

Commentary on the Book of Colossians

Chapter 1

1Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

Paul writes to the church at Colossae on behalf of both he and Timothy. He writes approximately in AD 60-62, about the same time he wrote Philemon and while he was in prison in Rome. Mentioning Timothy as being involved in the composition of this letter is essential for him as many questioned his authority because of his youth (1 Timothy 4:12). Yet Paul, as an expert in discipleship, not only gives Timothy credibility but seems to also involve him in the writing of this letter. The God who called them both as servants of Christ (though Timothy was not an apostle for he did not see the risen Christ) by His will (God is ultimately sovereign in electing who will come to faith though we are responsible for our will in choosing Him or rejecting Him) inspired them as they wrote this part of Scripture. Paul is evidently the chief writer as he moves to the first person toward the end of chapter one and into chapter two. He also is the only one to sign the letter.

2To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Paul is writing to the saints who are the faithful brothers and sisters of Paul and Timothy in Christ. He gives his standard greeting of grace and peace to them from God. Despite any corrections or exhortations that they may be given, the end goal and the spirit of the admonitions is always gracious and peaceable, not seeking unnecessary conflict, selfish gain, or division.

3We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

4since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

Paul and Timothy thank God (not just any God but the one true God, the Father of Jesus) because of the faith of the saints at Colossae and because of their love for one another. Not only have they believed the truth of the gospel by faith but they have the true mark of a disciple of Christ: love for one another (John 13:34-35, 1 John 4:7-8). These don't sound like people who "need" prayer, but Paul and Timothy explain that they pray for them always. There is no believer, even though we are positionally saints in Christ, who doesn't need constant prayer and help from Christ.

5because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel

6which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth;

They are grateful to God for those at Colossae because they are certain that there is an inheritance waiting for them in heaven because of their faith in Christ. As such they all can have great hope which is reason for further thanks to God. They had heard the word of truth, which is the gospel. The gospel is a message made up of logical and propositional phrases and with a clear intended meaning. It is fully reliable, accurate, absolute, irrefutable, and totally true. It is this word which a person must hear in order to receive faith and be born again. Christ had said that He would build His church, and in the first century, like all other centuries, the church has continued to grow as it preaches the gospel. Though we do not see with our eyes how the gospel is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, we must believe with our hearts and affirm in our minds that the labor that we do for Christ will last. It is never in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). We often look merely at conversions and church growth as being fruit, but we are reminded that fruit is something that is born also within us. As our inner person is transformed to be more and more like Christ and as we yield further to Him and to His Word, we manifest more and more of the fruit of the Spirit. Yet there can be no fruit in a person's life apart from first hearing the word of truth, understanding it, and receiving it. The grace of God extends the free gift of salvation and the righteousness of Christ, but we must respond with understanding, confession, repentance, and belief. The grace of God does not and cannot operate apart from truth, for it is truth. The gospel is truth and it must be responded to in truth. Thus, any attempt to undermine the absolute assurance of the truth of the gospel message is heretical.

**7just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,
8and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.**

The gospel is transmitted through witnesses, which we are as believers (Acts 1:8). The Colossians first heard from Epaphras, a friend and brother in Christ of Paul who made himself a servant of God by choice. It is dangerous and risky business to share the truth of the gospel as it is an offensive message to those who don't want to admit their wrongdoing, yet Epaphras boldly preached the gospel at Colossae. A whole church was born as a result of his labor. Paul again affirms the credibility and integrity of a fellow servant of God. This is essential in how the church is supposed to be propagated. Faithful men are to teach others who can teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2). It was Epaphras whole told Paul and Timothy about the progress of the gospel at Colossae and of the love of the believers there.

9For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

10so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Since the gospel has indeed taken root in the believers at Colossae, Paul and Timothy were more motivated to pray that the seeds that were planted would grow to be mature

fruitful plants which would sow seeds for others who would in turn respond to the gospel message. Paul and Timothy have not ceased to pray for them. This requires an extreme love for God and Christ and for His people, in addition to a great deal of discipline and self-control, which are evidences of the fruit of the Spirit. Their prayer has been that the believers would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. God's will cannot be known apart from His Word, but it is also necessary to ask for wisdom (James 1:6). As such there are things we need to ask God for His leading in and for how to apply His Word. He is faithful to give us wisdom if we ask in faith and without doubting. We are not to lean on our own understanding but to call out to God earnestly for direction of our paths (Proverbs 3:5-6). This is not partial understanding and somewhat helpful direction and knowledge. This is all wisdom and understanding and a being filled up and maxed out with the knowledge of God's will. It is not God's fault that many of us wander about not knowing God's will and being frustrated that we cannot hear His voice or discern His leading. Paul and Timothy are praying according to God's will (it is inspired Scripture). God desires that His people know Him intimately, deeply, and according to His Word. He desires that we seek direction from Him rather than making presumptions apart from Him. We have all that we need for life and godliness in Him (2 Peter 1:3) if only we would ask in faith.

Paul and Timothy pray also that they would walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Obviously this speaks to integrity and personal holiness. How can we possibly know the will of God if we are grieving and resisting the Spirit of God within us because of presumptuous and unconfessed sin? We are not slaves of the flesh that we must do its bidding, but we are rather to walk after the Spirit. There is no reason or place for the Christian to walk according to the flesh. We ought to live in a way such that our lives are an aroma and a signpost pointing to God because of the evidence and abundance of the fruit of the Spirit working in our lives. We are to please Him in all respects. If we got graded for our faithfulness each day, we ought to be getting one hundred percent. Again, Paul and Timothy are praying according to God's will, so we ought also to pray as they prayed. We ought to believe that God can and delights to have us bear abundant fruit and to be freed from the influences of sin.

We can please Him in all respects, not just some and not just most except for one. God's call to the Christian is a total commitment. Though we will sometimes fail and fall, it is because we lack faith in God's provision and promises and because we are not yet made into the fullness of the image of Christ. Yet we pray that we would continue to bear fruit in every good work. All that we do if it is for the Lord can bear fruit for the kingdom, even if it is merely inward fruit of a good attitude, and no visible results are seen. Part of walking worthy is also that we increase in the knowledge of God. It is not good enough to get the basics of Christianity for years on end. We need to move past basic doctrine (sadly many today are not even taught this), and get to knowing the depth of the riches of the love of God as we delve into the wonders and extravagance of His Word. There is no way that we can grow in Christ or be mature apart from growing in knowledge according to God's Word and by the work of the Holy Spirit within us. By knowledge, we don't mean merely dates, authors, and archaeology of the Bible; we mean knowing our God. God's Word is given to reveal the heart of God to man. Thus our goal in studying Scripture is ultimately to know our God so that we will walk worthy of Him in the here

and now, bearing abundant fruit of good works and inner holiness and conformity to Christ.

11strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously

12giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

Paul and Timothy pray further that the Colossians would be strengthened with all power (again not just some but all). This is not power that enables our fleshly lusts and desires, but it is power according to His glorious might. Thus, receiving and appropriating the power that they are referring to requires a surrender, a submission, and a yielding in faith to the work of the Spirit. The goal is not self-advancement or achievements in and of ourselves but an attaining to a consistency and persistency of faithfulness and endurance in our walk with God. A mature believer is able to maintain an attitude of faith without doubting for extended periods of time. No matter the amount of suffering and no matter the amount of temptation, this person does not yield to sin but remains yielded to God. He is not impatient when God tells Him to wait or to merely endure because He does not remove the suffering. Maturity involves patience, and we must believe that God's timetable is perfect and that He will provide. In the meantime, though we may not be doing the good works that we think we should be doing, we can be faithful in the ones which God provides for us. We are to give thanks to the Father not in a mundane or ritualistic routine but joyously from the heart. Our joy is increased when our character is proven under trial and when by faith we persevere. We can give thanks that God is working to make us into mature creations in Christ, rather than young new creations. Notice that our thanks is to the Father and not to Jesus directly. Jesus is indirectly praised for He is God and the Light through whom God reconciled us to Himself. Yet ultimately it is God Who qualified us to share in the inheritance of His Son as saints because of His sending His Son to die for us while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8). He made the plan to redeem man, and Jesus was obedient to His Father. We are to direct our thanksgiving and joy ultimately toward God, and in so doing, we elevate the name of Christ.

13For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,

14in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Before we became partakers of the Light, we were slaves of the kingdom of darkness, dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1), and children of the devil (1 John 3:10). Yet God rescued us through Christ from Satan's domain and transferred us to Jesus' kingdom which will endure forever. God loves His Son deeply, and it is through Him that we can become children of God and experience the intimate love of our Papa (Romans 8:15). It is through Jesus alone that man can be redeemed from the bondage and penalty of sin, and it is only through Christ that sins can be forgiven. There is no other way that a man can attain to righteousness. Christ is the only road. If there was another road, we had better praise and worship it. Yet since there is not, we need to direct all praise and joy to God,

which will happen naturally as we yield to His work in our lives and His will for our lives.

15He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

16For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him.

17He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God in that He made God's attributes and character visible to the world. He was fully God, for He and the Father were one and are one. Yet He took on the form of a man, being made in human likeness. As such, in a mighty show of love in condescending to man's corrupted state (though Himself being without sin), He revealed the depth of God's love and what true holiness is. Though God is spirit and is thus invisible, Jesus gives us a visible manifestation of God. He is also the firstborn of all creation in that He was the first to overcome sin and death and to make the way open for others to become God's children. He will no longer be the only Son of God. He is the only divine Son of God, but we also will be God's children, sons and daughters both. We are not the firstborn, but we will worship the firstborn. For it is only because of the work, life, death, and resurrection of the firstborn that we can be adopted as children of God at all. We are to remember that we are not begotten of God, but we are adopted by God. There is only one begotten Son of God, and He deserves our praise and worship. Jesus was involved in the act of creation, and nothing was made without His involvement. All that we can see with our eyes in the universe and that which we cannot (like subatomic particles and distant galaxies) were made by Him. Even the angels and fallen angels including Satan were made by Christ. All that is has been created through Him. All that has been created is ultimately for Him in that He will put all things under the feet of God. He will restore creation to its pre-fall state when He makes a new heaven and a new earth. All mankind will one day bow the knee to Him, and those who do it prior to the Great White Throne judgment will be made a part of His body. Christians are not made for themselves (or any man for that matter) but for the worship and glory of God in Christ who created all things and through whom all things hold together. The fact that He is before all things indicates that He pre-existed all that was created. Jesus existed before the world was created. He is not a created being as some false religious like to say, for He was before all things. He was before time, space, and any created order. This is why as science progresses (at least if it progresses honestly) then it should ultimately give us more and more evidence of Christ who is before all things. All honest scientific inquiry and study of the creation should point to the Creator, which is Christ. The fact that in Him all things hold together means that if Christ is removed from belief and from relevance that all things (philosophy, religion, faith, belief, practice, life, relationships, finances, governments, economies, and so on) splinter, become incoherent, discrete, and chaotic. There can be no peace and no order according to truth and logic without Christ centering everything. All things find their connection and interconnection through their source, centerpiece, and creating and sustaining force which is Christ. Without Christ the whole universe, physical, spiritual, and in any other way will disintegrate. The church is the pillar and support of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).

Cut out Christ which is the head of the body which is the church, and the church as well as the truth will crumble into chaos and destruction. If the church self-destructs, then the world is in real trouble. It will take Christ to restore order, and we know that one day He will do just that (Micah 5:5). Only in Him, can anything hold together.

18He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

Jesus not only created the world, pre-existed the world, and will reign and rule forever, but He is also the chief of the church. He is the leader, the head, and the final authority. He is the beginning of life physically and life spiritually being the first one to conquer death in rising from the dead.

**19For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,
20and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.**

In verse 19, the word fullness is commonly used to speak of a ship that is filled to capacity of rowers, sailors, and soldiers. The idea to be had is that it was God's design by His good pleasure to restore what was lost in Eden. God created man not because He needed man but because He wanted to lavish His great riches and love upon man, who would bring Him glory by being thankful and manifesting God's image. When sin separated us from God, it was God's good desire (even from before the foundation of the world) to reconcile us to Himself through Christ. The fullness that dwells in Christ is the fact that an abundance of believers will be adopted as children of God, He being the firstborn. The mystery is He is us and we in Him. Christ is filled up to the max with those who love Him and have received Him in faith. Also implied in the statement about fullness is that Christ is fully God having the fullness of Deity in Him.

God through Christ reconciled all things to Himself, even creation will one day be restored. All can come to Christ if only they would choose to receive Him. Yet many choose this world and the pleasures that lead to hell over the road that leads to life. Christ was needed to make peace between man and God, since it has been lost by sin, into which all mankind is born. We are enemies of God until we apply the blood of Christ to our hearts and receive forgiveness from our sins. All that dwells on this earth has the ability in and through Christ to be made new. All that is in the heavenlies, with the exception of the fallen angels, will also be made new when God creates a new heaven and a new earth. Evidently, even this reconciling of all things to Himself required the death of Christ.

21And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,

22yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—

Before we come to Christ, we are aliens from God, totally separated from Him. We cannot work our way into fellowship with Him, for even our minds are hostile toward the things of God. We are unable to do the very things we want (Romans 7:15). We need the grace of God to open our eyes and give us the faith to believe the truth about Christ. In addition to having minds that hated God, we had actions to prove our hatred. What was on the inside was manifested by outward rebellion against God as well. Through God who has indeed reconciled us who believe to Himself through Christ's bodily death on the cross we can become blameless and above reproach because such is the work and will of God. Positionally and legally we are justified before God. Yet we do not always live like it practically and conditionally.

23if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

"If" presents a qualifier. The condition for us being holy and blameless practically is that we respond in faith and believe God that He will lead us away from temptation and provide the way of escape. We must continue in the faith, believing the promises of God and holding fast to sound doctrine and teaching. We need to not falter about as those who doubt and are double-minded, but we need to be firmly established, being convinced of the truth of the Word of God. As believers there is no need for us to fall away into rebellion, though we can never fall away from the love of God (Romans 8:39). We are to hold to the hope of the gospel which says that we are made new creations in Christ who will be sanctified and glorified (2 Corinthians 5:17). If we lose sight of the gospel, we will rapidly fall off course in our practical holiness. And why would we doubt the gospel? It has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven. In other words, the entire earth, even those presently in Hades (the holding place of the dead, distinct from hell, which is the lake of fire and second death) has heard of Christ's triumph over sin and death. Satan and his evil ministers certainly are aware, recognizing that their time is short. Not all mankind has heard all of the details yet because we are commissioned to go and tell them, but God made His love public through Christ's death on the cross. The cross was not an act behind closed doors. Jesus has made an impact on the world like no other "man" before Him. No one can question the validity of the history of Christ. The cross was a worldwide showcase event, and the gospel is to point people to what has historically happened. It is for the proclamation of this gospel that Paul was called by God to be a minister.

24Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

Paul says that he rejoices in his suffering (which is something very difficult for us as Christians to learn) not because of his own sake but for the sake of those in Colossae. Even his own suffering was reason for Paul to rejoice on behalf of others. This is a radical perspective that is not self-centered in any way. The reason that he is able to rejoice for the sake of others in his own suffering is that his suffering means that they will

have to suffer less. If he can bear the brunt of the suffering that was lacking in Christ's suffering, then others who are the body of Christ in Colossae and elsewhere would not have to suffer as much. Evidently, part of the divine plan and mystery includes a set amount of suffering on behalf of Christ and His church. Suffering has a purifying and refining effect, proving our faith and character and giving us endurance. Since God's plan is sanctification and since His desire is that we grow in intimacy with Christ, He chooses to work through suffering through which spiritual progress and intimate knowledge and fellowship with Christ is possible (see Philippians 3:10). *(see also commentary on Colossians 3:4)*

25Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God,

26that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,

27to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Paul's ministry is for the church, not for any self-advancement or career mentality. His call is from God for the purpose of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles and making it clear to all the world that the gospel is for all those who would put their faith in Christ. His stewardship as a minister of the gospel is for the benefit of all those who would hear the gospel. The mystery that has been hidden is that God would come and dwell in man, Christ in us, the hope of glory. Specifically, the mystery is that Christ would indwell Jews and Gentiles alike. Not all men have Christ in them just because this mystery has been revealed and proclaimed. They must repent of their sins and receive Christ by faith in order for Christ to indwell them. But what a glorious hope it is that it is not sin which reigns in us but Christ. The God of the universe has chosen to make His home not just with man, but in man (1 Corinthians 6:19). It doesn't get any more humbling than that.

28We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

29For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Paul's objective is not to dance around who might be the elect of God and who is not. Only God knows. His mission and life objective is to teach every man the full counsel of God. His goal is to first see to it that the gospel message is proclaimed so that they can be transformed. Upon having Christ in them, it is now possible and desirable to teach them the full counsel of God so that they can become mature in Christ. Paul's objective is to create mature followers of Christ who can then do the same for others. His goal is not merely to get as many professions of faith as possible, but his life manifested his desire to live among the church to labor with them, serve them, and teach them so that they could become like Christ. Not surprisingly, Paul calls this true discipleship laborious. It is work, it is difficult, and it is tiresome. Yet Paul was not trying to preserve

his life so that he could fulfill selfish desires. His desire and calling was to lose his life in service for others and ultimately for God. This is a taxing load, but it is one that makes this life worth living in the first place. Paul could not fulfill his ministry of his own strength. His labor for the Lord was according to the power of Christ who is at work in and through Him. Christ's power is mighty, while Paul's fleshly ability is weak. He had a high intellect and was well learned. Clearly, he could write a Ph.D. level treatise. Yet his boast and strength was not in anything in and of himself but in Christ who was in Him. He admitted and recognized his total dependence upon Christ and by faith lived as a needy man who had all his needs filled in Christ.

Colossians 2

**1For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,
2that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself,
3in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**

Paul is tormented on the inner person because he is so caught up with the welfare of others, especially those who are young in Christ. He wishes to see them face to face, especially at Laodicea. From reading the account of the church at Laodicea a couple generations later (Revelation 3:14), it only makes sense that Paul was so burdened to ground the church in truth so they wouldn't get led astray. Paul wanted the churches to be able to connect his writing with a person and a face. He wanted them to see the genuine care and love that he had for them. He wanted to experience the joy of fellowship that cannot happen over a phone, an e-mail, or a printed page. He understood that Christian ministry is as personal as possible, and he wanted to enjoy the blessing of fellowship. He wanted to encourage their hearts so that they could grow in their love for one another. Furthermore, he wanted them to attain to all the wealth that comes from a full assurance of understanding of God's revelation through Christ and His Word. Paul is not saying that we should glorify doubt, uncertainty, and mystery. He is saying that we should have a true knowledge of the mystery. God keeps some things secret (Deuteronomy 29:29), but what we can know from His Word, we must not just know, but hold firmly with full conviction. God's revelation of Himself in His Word is so that we can know Him through His Son. We cannot truly know our Savior, though we may trust in enough and know enough to be saved, unless we are fully assured in what we believe. We will not be fully assured unless we have faith, unless we grow in the knowledge of Christ and His Word, unless we let Christ transform us to love others, and unless we choose to walk in victory over sin by faith (i.e. abide in Christ and keep His commandments). What is true wealth, anyways? The wealth that man seeks after but doesn't find except through Christ is only in Christ. It is all wisdom and all knowledge. Outside of Christ, there is no true knowledge and no true wisdom. Only when man by faith believes what his empirical and rational senses indicate about the world and universe (that Christ exists and is in and over all things) can he be on the road to wisdom. Only when he trusts Christ as His Savior and Lord can he partake of this wisdom. When

disciplining or mentoring, it is utterly important to choose to learn from those who are born again, for only in such people is true wisdom and knowledge. Only they have the Holy Spirit who can lead them into all truth. Only they have the ability to understand the Scripture. Yet all things must be weighed against the Scriptures. Even unbelievers sometimes get some elements of knowledge right by the grace of God, though they fail to acknowledge the truth, thereby missing the treasure trove of wisdom.

4I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument.

Paul knows that unless young converts are trained in the knowledge of the Lord, they will easily be led astray into the vast array of misconceptions, lies, and false doctrines available. Some people are so persuasive and convincing when they sell us something. They seem so genuine and so right, but their arguments lead us astray. Paul knows that we can be deluded, especially if we are not fully mature in Christ. Maturity is not only having Bible knowledge, but being trained in discernment and learning contentment, among other things. Such things take time to develop. This is why new converts ought not to be thrust into positions of leadership and authority immediately. We need time to grow.

5For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

Paul says that he is with them in spirit, though not in person. His heart is for them and with them. He prays for them and rejoices with them. They are doing well so far, maintaining stability in their faith and not getting carried away by deceptive doctrines. They have disciplined their bodies and minds to do and think on the things of the Lord. Discipline is a matter of faith which impacts and energizes the will, mind, and actions. We can't discipline ourselves by self-effort, for we can do nothing apart from Christ. Discipline, like self-control, is an outworking of the Spirit within us (Galatians 5:22-23). We must believe what is true about God giving us victory over sin, and we must then by grace through faith make the decision to live in a way honoring to God. The one who is the best at disciplining himself will be the one who doesn't doubt, whose faith is strong, and who is stable in his belief about God and His Word.

**6Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,
7having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.**

Just as we received Christ, which required a simple faith to receive the gift of grace and admit our inability, we are to live this life for Christ. Sanctification, just like salvation, is by grace through faith. Just as we were saved, so are we sanctified. We can do nothing of our own effort, but only by faith in Christ and His mighty power which works within us. Paul understood that the only way to be an effective minister of the gospel was for the mighty power of Christ to work within Him. It is the same for us. It is absolutely important that when we share the gospel, we share a true gospel. This should go without saying, but too often we modify it to make it more palatable to the hearer. There is no

way that a person can be firmly rooted unless their belief about their eternity is anchored in full truth. We need people who are firmly rooted in their salvation experience because of a clear understanding and total faith in the work of Christ and in His call to repentance. Only if we are firmly rooted can we be then built up in Him and established (made firm) in our faith. There are many Christians today who soak up whatever the latest and greatest strategy or philosophy is, as long as it is published somewhere and somebody has successful results to prove its truth. We need to return to the essence of the gospel and study the theology of it and how it changes man. We need to preach such a gospel, and only upon such a foundation can we learn the truths that will by grace through faith enable us to become mature and not carried about by every wind of doctrine. The reason for this lack of maturity in the church is because of a lack of instruction. Unless the teachers have it right, the disciples and converts will not have it right. They believe what they are told, and they are either led to maturity and truth or to eternal infancy in Christ. What we preach in terms of the gospel and what we teach from the pulpit will dictate whether or not a person can grow to maturity in Christ. When a person truly encounters God through His Word and the Holy Spirit speaks to his heart about truth, he will be overflowing with gratitude and thanksgiving. When we get weak messages week after week, we will leave having been entertained (if we are that fortunate), but we will not abound in gratitude because we have not encountered God. True joy springs from the presence of God and drawing near to Him, which only happens through the Holy Spirit working on our hearts via the Word of God.

8See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

We are no longer captives of the devil, having been set free through Christ when we put our faith in Him. Yet we can be made captive again if we are deceived. We can always be freed through truth and through Christ, but if we are missing the truth because we are deceived we may stay in a place of doubt, defeat, and confusion for quite some time. The way to get deceived is by listening to crafty, clever argument and not trusting the Holy Spirit in our hearts. If we don't know the Word of God and are not able to rightly handle it, we are prone to deception. People will wax eloquent and try to trap us in shallow, earthly thinking, often telling us that their way will give greater pleasure, blessing, and happiness. Deception is according to elementary principles of the world. The world seeks pleasure, happiness, success, popularity, and wealth, and false teaching always appeals to some lust, whether of the eyes or flesh or the pride of life. It draws our eyes away from the prize of heaven and fixes them upon getting all we can out of the world in the here and now. The tradition of men is faulty and repetitive. Man always moves farther and farther away from the truth into moral license, and he then destroys himself and his society. Some immorality is disguised as religious piety, which may be nothing but denying the work of Christ and exchanging it for the work of self. Any idolatry, whether of a man, of self, or of a god of one's own making is wrong and not according to the ways of Christ.

9For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

10and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

This verse is a clear statement of the deity of Christ. Christ is God; let there be no doubt or misunderstanding. Worldly philosophers want to deny God exists, and if they grant that Jesus exists, they will deny His Deity. The way to discern truth from error is to look at whether or not a person or group believes that Jesus is God. The interesting thing is that Jesus still is in bodily form, albeit immortal. Prior to the incarnation, Christ was a spiritual being with no physical expression. Yet His humility is continually manifested in the fact that He is God clothed in a human body. What love to do this for us. In Him, we are made complete. We are fully righteous, not needing to earn our way or continue in self-effort. We have all we need in Christ, not being dependent upon any peddlers of earthly philosophies and wisdom. All truth that we need for life is in the Bible. We don't need some "prophet" to give us added insight. Christ is the sole authority figure in the universe. All authority has been given to Him, and He will subject all things under the feet of the Father. As such, we don't need to listen to other voices that tell us things contradictory to what Christ has told us through His Word. Christ is sufficient and His Word is sufficient.

11and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ;

12having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

We were spiritually marked out as the people of God not because of a physical circumcision like the Jews but through a removing of the body of sin and death which was our old man. Our old self was fully corrupted and full of sinful, fleshly desires. Yet Christ took that away when we received Him in faith. It was cut away and disposed of. It is now dead and a mere memory. We were buried with Him through baptism into death. When He died, our old selves died with Him. Yet when God raised Christ to new life, He raised us with Him, giving us a new heart and new self.

13When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,

14having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

The state of the old man is one of helplessness. He is mired and dead in sin, unable to be made alive. God made us alive together with Christ, forgiving us of all of our sins and destroying the old self. He wiped away our debts that could never be paid because no amount of righteousness undoes the unrighteousness. God's Law could testify to our guilt and lawlessness. We would be guilty before God undoubtedly. The Law was hostile toward us as was God because of our sin. Yet through Christ, this has been taken away in that it has been nailed with Christ to the cross. Our sin was put on the innocent Lamb of God when He was given as a sacrifice to God. Though innocent and free from

sin, He bore the penalty of our sin, as God nailed both His one and only Son and our sins to the cross in a demonstration of love that our brains can barely comprehend. It is too wonderful; it almost goes right over our heads. Yet God sacrificed His own Son so that man could go free.

15When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Satan and his demons were disarmed (their destruction will come later), having no power over the person who is now in Christ. He can tempt and deceive, but he cannot hold them or make them sin. He can viciously attack them and oppress them, but he cannot harm them anymore than God ordains. He cannot harm their soul in anyway, though he may attack their bodies. God disarmed the rulers of darkness through making a mockery of Satan's power by showing that He could raise His own Son from the dead. God was in a game of spiritual chess with Satan, and it is as if he was toying with Satan for a time. But when God raised Christ up from the grave, it was checkmate for Satan, showing to him that his best wit and schemes were turned on their heads by God. What he thought was his greatest victory in killing God's Son quickly became his greatest defeat and certificate of doom. Now all the world knows that Satan is weak and beatable. During the Cold War, the whole world thought the Soviet Union was this empire and superpower, but when the walls came down, it was revealed that they were struggling, dying, and weak. Like the Soviet Union, Satan has been exposed. His walls are down, and all the world knows his weakness and Who is the Master of the Universe. Through Christ, God has disarmed Satan. Thus Christ has been given all authority, and thus it is through Him that we can have victory.

16Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day--

17things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

Christ is the centerpiece, the main event, and the core issue. Our sins are gone, and our identity is in Him. We know how the battle will end, and we do not have to live in enslavement to the devil. Yet some people were trying to make the Colossians live in slavery to issues of self-effort and self-made righteousness. They were judging one another for keeping the Sabbath, the festivals and feasts, and over food sacrificed to idols, among other things. Yet these things of the Old Testament were merely shadows of what was to come. What was to come has come in the Person of Christ. Thus, rejoicing in His finished work and in faith is to be our calling, not making sure everybody does all of the Old Testament rituals. There is nothing wrong with them; however, they were there to point to Christ. They gave us rest, but now our rest is in Him. They guided us away from sin, but now Christ does that. We are not to judge on another over the Law, but we are to each follow Christ.

18Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,

19and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

In Christ, we have a great prize in that we are made new creations. The work of becoming righteous is finished. Yet some wanted to enslave the Colossians into thinking that through beating themselves and through matters of self-harm that they could become more holy and honor God. Some advocated that angels be worshipped, but such Paul says is not from a vision from God but from an arrogant heart and mind operating in the flesh. Some people love to say that they have seen visions because it makes them seem more spiritual. After all, how can we counter what they say if they say it is from God? Yet Paul is saying to look to the truth already given through the work of Christ and the written Word through the apostles and prophets. We don't have to do anything to add to our salvation to make us more righteous. We certainly don't need to harm ourselves. Christ took all the wrath of God, and only He deserves our worship, not anything of the creation. He is the fullness, He is Deity, and He is the One who is preeminent. A person who invents wild errors of doctrine is not holding fast to Christ, if they even are in Christ to begin with. The entire body draws its strength from the head, which is Christ. We look to the head to give us value, power, and direction. We cannot grow apart from our head.

20If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,

21"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"

22(which all refer to things destined to perish with use)--in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?

Some were advocating asceticism, which really amounts to a form of self-righteousness and legalism, trying to discipline the body in ways that Christ never said to do. It has the appearance of righteousness, but it is worldly religion. It glorifies man rather than God and rejects the sufficient sacrifice of God in His Son. We have died with Christ to these base things of the world, no longer believing that we can earn our salvation and the approval of God. We ought rather to listen to His voice, rather than to the voices of the devil in the world.

23These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

The problem is that no amount of leaning upon our own human strength and intellect can keep us from indulging the flesh. As unbelievers, we will walk after the flesh because we are of flesh. Thus, no amount of bodily discipline will cure the problem which is an issue of the heart. As believers, sometimes we think we are drawing closer to God just because we don't do what some other Christians do (e.g. we watch only G rated movies and listen

to Christian radio). If we develop standards for the sake of keeping our flesh in line, and we are not following the voice of God in the matter, we are leaning on our flesh and will likely be those who judge others for not taking the same religious stands that we have. The only thing that is valuable against the flesh is faith in Christ who is our all in all. He has given us new hearts and the ability to reign in life through Him. True religion is that which is from a changed heart through Christ and that which lives by faith, following the leading of the Holy Spirit. It has nothing to do with setting extrabiblical standards. No amount of alienation from the things of the world can make a person holy. Even the monks could lust in their heart and mind. Martin Luther was honest enough to admit it, and thus was transformed when he read that the just are those who live by faith. Faith is the victory, and through faith in Christ we can overcome the flesh in our day to day living.

Colossians 3

1Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

2Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

The key for the Christian to grow and enjoy the fullness of life in Christ is to keep seeking the things of God and the things of heaven. It has nothing to do with setting boundaries on how much of the world is acceptable to indulge upon. It has to do with a mind that is not of the world (though in it) and set upon following God as He leads us to our true home. It is a radical perspective change that sets its hope completely upon the grace to come. It sees the world in an entirely different light, viewing it as a sort of mirage to the spiritual battles that are going on constantly around us. We are not to be thinking of things that fade away and setting our hearts upon them. Again, the issue is not deciding which chunk of the world can be justifiable to enjoy and indulge and which should I put a boundary next to so that I can grow in Christ. It is not about boundaries and thinking as one in the world. It is about living in our new identity as those who are already seated with Christ in heaven next to the throne of God. It is living this life in light of the next, as one who is merely passing through. We need to have spiritual eyes to see the world as God sees it. It is not a playground, but a warzone. It is not a place to make our heaven, but a place to which we are to bring heaven. These are radically different.

3For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

4When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

We are to remember that our old selves which loved the world are dead. Our lives are not about this world at all, for they are hidden with Christ in God. Literally, we are now operating as instruments of God to bring light to this dark world. We are to advance the kingdom of God against the kingdom of darkness. Ultimately, this will take Christ to set up, but in the meantime He will build His church. The world will go to hell in a handbag as the saying goes, but the church will grow despite the persecution and suffering. When

we start living as those who actually believe that their entire lives revolve around being Christ to this world and in this world, we will be persecuted. We will get strange looks, even looks of hatred and letters of animosity, simply for carrying a Bible around and sharing the gospel. Yet we shake it off, simply filling up the suffering of Christ. When we as Christ's body go through this world as His life manifested through us, we will suffer and fulfill the suffering which is lacking in His body. Christ is our very life, and we are His very body. Thus, when we suffer, He suffers. He doesn't complete His allotted amount of suffering until we are done suffering. In God's mysterious way, this suffering jointly with Christ, not merely for Christ, is part of true fellowship and intimacy with God. This is so far out there, but it is sound theology. It is so amazing, but the fact is that we are deluded by philosophies of men if we do not understand that our life is hidden with Christ in God. We are wrapped up in the Son of God as He gives us His direction, His desires, and His enabling. We can do nothing apart from Him, and if He calls us to do something, He will enable us to do it. When He is revealed at the last time as the Judge of the universe, then we too will be there with Him as His body.

5Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

Since we are in Christ and since He is our very life, we ought to believe that our earthly bodies are dead to every kind of evil and impurity. Those things which characterize the flesh ought not to be the things which characterize our lives. We certainly have the capacity to follow evil passions, greed, and make idols of just about anything. But since we are in Christ, we don't have to do this. We must remember that we are His and in Him, and we must hold to the fact that He can give us the ability to reign in life. Though we still have flesh and are able to indulge fleshly desires, we are to view our body as dead to those things as we yield to the power of Christ in us.

6For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience,

7and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.

God's wrath will be poured out upon those who are not His sons but are sons of disobedience and of the devil. All that is of evil passion and impurity they will be judged for. Since such things characterize the unsaved, they ought not to characterize the saved. We are not those who are storing up wrath for ourselves, for we have been set free. We do not have to continue in sin. Before we were Christ's, we were sons of disobedience, walking in all sorts of evil. Yet now we are children of God, and so we are to by faith walk accordingly.

8But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.

**9Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,
10and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—**

We who are children of God can put all such evil and garbage aside including all that comes as a result of selfish desire and not trusting in Christ for fulfillment and pleasure. Conflicts arise when we try to meet our needs on our own apart from God. We then scheme and lie to get what we want. This is not how it is to be for the church, since the church has (past tense) laid aside the old self and all of the evil practices that grow out of having a corrupted self and heart. Since the church has (past tense) put on the new self, we ought also to walk as such. This new self is a work in progress, undergoing refinement and sanctification. Christians still stumble and fall, but they are able to immediately repent and walk in Christ victoriously. They cannot use manmade religious works and self-abasement to beat themselves to regain God's favor. They must just simply repent and believe that they are forgiven and that their conditional guilt is taken away. This new self is being renewed (continuous, ongoing) to a true knowledge so that we can see Christ as He truly is and be made to fully reflect that image.

11a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

This renewal and refinement will occur for all believers, regardless of race, ethnicity, age, employment, status, or any earthly classification. Nobody has any advantage because sanctification is a work of Christ as He gives us faith. We are all helpless except for Him. This renewal is a spiritual issue, something which Christ will complete.

12So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;

13bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

Paul wants believers to live in their new identity, according to the new self. It is already put on, but we must "put it on" again in the sense of reckoning it to be true that it was put on when we came to Christ initially. We must realize by faith that we do not have to be enslaved to sin because we have a new self and a new heart. As such, we are to live out conditionally what we are positionally in Christ. God sees us in the robe of righteousness that is found in Christ. We are declared holy and righteous in Him. Yet sometimes the holy and righteous don't live like it. We ought to however, as those beloved of God and chosen by Him. In light of this identity and in light of God's great love, we are to live out of the reality that we are new creations in Christ, which is what Paul means when he says "put on a heart." When we do this we live out of who we really are by the power of Christ within us, enabling us to show compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We are able to bear with one another and forgive one another as our Savior has forgiven us. We live not as those who gloss over sin and live in a "continue in sin so that grace may abound" mentality. But we live as those transformed who actually and genuinely seek the welfare of others above our own. Rather than scheming and lying to advance ourselves at the expense of others, we try to do what we can to make others succeed and grow in Christ. This is a radically different mindset than that of the old self and that of the world. Rather than thinking each man for himself, the new heart manifests

kindness and does good for people even when they don't deserve it and when there is no way that they can ever pay us back.

14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

The crowning virtue of the Christian is that we love one another. Love that puts others ahead of ourselves and loves those in the world like God did (even being willing to give up His own Son) is that which binds Christians in a community and family in a way unknown and misunderstood by the world. True unity is something that the world can never achieve. Thus, when we are one as God and Christ are one, the world will know that the Father sent the Son (John 17:21). What is true unity? True unity is a growing in common knowledge of God through His Word and in learning to love one another according to truth, not in spite of it. Christians are forgiving, not tolerant. They seek a person to be reconciled to God, not believing that it is in their best interests to continue in sin. True unity is not manmade uniformity, legalistic standards, or common outward behaviors. It is hearts knit together because they are all pursuing the honor and glory of Christ, allowing Him to live out His life in and through them as the body of Christ. Such is the work of faith. It is already the case, but we must believe it and live in light of that reality. We are to live and love in such a way that the spiritual unity that we have becomes a visible, tangible reality. The world is not impressed by those who can all dress the same or who all refuse to go to the movie theatre. The world is moved only when they see what they cannot have or accomplish and that is true selfless love.

15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Christ already lives and rules in our hearts. The issue is that we at times grieve the Holy Spirit and refuse to let Him rule. Oh, He is still sovereign, but we fight Him for who knows best. When we defy God, we lose our peace and become ungrateful. We are to let His peace rule in our hearts as we follow His voice and leading. When we do so, we will see His wisdom and have much to be thankful for.

16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Some people sit under preaching and teaching of the Word multiple times a week, and yet they never let it change them. They analyze it, evaluate it, critique it, and even tell others about what they learned and how they should change, but it never changes them. They refuse to yield to the work of the Holy Spirit in faith because they are too proud to let God's Word rule in them. Christ dwells in all believers as does His Word, for through it they have been born again. Yet the word of Christ does not dwell richly and abundantly in them. Their head may be filled with Bible facts and knowledge, but their desires and affections and ambitions are unchanged in light of what they know in their head. Christ's word dwells in us richly when we learn to love it and yield to the ministry of the Holy Spirit who indwells us. When what is inside of us is overflowing with the word of Christ,

it will then flow out of us unto effective and effectual ministry that bears spiritual fruit. We will know what to say so that we can speak the wisdom of God and not fleshly wisdom that is just nice ideas that have no spiritual fruit. Those who let God's Word impact their lives completely because they believe it by faith and let it impact every aspect of their being are those who can then speak wisdom to others and teach them truth. They can see errors and are able to admonish other believers in love who are straying off course. Their lives are so energized by the truth of God's Word that they can't help but sing or quote a psalm or early church hymn. They are so grateful for the Word and how it is transforming their lives and continuing to free them from sin patterns of old. Victory brings with it great joy and thanksgiving, even making us burst out in song at times. The wonderful part about the songs written is that they were full of Biblical wisdom and doctrinal truth to the extent that they could be used to challenge one another and build them up in the faith.

17Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

The summation then is, seeing that we are new creations in Christ and have put on the new self, that we do all things whether in spoken word or physical action in a way that is honoring to God. Rather than set up legalistic manmade boundaries, God calls us to pure motives from the heart. We are to do everything in a way that brings glory and draws attention to the name of Jesus. We are to give thanks to the Father through Him as He enables us to live conformed to His image. Our sanctification, like our salvation, is ultimately something we must thank God for because He started the good work.

18Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

19Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

20Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

21Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

Paul immediately shows practically how we can do things in a way honoring to God by drawing attention to family issues. How one lives with his own family will largely impact and dictate how he will live with the family of God. As such, how one handles his family is indicative of spiritual maturity and trustworthiness to lead the people of God. Wives are to do their part in being submissive to their own husbands (not to men in general) by showing them respect and empowering them to lead the home. Husbands are to do their part by not acting as if they are sick and tired of their wives, being bitter toward God and toward them. Rather, they are to manifest and showcase the love of Christ toward them, leading them toward further spiritual growth. If they continue to be bitter toward their wives, they can be assured of not having their prayers answered and largely being rendered ineffective in terms of the kingdom of God. Children are to do their part in obeying their parents as they learn what it means to submit to a godly authority. They are to obey their parents in all things, even if they disagree about some things. They do not have to go against the commands of God, however. Obedience is pleasing to the heart of God, and a child who learns to obey is one who is pliable and able

to be taught the things of God. Finally, Paul gives a direct admonition to the fathers that they do not exasperate their children. How a father treats his children will impact how his children view their Father in heaven. If they demean them, hurt them, abuse them, talk down to them, or trick them, they will have trouble trusting God. Paul says that they will lose heart. They will doubt their worth, identity, meaning, and the truth of the Bible. A father's love and approval go a long way in a child's life and in their relationship with God as they grow older. It is absolutely important that fathers show unconditional love, involve their children in their lives, and speak words of encouragement and affirmation.

22Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

Slaves, too, were to obey their masters on earth with a sincere attitude and motivation. It is easy to give lip-service to a boss or employer but how prevalent is it that people complain, mock, and malign behind the back of the authority. Paul is saying to respect the authority because God honors that. God has put the slaves in that position, and they are to honor their masters out of fear for the Lord. Masters are not to treat their slaves brutally or unfairly, but even if they do (and this is not assuming a mobile society) they are to submit willingly. It is never right to enslave a man against his will. In some cultures and in some times, however, it is acceptable and even advisable to become a servant of a master. It is not slavery as in the sense of treating a person as a lesser human being but it is more like an employee-employer relationship. In such cases, and even in unfair cases, servants need to show honor to their masters.

23Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

Paul repeats his exhortation to do all things as to the Lord and in a way that honors God. All that we do, even if it seems like it has no eternal value, does have eternal value if we do it as an act of worship to the Lord. There is nothing that is too trivial that it cannot be considered worthy of doing as to the Lord. We get ourselves in trouble when we categorize certain activities as worldly or secular and others as sacred. All things are before the eyes of God, and all things can be an act of love or an act of rebellion. God wants to see hearts that love Him and serve Him out of love and admiration. Another road to failure involves doing things to get the approval of men. It is the nature of man to constantly want to have approval from his neighbor or to outdo his neighbor. There is an unfriendly subtle competition that goes on. Yet God says that we are not to do things to look good before men at the expense of violating the commands of God. When we seek to honor God, God will exalt us in due time. That may mean people will like us; it may mean we will get persecuted. Either way, it will bring us honor in the kingdom. All things are to be done as a stewardship for God because it is from Him that we will receive our reward. Our earthly masters cannot give us eternal rewards. Which is more important, the paycheck now or the eternal rewards later? Both are important, but the eternal rewards are the longer lasting and more enjoyable. Thus, we ought to keep an

eternal mindset, remembering from Whom comes our true inheritance. We serve ultimately not man, but our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Christians are servants of Jesus, not people who merely profess knowing Him and continue practicing sin. We need a perspective with Jesus as our Lord and Master.

25For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

Those who honor God will be rewarded accordingly. In the same way, those who sow after the flesh will reap after the flesh and receive the consequences of doing wrong. For the Christian, this means a loss of rewards. For the unbeliever, this means the wrath of God in hell. There are consequences for how we live and for the choices we make. Thus we are to conduct our time on earth in fear before the One Who sees all and Who will render to each according to his due. There will be no exceptions and all will get what they deserve.

Colossians 4

1Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

Paul doesn't forget the masters. Just because a master-slave relationship exists doesn't mean that the master ought to treat the slave however he wants. He is to be fair and just, giving him what is his due and not treating him like some animal. He ought to treat the slave as he would want to be treated if the roles were reversed. This is a great check for any person in authority. Imagine yourself in the role of the person under authority and ask yourself how you would want to be treated. After all, we are all those under authority because God is our authority. Just as He treats us lovingly, justly, and equitably, we too ought to treat others in the same way.

**2Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;
3praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned;**

4that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

Paul commands all of the believers at Colossae to devote themselves to prayer. It is not a passing activity before meals and before bedtime, but it is a lifestyle and a serious calling. They are to stay alert in their praying, not dozing off or letting their minds wander. They are to view it as a spiritual battle against the enemy. Paul is asking them to pray for him and Timothy specifically so that God would open up opportunities for the gospel to go forward. He didn't assume that people would readily respond and that the preaching of the gospel would go uncontested. He knew better and had scars to prove it in addition to his present imprisonment. In order for the dead to come to life spiritually speaking and for the gospel to make sense to an unbeliever, a spiritual opening must be made by God. He must push back the forces of hell, the strongman must be bound, and then the heart

can be taken for Jesus. Such happens in prayer and in the preaching of the Word. Sometimes we think that we can convert a soul. Paul, the great apostle and writer of much of the New Testament, didn't think so. He needed prayer. He understood that the battle is ultimately spiritual and needs a spiritual push through the prayers of the saints. Paul wanted prayer so that the gospel would be clear to the listeners and that God would make it clear exactly how he was to present it. The content was always the same but how the message was encased was different depending upon his listeners. Some needed an introduction and orientation (Acts 17) while others needed to be taken through the Old Testament (the Jewish council). Paul needed wisdom to know how best to present the content of the gospel, and so do we.

5Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.

These are the words of a man with an agenda, a man with a mission. Whenever Paul talked with those outside of the church, he viewed it as an opportunity to share the gospel. His call to believers is to use their opportunities when they are around the unsaved as a means of working God into the conversation as God directs. The goal is always to share the gospel. We need to view our interactions with unbelievers as opportunities, and we must have an eternal perspective being mindful that the unsaved are headed for hell. What we do with the opportunity is up to us. We may cower in fear or we may take advantage of such divine appointments. We need wisdom for this task to know what to say, when to say it, and how to say it. Fortunately, this is why we can rejoice that, though we are weak, Christ in us is strong.

6Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

In all conversations, with believers and unbelievers alike, what we say and how we say it is to be gracious. It is not to be harsh, seeking a fight, full of unrighteous anger, or mingled with self-interest. What we say is to be nonjudgmental, kind, and from a tender heart that recognizes that it, too, needs the grace of God. Our speech is to be seasoned with salt in that it points people to the Savior. As the salt of the earth, we give those on the earth the chance to have their souls preserved. We give the world a taste of the eternal by pointing them to God and manifesting Jesus in their lives. All that we say should be carrying a fragrance of Christ and of His love. When we are depending upon Christ for what we are to say in a given circumstance, we can know how we should respond. There is something interesting about a person who listens well and says graceful things from his heart. For some reason, when a person feels loved unconditionally and unjudged and unthreatened, they will open up and say things that they wouldn't normally say. It is this saltiness of the believer that should almost effortlessly draw people to the truth and to conviction of sin. After all, it is God's kindness that leads to repentance, not His wrath. So, too, believers must manifest grace and kindness, not condemnation and even spite toward the lost.

7As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information.

8For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts;

9and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

Moving to more practical matters of administrative things and of news about his life and circumstances, Paul says that he is sending Tychicus to inform the Colossians of how he is doing. He hopes that by learning more of how God has worked in and through him that they may be encouraged and spurred on to more good works. Notice how Paul gives this servant of God credibility and encouragement in his endorsement of him. He says that he is a bond-servant of God, a fellow servant, and a beloved brother. These are high compliments that the sheep of the flock need to hear from the shepherds of the flock, assuming of course that they are true statements.

10Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him);

11and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.

Paul passes on the greetings of another brother in Christ and co-prisoner with Paul, Aristarchus. Barnabas' cousin Mark was to be welcomed, despite whatever issues had been before. This theme of fellowship and brotherly love runs deep through this letter. These people couldn't pick up a phone and call one another, and their lives were daily a challenge, full of persecution and ridicule. Thus, they banded together and determined to know about the well-being of one another so that they could encourage one another to pray for each other and to fight the good fight of faith.

12Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

13For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Epaphras, evidently a Colossian who had traveled with Paul, is complimented as a bond-servant of Christ. I can't get over how this concept of Christianity is lost. We are not free Christians to do as we please in the sense of abusing grace as license to sin. We are slaves of Christ by choice to do His will. Obedience is the mark of the bond-servant of God. Paul passes on his greetings also, and gladly informs the Colossians that one of their own always labors earnestly in prayer for his brothers and sisters at Colossae. Complimenting somebody for effective and faithful service does not steal their reward, as some would like to think. This is a recognition that is an encouragement for this man and a reminder to those in his home city that he is walking after the Lord. His prayers are like

Paul's in that he prays that the Colossians will stand perfect, being made mature in Christ and fully assured of the will of God. He desires them to not waver in doubt or be vulnerable to variations of theology and doctrine. He wants them to know the will of God, to follow the leading of Christ, to keep the commands of God, and to persevere.

14 Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.

Doctor Luke who had a high reputation among the believers passed on his greetings as well. Luke traveled with Paul often, suffering as he suffered, though he merely chronicles the life of Paul in the book of Acts. Demas also passes on his greetings. He is referenced in Philemon 24 and in 2 Timothy 4:10, in which he is said to have forsaken Paul. Even faithful disciples can lose heart and abandon the call of Christ, though they cannot lose their salvation. The bottom line is that Paul was not a lone ranger, trying to win the world for Christ himself, though if nobody had joined his cause, he would have tried to do just that because it was to that end that he was called. Paul took other godly men who had proven themselves as faithful and mentored them along the way. It is evident that they picked up his love for other believers and his burden to pray earnestly and always.

15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house.

16 When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.

Paul also wants the Colossians to greet those who are meeting in the house church at Nympha's home. This woman of God opened her home in godly hospitality for the church to gather. Greetings are also to be extended to the church at Laodicea, and the Colossians are commanded to read the letter that Paul had sent to them (often assumed to be Ephesians but not known conclusively).

17 Say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it."

Archippus may well have been Philemon's son (see Philemon 2). Paul challenges him to be faithful in the ministry in which God had called him. He had been graced with some gift to serve God as all believers are, and Paul wants him to see to it that he fulfills his calling. This is a challenge for perseverance and faithfulness despite the challenges and hardship of ministry.

18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand Remember my imprisonment Grace be with you.

Paul emphasizes that this letter is his own, having signed off on it. He likely dictated the letter to someone who would write it down for him, another sign of brilliance and the grace of God on this man's life. It is not easy to dictate something like this. He asks them to remember his imprisonment, not discounting his apostolic authority and being

mindful to keep him in prayer. His example serves as one of utter devotion to God no matter what suffering it entails. He ends as he often begins by praying for them that grace will be with them. God's grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9), Christ is full of grace (John 1:14), and in Him we have all the grace we need. We must ask God to give us faith to harness His grace, and we can pray for grace upon grace (John 1:16).

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