and care especially for the brethren. It is putting others above yourself. (Phil. 2:3-4) Kindness flows from true concern. It

is a general goodness that is present in the entire person. It is a desire to always do good to others.

- d) Humbleness of mind is humility. It is interesting to note that in the Greek language this was viewed as a negative quality. It is Christianity that made humility or humbleness into a virtue. It is not thinking more highly of oneself that one should.
- e) Meekness has been described as strength under control. It describes one who is not easily provoked, but is willing rather to wrongly suffer for the sake of Christ.
- f) Longsuffering is extreme patience. It is never giving up on others or on ourselves, but learning to wait upon the Lord in all circumstances.

v.3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also [do] ye.

Paul continues the list of behaviors and virtues associated with the new man they had put on. As to insure harmony between their position in Christ and their behavior, they are to incorporate these behaviors and virtues into their lives. They are to “put them on” as the elect of God. (v. 3:12)

- a) Forbearing one another” is very simply “putting up with one another”. Even believers have personality quirks and can rub each other the wrong way. The believer is to train himself to overlook these things which are usually of little importance for the sake of harmony in the church. (Eph. 4:7)
- b) Jesus constantly “put up” with the apostles. They frequently argued among themselves and constantly misunderstood His teachings and even His mission, but He was always forbearing with them.

“We have all of us something which needs to be borne with, and this is a good reason why we should bear with others in what is disagreeable to us. We need the same good turn from others which we are bound to show them.” Matthew Henry

- c) When a believer is wronged or offended, when he has a rightful complaint against another believer, he is to be quick to forgive. In forgiving we are to hold no grudge and to wish upon him and do unto him nothing but good. Believers are to be forgiving people. Forgiveness should be second nature to them. (Matt. 18:22)
- d) The believer’s example of forgiveness is Jesus Christ. Every believer was forgiven an insurmountable debt. How then can the believer in turn not forgive his brother? (Matt. 6:12-15)

v.3:14 And above all these things [put on] charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

Above everything else mentioned they are to put on or to clothe themselves in love. Paul calls love the bond of completeness for it holds all of the other virtues together.

- a) Love is the seam in the “garment”. Any of the other behaviors and virtues without love become mere hypocrisy.

- b) One cannot be truly compassionate, kind, humble or meek; one cannot display true patience, put up with others, or truly forgive without love. He can only possess these other virtues, in their true form, in proportion to the love in his heart. God Himself is love. (1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Peter 4:8)

v.3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

The peace of God is the calm, the feeling of safety and serenity that God puts in the soul of the believer. It is the sign of His presence and His pleasure. Outside trials and tribulations cannot disturb it, so it is said to “pass all understanding”. It is the knowledge that we are right with God.

- a) Although this peace can weather the greatest storm it is very sensitive to sin. This peace is tied to the conscience, for when our conscience is clear we are at peace, but when our conscience is troubled the peace is disturbed.
- b) The believer therefore is to use this peace of God, that is, to let it umpire (rule) his life. Will an act disturb this peace or promote it? Let this peace that God gives guide your decisions and actions.

“The peace of Christ guides believers in making decisions. When faced with a choice, the believer should consider two factors. First, is it consistent with the fact that he and Christ are now at peace and thus on the same side? Does it perpetuate that oneness with the Lord that is the believers possession? Second, will it leave him with a deep and abiding peace in his heart?” John MacArthur

- c) Paul ties this peace of God to the social or relational aspect of Christianity which has been the focus for the last several verses. They are to be at peace with each other for they are one body.
- d) They are to let peace rule over their dealings with others. They should practice the way of peace among themselves as well as forbearance, forgiveness and love.
- e) Paul reminds them yet again to be thankful. (vv. 1:3, 12, 2:7) They are to be thankful for the peace of God that is within them, for it is another precious gift of God. It is something that the whole world seeks, but will never find outside of Christ.

v.3:16 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.

Just as sin disturbs the peace of God within the believer, so the word of Christ dwelling in the believer promotes and enhances His peace. The word of Christ is the revelation He gave, that is, the gospel message and all of scripture.

- a) They are to let the word dwell in them which means that it should live in them or take up residence within them. It is to dwell in them richly or abundantly which means that it will be fruit bearing.

- b) The word is to touch and to control every aspect of their life. It is to be their spiritual food and their guide. (Ps. 119:105; 1 Peter 2:2) They are to hide it in their hearts. (Ps. 119:11)
- c) Wisdom is the application of knowledge, so they are to let the word take up residence in them in all truth or according to knowledge, that is, in the proper spirit of the word or as Paul told Timothy, "to use it rightly". (2 Tim. 2:15)
- d) The word of Christ is to be active within them and among them. They are to use it to teach each other. Every believer is called to teach in some degree. The Holy Spirit gives special insight into the word to every believer through his unique personality and experiences.
- e) The word of Christ is vast and living. No one man could hope to grasp it all, understand it all, or even explore all of its far reaching aspects and applications. All believers can truly learn from each other and so the command "teach one another".
- f) Believers are to also admonish each other using the word of Christ in all wisdom. As members of one body we are to care for our brothers and sisters in Christ. This concern is not only manifested in teaching them, but also in correcting them when we see them going astray or taking a path that we know will lead them to destruction. Admonishing is to correct or to warn. (Matt. 7:3-5; 2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- g) Song can stir the heart, awaken emotion, and lift or convict the spirit. It is a way to more easily commit truths to memory, and so it is encouraged here by Paul as a method to be used in instructing and in admonishing each other.
- h) In general, psalms refer to the book so named in the Old Testament scriptures, hymns refer to songs of praise to God and Jesus Christ expressing spiritual truth, while spiritual songs are more personal, probably emphasizing testimony.
- i) Psalms are quoted by Christ on more than a few occasions in the gospels. (Luke 24:44) Jesus and the disciples sang hymns as did Paul. (Matt. 26:30; Acts 16:25) In many portions of his letters it is suspected that Paul included hymns and spiritual songs although they are not readily apparent in translation. (1 Tim. 3:16) There will be such songs of worship in heaven. (Rev. 5:9, 14:3, 15:3)
- j) As this method is effective in teaching and admonishing and then at the same time gives praise and worship to God as His truths are being proclaimed and taken to heart. Therefore, the heart should agree with the mouth, that is, it should be filled with God's presence. Grace incorporates the idea of thankfulness and joy.

v.3:17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, [do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Paul has just provided the Colossians with an extensive list of behaviors and virtues, that as believers, they are to "put on" as well as an extensive list of behaviors they are to "put off" as being inconsistent with their divine calling. In summary, Paul now offers a fundamental principle they can apply to their lives in general.

- a) All of the believers thoughts, words and actions should be done in the name of Jesus Christ. (We can rightly include thoughts for all our words and actions are born in the mind and heart)

- b) To do all in His name means to do everything according to His will, teaching and doctrine. To do all things (not only those related to church or religion) in subjection to His authority with a dependence in His power. (1 Cor. 10:31)

“Do it all because he requires and commands it, and with a desire to honor him. His authority should be the warrant, his glory the aim, of all our actions and words.” Albert Barnes

- c) Everything we do in the name of Jesus Christ is to be accompanied by a spirit of thanksgiving to God. It is through Him that we are empowered to live a Christ centered life, and so through Him that our gratitude must be rendered to God.

“He is most likely to do his duty well who goes to it with a heart overflowing with gratitude to God for his mercies; and he who is most likely to perform his duties with the most cheerful fidelity, is he who has the deepest sense of the Divine goodness in providing a Savior for his lost and ruined soul.”
Albert Barnes

v.3:18. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.

Paul has reminded the Colossians that they have “put on” the new man. He instructed them that their every word and deed should be in harmony with their position and calling in Christ. He will now apply the truths he has taught to special groups beginning with the family.

- a) The wife is told to submit to her husband. The word submit means to willfully relinquish ones rights to another, that is, to make a conscious, educated decision to do so.
- b) The phrase “fit in the Lord” makes submission an obligation or necessary duty of the wife. The wife is to submit in obedience to God. Such behavior on the part of the wife is pleasing and acceptable to God. It is behavior that is in harmony with her position and calling in Christ.
- c) The submission of the wife is not a sign or an admission of inferiority of any kind, but simply an acknowledgement of acceptance of the role which she has been assigned by God. Her submission to her husband is a direct result of her submission to God. (Eph. 5:22-24)
- d) The fact that the husband is the head of the wife is simply God’s will according to His design and purpose and is not open for debate. God is a God of order and this is the hierarchy He has established. (1 Cor. 11:3) Man was created first and the woman created specifically for the man. (1 Cor. 11:8-9)
- e) Submission is not absolute obedience, but is intended to take place in and to foster a loving relationship. Everyone’s first duty is to obey God. As MacArthur puts it, *“There may be times when a wife must refuse to submit to her husband’s desires (if they violate God’s word).”*

v.3:19 Husbands, love [your] wives, and be not bitter against them.

The command to the husband is to love his wife and to treat her in accordance with that love. Expressed negatively by Paul, the husband is not to treat his wife with bitterness. He is not to be harsh with her, subjecting her to his ill temper. He is not to irritate or

provoke her. Again a MacArthur puts it, “*Paul tells husbands not to call their wives ‘honey’, and then act like vinegar.*”

- a) The verb used is the perfect tense and so gives the idea of “keep on loving your wife”. This love should never stop or be interrupted, but to be growing and continuous. Furthermore, as with submission, it is a willing love or a love of choice. It is not the love of emotion or passion that has a tendency to build up and then wane.
- b) In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul further describes this love comparing it to the love that Christ had for the church. (Eph. 5:25) The husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. The love that Christ showed for the church is the husband's model. It is the example he is to imitate and the goal he is to constantly pursue.
- c) Christ's love for the church was both undeserved and self-sacrificing. Christ loved the church because it was given to him by the Father. The church in no way merited His love. His love was not an emotional attachment, but an act of His will.
- d) Likewise the husband must love his wife because she was given to him by God. He must determine with his will and in his heart to love her with the love of Christ. His love cannot be conditioned on what he gets out of the relationship. His love cannot be conditioned on her submission.
- e) As the scripture says, “we love Him because He first loved us”. The husband, in the same way, must unconditionally love his wife. Submission cannot be demanded, but true submission is earned.

v.3:20 Children, obey [your] parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.

Paul's command to children is simply to obey their parents in all things. The word obey means to “listen and positively respond”. Children are to put themselves under the authority of their parents.

- a) It is this parent/child relationship that introduces every man to authority and obedience. It is through this relationship that one first learns how to curb selfishness and aggression while learning discipline. (Eph. 6:1-3; Prov. 1:8)

“... it is the key principle behind all right human relationships in society. A person who grows up with a sense of respect for and obedience to his parents will have the foundation for respecting the authority of other leaders and the rights of other people in general.” John MacArthur

- b) To honor one's parents is the fifth commandment. Disobedience to parents was dealt with harshly in the Old Testament showing its importance in the eyes of God. (Ex. 21:15-17; Deut. 21:18-21; Prov. 30:17) Disobedience to parents is a mark of the ungodly. (2Tim. 3:2)
- c) In all things means exactly that, IN ALL THINGS. The child should respect and honor the parents wisdom and authority. The limitation, as with submission, is if obedience to the parent is against God's law. Any individual's relationship with Jesus Christ supercedes any other. (Luke 14:26)

- d) The Lord views such obedience on the part of the child as good. It is behavior deemed acceptable by God. It is right. It pleases Him. It is consistent with His will.

v.3:21 Fathers, provoke not your children [to anger], lest they be discouraged.

Paul states the duty of the parents in this relationship. Probably because of his position as head of the family unit, the father is addressed, although the following instructions apply to both parents.

- a) Basically, the parents, as much as possible, are to make obedience an easy and desirable task for the children. Just as the love of the husband for his wife is to be such that submission is not a chore, so should the relationship work between parent and child.
- b) Parents are not to steer their children toward hostility and rebellion through a wrong pattern of behavior in dealing with their children. Some of these wrong behaviors which can provoke a child to anger are over protection, favoritism, unreasonable pressure to succeed, abuse of any kind, attacking their self-esteem, using love as a punishment or reward, inconsistency, neglect and the list goes on.
- c) Such behaviors can break a child's spirit and cause them to lose heart. Discouraged means without courage or without spirit. They can withdraw into themselves and being in despair will seek love and instruction outside the family unit.
- d) In a positive sense, the parents are to bring up the children in such a way that they will become acquainted with and schooled in the ways of the Lord. They are to be brought up in a way that will afford them every opportunity to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The child should see Christ and His wisdom in his parents.

v.3:22-23 Servants, obey in all things [your] masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do [it] heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;

The final relationship on which Paul is going to offer special instruction is on that of slave and master. Paul does not advocate slavery, neither does he condemn it. As Hendricksen states, "*Paul took the social structure as he found it and endeavored by peaceful means to change it into its very opposite.*" Masters and slaves abiding by Christian principles would change the institution into an employer/employee relationship.

- a) Addressing the slaves, Paul instructs them to obey in all things, that is, in pleasant matters as well as in unpleasant matters or duties. He points out that their masters are such in accordance with the flesh.
- b) Those who look to their masters only work when they are being watched. They work only to get ahead or to make a good impression. They are deceivers, getting away with anything they can. They put on a show for their masters.
- c) The slave is to fear God. It is Christ whom he serves and in whom his duty lies, so he is to be sincere in all his labor. Their true master is always watching. He is aware of their situation. Therefore, they are to labor out of love for their true master in heaven and desire to please Him. (Eph. 6:5-8)

“In spirit people cease to be slaves as soon as they begin to work for the Lord, and no longer in the first place for men. This was, accordingly, the most helpful advice anyone could have given a slave. Moreover, by means of his wholehearted cooperation with his master, rendering obedience to him in every way, and doing this while his master was fully aware of the fact that the service was being rendered by a Christian, the slave was promoting the cause and honor of his Lord.” Hendricksen

v.3:24-25 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

Paul reminds the slaves that as believers they will receive the full amount of the inheritance. They will receive eternal life for it is the Lord Christ whom they serve.

- a) Paul tells them that their lot in life is a temporary one. If they look to Christ in all of their labors they will not be disappointed. If they remember that it is He to whom they are truly rendering service their burden will be lighter.
- b) Christianity is not an excuse to rebel or to disobey. They will reap what they sow. If they as servants are lazy and do wrong they will not enjoy divine protection, but suffer the consequences. God judges without partiality. He judges according to righteousness.

v.4:1. Masters, give unto [your] servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

Paul has been instructing the Colossians as to behaviors in a relationship that are in harmony with their position in Jesus Christ. He addressed the husband/wife relationship and the parent/child relationship before addressing the slave. He will now complete this section by addressing the master.

- a) Just as the slave is to serve with Christ in mind, so to is the Christian master instructed to rule. God is not a respecter of persons (v. 3:25) and so the master, in the eyes of God, is no better than the slave. The master will be rewarded by God for good and punished for evil, the same as the slave. God gives no special privileges according to rank in the world.
- b) In fear of God the master is to treat his servants with justice and equality. Masters should treat their servants as they themselves would want to be treated. (Matt. 7:12; Eph. 6:9)

v.4:2. Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;

Getting ready to close this letter, Paul presents some general instructions to the Colossian believers, the first of which concerns prayer. Paul urges them to continue in prayer.

- a) As to prayer, the Colossians are to be persistent. They are to devote themselves to prayer. God desires for the believer to communicate with Him in this way, presenting our petitions to Him, interceding on the behalf of others, and rendering Him thanks.
- b) Paul's exhortation to the Thessolonians was to "pray without ceasing" while his advice to the Ephesians was to "pray always". (1 Thes. 5:7; Eph. 6:18) This is the same idea expressed here. Every thought, every word, and every action is to be done with a consciousness of God.

"Prayer is the most important expression of the new life. As such it is the means of obtaining for ourselves and for others the satisfaction of needs, both physical and spiritual. It is also a divinely appointed weapon against the sinister attack of the devil and his angels, the vehicle for confession of sin, and the instrument whereby the grateful soul pours out its spontaneous adoration before the throne of God on high. Accordingly, perseverance in prayer is urged." Hendricksen

- c) Paul instructs them to watch in prayer. The word "watch" means 'to be awake or to remain alert'. The obvious meaning is that they don't fall asleep as did the disciples when they were told to watch in prayer.
- d) The broader meaning is that prayer be taken seriously. That we look for things to pray for being alert to our true needs and the needs of others. It is to pray specifically and intelligently.
- e) Finally, they are to pray with a spirit of thankfulness. Thankful that they can approach Him, that He hears their prayers, that He allows them to take part in His work, and for previous prayers answered.

- f) Thankfulness in prayer demonstrates that we recognize Him as the source of all things and that we humbly submit to His will and to His timetable. Paul has stressed to the Colossians the importance of a thankful heart. (vv. 1:12, 2:7, 3:15, 3:17)

v.4:3 Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:

Paul believed in the power of prayer and coveted the prayers of the churches for whom he in turn prayed for. He also asked the Colossians to pray for him and for his fellow workers, many of whom he will mention in the closing verses.

- a) Specifically, Paul asked them to pray that opportunities to preach the gospel message would continue to present themselves to them. He reminds them that it is for the cause of this message that he is imprisoned.
- b) The “door” throughout the New Testament symbolizes opportunity. It is Christ who opens the doors as well as shuts them. (Rev. 3:7) It is Jesus who instructs us to knock.

v.4:4 That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

Paul wants the Colossians to pray that he would always present the gospel message in the proper manner, that is, that he would present it plainly and rightly.

- a) The gospel is to be proclaimed in its God-ordained simplicity, and so in a clear manner. (1 Cor. 11:3) It is to be proclaimed boldly, that is holding nothing back because of fear or circumstance. (Eph. 6:19-20) It is to be proclaimed in love or graciously. (Eph. 4:15)
- b) The word “testify” means ‘to give a through and complete declaration’. It is how Paul presented the gospel message. (Acts 20:21) It is a solemn act. He wanted to continue in this God-ordained manner despite temptations and fears that circumstance would modify his appeal.

** See MacArthur commentary on Colossians. pp. 184-185 on appropriate forms of evangelism.

v.4:5. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

Paul reminds the Colossians of their duty to non-believers. The Colossians are fellow workers with Paul. They are to redeem the time or to make the most of the opportunity that they now have as citizens of heaven living in the world.

- a) In this sense, wisdom begins with living a holy and consistent life according to ones professed Christian principles. They cannot be hypocrites, but live righteously with all honor, honesty and integrity.
- b) To be won over, the non-believer must observe in the life of the believer the manifestation of Christ. According to MacArthur, “*wisdom involves properly evaluating circumstances and making godly decisions. Believers are to exhibit a carefully planned, consistent, righteous Christian life.*”

- c) Believers can act as fools. They can get caught up in worldly passions and desires, so quenching and grieving the influence of the Holy Ghost in their lives. Such can do great harm to the church and the Christian cause.

v.4:6 Let your speech [be] always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

Paul reminds the Colossians that their speech also must be in harmony with their profession, it must manifest the Holy Spirit that resides within them.

- a) The believer is to always speak with grace. Such speech is defined by MacArthur as being, “*spiritual, wholesome, fitting, kind, sensitive, purposeful, complementary, gentle, truthful, loving and thoughtful.*” (Eph. 4:29)
- b) James, in his letter, shows the tongue as being the center of hypocrisy, the center of inconsistency, and as being near impossible to control, and yet, the believer is called to tame his tongue. (James 3:2, 5-6, 9-10)
- c) Salt is a preservative, that is, it prevents spoiling and corruption. In other places in the scripture believers are called the “salt of the earth”. The believer, especially in speech, should have a preserving influence in a corrupt world. Our speech should preserve the truth and uphold righteousness. It should get peoples attention.

“But not only does salt have preservative power. It also has pungency and flavor. Speech flavored with salt is, accordingly, not empty or insipid, but thought-provoking and worth-while. It is not a waste of time. Also, such speech does not repel. It attracts, has spiritual charm. Accordingly, it is distinctive; a Christian is known by his speech as well as by his conduct.” Hendricksen

- d) Having gracious speech seasoned with salt the believer will be able to render an answer to every man. He will be able to educate the ignorant, offer wisdom to the fool, calm the angry, outwit the crafty, and provide words of hope to the hopeless.
- e) If the believer does not quench and grieve the Holy Spirit with his speech, but uses it in the way prescribed above, the Spirit itself will provide the words when they are needed.
(Luke 21:15)
- f) So the believers behavior coupled with his speech should label the believer as being “different”. It should evoke curiosity as well as persecution, however, curiosity and persecution both provide opportunity for the believer to profess the truth within him.
(1 Peter 3:15)

“We have need of a great deal of wisdom and grace to give proper answers to every man, particularly in answering the questions and objections of adversaries against our religion, giving the reasons of our faith, and showing the unreasonableness of their exceptions and cavils to the best advantage for our cause and least prejudice to ourselves.” Matthew Henry

v.4:7-8 All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, [who is] a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord: Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts;

In the close of his letters Paul frequently makes mention of some of his fellow workers in the gospel. Usually it is individuals with whom the particular church he is writing to would be familiar with or often times it is a greeting from those who are with him.

- a) In one of his more lengthy closings, Paul mentions ten individuals by name, recognizing them in some way as being an integral part of his ministry. In his commentary, John MacArthur entitles this section, “*With a little help from my friends*”. Paul knew that God used these “unsung heroes” in a great way and that his ministry depended upon each of them.
- b) The first individual mentioned is Tychicus who was the deliverer of this letter to the Colossians as well as the letter to the Ephesians. Paul calls Tychicus a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant. With these words Paul expressed his love, admiration and gratitude for this man.
- c) Paul was planning on taking a collection from the gentile churches to Jerusalem. He took some gentile believers with him and among them was Tychicus who met up with Paul in Troas. (Acts 20:4-5)
- d) Some four years later, Tychicus is still with Paul in Rome. He had probably been with Paul the entire time through his troubles in Jerusalem and his imprisonment in Rome.
- e) Tychicus would deliver this letter, but also fill the gaps, especially on things of a personal nature. He would tell them of Paul, his joys and sorrows, his trials and triumphs.
- f) Tychicus was also sent to minister to the Colossians. He was a very capable individual who was to get involved, that is, to check on their well-being, offering them help and comfort.

v.4:9 With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is [one] of you. They shall make known unto you all things which [are done] here.

Onesimus was the traveling companion of Tychicus. He was a runaway slave who belonged to Philemon who was a member of this Colossian church. Onesimus carried with him the letter to Philemon his master.

- a) Onesimus had met Paul in Rome and had accepted Christ. (Philemon 10) The letter to Philemon is a plea, from Paul, in behalf of Onesimus, that his master would now accept him as a brother in Christ and show mercy toward him.
- b) In this letter, Paul pleads for Onesimus to the Colossian church. He calls Onesimus a faithful and beloved brother. With the phrase “one of you”, he tells the Colossians that Onesimus is a member of their fellowship, placed in the body of Christ by the Holy Ghost upon his conversion. (Gal. 3:28)
- c) These two brothers in Christ and traveling companions would together inform the Colossian church of Paul’s affairs and the general situation in Rome.

v.4:10 Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him;)

Aristarchus and Marcus (also known as John Mark in the pages of the New Testament) were also with Paul in Rome and send their greetings to the Colossian church.

- a) Aristarchus was a longtime companion of Paul. He hailed from Thessolonica and was one of those seized by the rioting mob in Ephesus. He accompanied Paul to Jerusalem and then to Rome where he remained with Paul as a fellow prisoner. (Acts 19:29, 20:4, 27:2)
- b) John Mark was the cousin of Barnabas. He deserted Paul and Barnabas on what is called Paul's first missionary journey. (Acts 13:13) Barnabas wanted to take John Mark on the second missionary journey, but Paul refused, causing the two friends to separate. (Acts 15:37-39)
- c) It is believed that Paul had a great influence on the life of John Mark. (1 Peter 5:13) Paul eventually accepted John Mark as a fellow laborer. (2 Tim. 4:11) The Colossians were evidently told of John Mark and a probable visit from him. Paul puts his personal stamp of approval on John Mark's ministry. John Mark is the author of the gospel of Mark.

v.4:11 And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only [are my] fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.

Other than this verse nothing is known of the man called Justus. He was a Jew who had given his life to Christ. He was a fellow worker proclaiming the present rule of God in the hearts of men.

- a) He, along with Aristarchus and John Mark were the only individuals of Jewish decent that Paul could call fellow workers. For that reason they were a comfort or an encouragement to Paul who had a tremendous burden for his people. (Rom. 10:1)

v.4:12-13 Epaphras, who is [one] of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them [that are] in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.

Epaphras, was earlier in this letter, called by Paul, a dear fellows servant and a faithful minister of Christ. (v.1:7) We now find out that he was a member of the church at Colosse, possibly the founder and/or pastor of the fellowship.

- a) Epaphras, totally dedicated to the cause of the gospel, that is, a bondsman of Jesus Christ, sent his greetings to them. Paul assures the Colossians as well as those belonging to the other churches in that general area of the sincerity of Epaphras concerning their well-being in the faith.
- b) Much more than sincerity, Epaphras had a passion for them. This, Paul had observed firsthand. Epaphras agonized, fought, wrestled (another athletic term), for them in prayer. He desired for them to be complete and fully assured in the truth and in the will of God.

v.4:14 Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.

Luke and Demas were currently in Rome with Paul and send their greetings to the Colossian church.

- a) Luke was a gentile believer. He was a doctor who joined Paul on his second missionary journey. He is considered by many to have been Paul's personal physician for he remained with Paul for most of the remainder of his life. (2 Tim. 4:11)
- b) Luke and John Mark were gospel writers. It is interesting to note that both were together with Paul in Rome.
- c) Demas was also a faithful fellow worker with Paul for some time. The life of Demas however does not have a happy ending as he forsook Paul and the ministry he was entrusted with. (2 Tim. 4:9-10)

v.4:15-16 Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the [epistle] from Laodicea.

Paul instructs the Colossians to greet the brothers in his name in the nearby city of Laodicea. In particular, an individual named Nymphas in whose home the church met.

- a) This letter to the Colossians, when it was read and perhaps even copied, was to be sent to the Laodiceans for their benefit. In turn, a letter in the possession of the Laodiceans was to be read in Colosse.
- b) As Hendricksen puts it, "*Altogether too large a literature has been built up around these few words. Countless conjectures have been made regarding this letter from Laodicea.*" The best explanation is that it is a genuine letter of Paul which was not preserved.

v.4:17 And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.

Archippus is mentioned only here and in Philemon 2:2. From that verse it is probable that Archippus is the son of Philemon.

- a) Archippus is called a fellow soldier by Paul and we know that he was a minister in the Colossian church that met in his home. Paul calls upon those in the Colossian church to exhort and/or admonish Archippus as concerning his ministry. They were to advise him to diligently perform all of his duties; to take his ministry seriously as it was received of the Lord.

v.4:18 The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace [be] with you. Amen.

Paul concludes this letter to the Colossians asking them to remember his bonds. He covets their prayers, their visits and probably their letters. He wants his situation to ever be in their minds as to constantly petition the Lord for the furtherance of his ministry and his release.

- a) In all probability many of Paul's letters were probably dictated. He personally writes this verse by hand. His final thought is that the unmerited favor of God would be upon them.

Amen