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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119: 105**



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Evangelical House Churches

Letter to the Colossians

The Supreme Glory of Christ's Person

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Paul had never visited Colossae when he composed his epistle to the church here, but he does imply that Epaphras founded the church, along with those at Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col 1:7-8; 4:12-13). This was probably during Paul's third missionary journey, when he preached in Ephesus for two years, "so that

all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10 KJV).

Colossae was a city of south-western Phrygia in the Roman province of Asia (Asia Minor) in what is now Turkey. The city was situated on the Lycus River not far from where that river joined with the Meander River. Colossae was located about 125 miles east of Ephesus near the cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea. These two cities were 10 and 13 miles respectively northwest of Colossae, which was the oldest of the three cities. Originally Colossae lay on the trade route from west to east. This location made it an important city. But then the main road was changed and moved north near Hierapolis and Laodicea. These two cities then grew in importance and surpassed Colossae in wealth and prestige. Colossae declined to a relatively small, unimportant village. It retained its fame for its wool and its municipal independence under the Romans.

Background

Colossians and Ephesians are twin epistles; in fact, their resemblance is so great that some who doubted the Pauline authorship of Ephesians have averred that it is only a copy of Colossians with additions. The town of Colosse was as we know located in the hinterland of Asia on a rocky ridge overlooking the valley of the Lycus River, not far from the cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea. During the period of the Persian Wars in the fifth century B. C. , Colosse had been a town of considerable importance, but as Hierapolis and Laodicea grew, its commerce declined. It had been especially noted for the glossy black wool that was grown by the shepherds in the adjoining hill country. In Paul's day it was decadent, although still a good-sized city.

Paul himself had probably not visited Colosse or its neighbouring cities, since he says that they had "not seen [his] face in the flesh" (Col. 2:1). It must have been evangelized during his stay in Asia, perhaps by Timothy and Epaphras (1:7) who went from place to place while Paul preached in Ephesus.

The heresy of Colossae that evoked this letter was a local development that arose because of the peculiar situation of the city. Colossae was on the trade route from the East, along which oriental religions as well as oriental merchandise were transported to Rome. The Colossians were Phrygian Gentiles (1:27) whose religious antecedents were highly emotional and mystical. They were seeking to attain the fullness of God, and where teachers came among them with a philosophy that promised a mystic knowledge of God, they were entranced by it. Among its tenets were voluntary humiliation, probably by

ascetic practices (2:18, 20-21), the worship of angels, who may have been reputed intermediaries between God and man (2:18), abstinence from certain foods and drinks, and the observance of feasts and ceremonial days (2:16). It is quite likely that these teachings also included a strain of Jewish legalism, brought in from contacts with the Jewish population of Asia Minor. Paul's references to ceremonialism (2:11) and to the fact that the ceremonies and feasts were a shadow of things to come (2:17) sound more like Judaism than heathenism. The Colossian heresy, then, was of the same order as the Galatians heresy, except that it centred about the person of Christ rather than about salvation by grace versus salvation by works.

Many interpreters of Colossians regard this heresy as a syncretism (i. e. , a mixing or blending) of Jewish and oriental elements. There appears to be ascetic veneration of the "elemental spirits of the universe" (2:8 RSV) along with a Jewish ritualism concerned with various matters of food and ceremony (2:16). This is likely not a formal Gnostic system, such as became known in the late first and early second centuries, but may have contained elements found in that later complex of thought.

The answer to this heresy lay not in extended argument, but in a positive presentation of the person of Christ. Paul pointed out that all philosophies, spiritual powers, ceremonial observances, and restrictions were secondary to the pre-eminence of Christ.

Content

Outstanding in Colossians is the passage from 1:14 to 22, which sets forth Paul's Christology. Curiously enough, it was not a separate treatise, but part of a prayer with which Paul opened the paragraph in 1:9. Beginning with a relative clause explanatory of the phrase "the Son of his love" (1:13), it continued with a description of Christ in terms that could be applied only to deity, summarized finally in the astounding statement that "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"- (2:9). In creation, in redemption, in the church, and in personal life Christ must be preeminent.

Redemption is prominent in the teaching of Colossians. In Christ we have forgiveness of sins (1:14). Through the blood of his cross we are reconciled to God (1:20, 22). The bond written in ordinances that was against us has been abolished in the cross (2:14). The subjective application of death and resurrection is also taught in Colossians: "If ye died with Christ . . . why . . . do ye subject yourselves to ordinances? . . . If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God" (2:20; 3:1).

Colossians was written as an antidote to a blasé intellectualism that prated of mysteries, secret knowledge, and wisdom, while discounting Christ by a false philosophy. Paul shows that in Christ God is perfectly pictured (1:15), that in him all the fullness of deity resides (1:19), and that in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3). Moreover, the ethical demands of the Christian life are closely linked with its intellectual standards. "Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth" (3:2). The practical section of the book that follows this injunction (3:5-4:6) is connected to it by a "therefore," which establishes the relation of conscious effort between knowledge and behaviour. Paul was no purveyor of idle theories. For him the gospel had clear ethical consequences.

Outline

The personal glory of Christ as head of the body, the church, is specially brought out. The hope before the saints is in heaven : they are viewed as risen, but not seated in the heavenlies in Christ, as in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The life of the new man is dwelt on, but the Holy Spirit is only once mentioned: 'your love in the Spirit.'

Chapter 1

After the salutation, and thanking God for what Paul had *heard* of their faith (for apparently he had not been to Colossae) he at once prays for them that they might be filled with the full knowledge of God's will ; might walk worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in all things ; and might be strengthened with all power. Verses 9-11. Then he gives thanks for what God *had done* for them, which is true of all Christians. Verses 12-14. The glories of Christ follow : as man, and as the Creator-God : He is head of the body, the church. Verses 15-19. All fullness was pleased to dwell in Him, and by Him; to reconcile all things to Himself (or itself), having made peace through the blood of His cross : the saints were already reconciled if they continue in the faith (which would prove their reality). Verses 20-24. Paul had a double ministry : in the gospel, ver. 23 ; and in the church, ver. 25. His sufferings in his body filled up the (non-atoning) sufferings of Christ ; and the revelation he had, concerning the mystery of the church, filled up the word of God (not as to time, for some portions were added afterwards, but as to the circle of subjects). Paul laboured to present every man perfect (that is, full grown) in Christ.

Chapter II

Paul was deeply anxious for the welfare of the saints, that they might be rooted, built up, and established in the faith, lest they should be led astray by the philosophy of the world and the deceitful teaching of men, which would

in no way minister Christ to them. In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,' and they were complete in Him nothing must be allowed to come between them. In Christ they had the reality of the things signified in the ordinances of circumcision and baptism. They had died and were risen with Christ. The saints were warned in verses 16, 17 against being entangled with the Jewish things; and with the occult philosophy of the fleshly mind of the Gentile : all of which was in contrast and in opposition to holding Christ as Head. Having died with Christ they were set free from all the ordinances of men. This has been called the *negative* side.

Chapter III.

This gives the *positive* side, being risen with Christ.' Their mind was to be set on things above, as heavenly people walking on earth. When the Lord appeared they would appear with Him in glory. Christ was their life, and in consistency therewith they were to mortify put to death—all that sprang from the motions of the flesh. A catalogue of things is given which were to be practically *put off*, because the old man had been *put off* with his deeds. Then having *put on* the new man, a catalogue of things is given which in consistency therewith were to be *put on* (the display of Christ, who is in each one ') : above all things was *love*. Peace was to *rule* their hearts, and the word of Christ to *dwell* in them ; helping one another with their songs. Exhortations follow to wives, husbands, children, fathers, and servants. Practical Christianity should be manifest in every station of life.

Chapter IV.

Exhortations to masters, and then to all. Tychicus and Onesimus would declare to them the affairs of Paul. Salutations follow. The epistle was to be read to the church of the Laodiceans, and some epistle coming to them from Laodicea was to be read at Colossae. (Perhaps the epistle to the Ephesians was being circulated from church to church.) A message to Archippus : the salutation by the hand of Paul, and a request to remember his bonds close the epistle with " Grace be with you. Amen."

Summary of Outline

1: 1-14	Paul's interest in the Colossians
1: 15-29	The glory of Christ's person and work
2: 1-23	Christ the answer to doctrinal errors
3: 1-4: 18	Union with Christ the basis of Christian living

Commentary

Colossians 1: 1-29

1:1-8

The Apostolic Greeting

Verses 1 - 3 Paul's pastoral solicitude

Paul identified himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. The expression “through the will of God” could indicate that his call to be an apostle was from God and independent of any human agency (Galatians 1:1) or that his receiving the apostleship was an expression of God’s unmerited favour. (1 Corinthians 15:9, 10; Ephesians 3:7, 8) Paul associated his young fellow worker Timothy with himself and referred to him as “the brother.” (1:1) In this case, the definite article “the” may be significant, revealing the apostle’s high regard for his loyal partner as “the brother” without equal. (Compare Philippians 2:19-22.)

Although Paul had not personally proclaimed the message about God’s Son in Colossae, he was deeply concerned about the believers in that city. He addressed them as “holy ones and believing brothers in Christ.” As “holy ones,” they were God’s people enjoying a pure standing before the heavenly Father on the basis of their faith in his Son. The adjective *pistós* may mean either “believing” or “faithful.” Paul could have been expressing his confidence in the Colossians as “faithful” or trustworthy brothers or acknowledging them as fellow sons of God having faith. As “brothers in Christ,” they were at one with him as members of his body. Paul included his customary prayerful expression, “Favour to you and peace from God our Father.” The designation “favour,” “grace,” or “unmerited kindness” would include all the help and guidance God gives to his beloved children, and “peace” would be the inner calmness and tranquillity stemming from the assurance of having his abiding love and care.

The Greek verb for “thank” is first person plural. Paul appears to be using the editorial “we thank,” and the present tense indicates that his expressions of thanks to God are continuing. When praying concerning the Colossians, Paul always thanked “God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” thereby giving God all the credit for the faith and love they had. Upon coming to know concerning their faith in Christ Jesus and the love they had for all the holy ones, Paul began praying for them. Their love must have been revealed in their coming to the aid of those in need. (Compare 1 John 3:14-18; 4:11, 12, 20, 21.) The hope laid up for them in the heavens provided strong motivation for them to maintain their faith in Christ and to express their love for all the holy ones. They had heard

about this hope when the “word” or message of truth, the evangel or glad tidings about God’s Son, was initially proclaimed to them. (1:3)

Verses 4-8 Reasons for Paul’s interest

In being laid up for them in the heavens, the realization of the hope had been secured for them and embraced sharing in all the rewards and blessings that would result from their being united with the Lord Jesus Christ upon his return in glory.

The evangel, which had come to the Colossians, bore fruit in “all the world.” Wherever the message about God’s Son reached people, many of them did respond in faith and so the evangel grew or flourished. This also happened among the recipients of Paul’s letter “from the day” or from the time they heard the glad tidings and came to know the “favour of God in truth” or came to understand what the unmerited kindness of God truly is. This would have included forgiveness of sins on the basis of faith in Christ and becoming members of the beloved family of God’s children, with all the blessings and privileges associated therewith. (1:6)

The Colossians had learned about the favour or grace of God from Ephaphras, whom Paul acknowledged as “our beloved fellow slave” and a “faithful servant of Christ.” Manuscripts vary in referring to Epaphras as a servant of Christ “in your behalf” or “in our behalf.” If “our” is the original reading, this would mean that Epaphras served in Paul’s place, ministering to the Colossians as the apostle would have laboured if he had been in the city. Epaphras had also told Paul about the love of the Colossian believers “in spirit.” The expression “love in spirit” could mean the love that God’s spirit produces or the spiritual love for Paul as their brother whom they had not seen personally. (1:7, 8)

1:9-14

The Apostolic Prayer

Verses 9 – 11 The petitions made

From the time Paul had received news about the Colossian believers, he did not cease praying for them, requesting that they might be filled with the knowledge of God’s will “in all wisdom and spiritual comprehension.” The apostle desired that they be in possession of a full, rounded-out knowledge of God’s will, possessing the wisdom to conduct themselves accordingly and the spiritual comprehension to discern the divine will for them. This would enable them to “walk” or to conduct themselves worthily of the Lord, being fully pleasing to

him, proving themselves to be fruitful in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God. (1:9, 10)

Although “Lord” could denote either God or Christ, the earlier mention of “our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3) provides a basis for concluding that the reference is to God’s Son. To walk worthily of Jesus Christ would also signify maintaining conduct that would please his Father. (See 1 Thessalonians 2:12, where Paul mentions walking worthily of God.) Every “good work” would include providing aid to those in need, maintaining praiseworthy conduct in dealing with others, and sharing the message about God’s Son. For believers to grow in the knowledge of God would require continual development in their relationship with their heavenly Father as his beloved children.

Paul prayed for the Colossians to be in possession of the fullness of divine power, “being made strong in all strength according to the might of [God’s] glory.” The expression “might of God’s glory” is indicative of a source of power beyond comprehension and of incomparable greatness. It is a glorious or magnificent might. In the letter to the Ephesians (1:19-21), this power is revealed as having been at work in raising Christ from the dead and seating him at his Father’s right hand in an exalted state far above all existing and future ruling authorities. Strengthened with such incomparable might, the Colossians would be equipped “for all endurance and patience, with joy.” (1:11) When faced with trials and suffering, they would be able to bear up without giving way to bitter complaining or wanting to retaliate. They would be able to maintain an inner joy, knowing that they pleased God and Christ, suffered for the right reason, were being refined through their trials, and had the assurance of sharing with Christ in his glory. (Compare Matthew 5:10-12; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 2:20, 21; 4:12-16; see the Notes section for additional comments on verse 11.)

Verses 12-14 The name in which the petition is made

The Colossians had strong reason for thanking the Father, as he made them fit (or, according to the reading of a number of manuscripts, “called” them) to share in the “inheritance of the holy ones in the light.” As “holy ones” or God’s cleansed people, they would be sharers in the “inheritance” promised to all who belong to him or to all who are his children. That inheritance is “in the light,” being markedly separate from the kind of defilement and impurity associated with darkness. “From the authority of darkness,” the Father rescued all who responded in faith to the message about his Son and transferred them “into the kingdom of the Son of his love.” In Christ or in a state of oneness with him, believers are redeemed, delivered from servitude to sin, and forgiven of their transgressions. (1:12-14)

1:15-17

Christ's deity and creatorship

Verse 15a Christ's deity

Verses 15b – 17 Christ's creatorship

Having ceased to be a part of the world of mankind alienated from God, they no longer find themselves in the realm of darkness under the authority of Satan. (Compare Acts 26:18.) They have been taken out of that realm of darkness and transferred into the realm of light, the realm where Jesus Christ is their Lord and King. As persons forgiven of their sins and approved children of God, they enjoy the benefits of being in the royal realm of God's beloved Son, which benefits include his loving care, concern, aid, and guidance. Upon Christ's return in glory, they would enter into the fullness of the royal inheritance.

The Son is the "image of the invisible God," in every way being exactly like his Father or his Father's very imprint. Therefore, seeing the Son is just like seeing the Father. (John 1:14; Hebrews 1:3) The Son is the "firstborn of all creation, because in him all things were created." The expression "in him" could signify that the Father, as the Author of creation, committed to his Son the work of creation, constituting the Son the direct cause of the creation. This means that all creation owes its existence to the Son. Accordingly, in relation to the creation, he occupies the preeminent position, possessing the foremost status associated with being the firstborn (including heirship and lordship). The creation includes "all things in the heavens and upon the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether rulers or authorities. All things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." As all creation owes its existence to the Son, any power or authority associated with the creation is also owing to him and inferior to his. The expression "through him" identifies the Son as the agent of creation, whereas "for him" or, literally, "into him," appears to reveal him as the one in whom all creation finds its purpose. (1:15, 16) The German *Gute Nachricht Bibel* makes this sense of "into him" explicit (*alles findet in ihm sein letztes Ziel* ["everything finds its final goal in him"]). "He is the goal of creation, " All things were created for Him. He is the sustainer of creation. "In Him all things hold together."

In his creative role, the Son is before all things and is also the one on whom creation depends. (1:17) The Greek word *synístemi*, which appears to denote "hold together," may be understood to describe the Son as the one who unifies

and sustains all creation, holding everything in its respective place. (Compare Hebrews 1:3.)

1: 18-19

Christ's headship over the church

Verse 18a He is Head of the church

Verses 18b – 19 He is the beginning of the new creation

The “church” or the entire community of believers is Christ’s body. Of this body, he is the head, for all members function under his guidance and direction. He is the “beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that he might become first in all things.” The designation “beginning,” as the context suggests, points to the Son as the one through whom all things had their start. In being the “firstborn from the dead,” he stands in a unique relationship to the dead. He was the first to rise with a glorified body and thus also came to occupy the position of “firstborn,” for he is the Lord of the dead through whom they are restored to life. (Romans 14:9) Accordingly, in creating all things and in being the first to rise in an immortal, incorruptible body, God’s Son is preeminent or “first in all things.” (1:18)

It pleased God to have “all the fullness” dwell in his Son. He is the exact representation of his Father, with nothing lacking of the divine glory, wisdom, compassion, purity, justice, and love. (1:19)

1:20-23

Christ's work of reconciliation

Verses 20-21 The beginning of reconciliation

Sin alienates humans from God. The Father therefore took the initiative in providing the basis for a reconciliation, sending his Son to the earth. The blood of Christ (literally, “the blood of his cross”) effected peace, as all who embraced his sacrifice for them gained forgiveness of sins. (1:20) Through Christ, those in a state of alienation became reconciled to his Father. The things upon the earth and the things in the heavens thus ceased to be at enmity and were brought into a harmonious condition of peace. (Compare Ephesians 1:10.) The sinner is reconciled (absolutely changed) by divine power from a state of hostility and aversion toward God to loving trust (Romans 5:10; 11:15 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Verses 22-23 The purpose of reconciliation

Formerly, before responding in faith to the message about Christ, the Colossians had been in a state of alienation from and at enmity with God. In thought and deed, they acted contrary to his ways. But in Christ's "body of flesh through death," they had been reconciled. Christ's sacrificial death in his body of flesh provided the basis for reconciliation with God. As to the objective of this reconciliation, Paul continued, "to present you holy and unblemished and blameless before him." Instead of continuing in a defiled and alienated condition before God, they, in faith, had accepted Christ's sacrifice for them and had been made holy or pure as persons cleansed by Christ's precious blood and reckoned as having no blemish or blame attached to them. (1:21, 22) To maintain their approved state, the Colossians needed to remain or persevere in the faith, solidly grounded and firmly fixed, not being moved away "from the hope of the evangel" which they heard. The evangel or message about God's Son included the promise of sharing with him in his glory at his return. Hope in the fulfilment of this promise served as strong encouragement for the Colossians to persevere in faith, never wavering in maintaining unqualified trust in God and his Son. (1:23)

After mentioning that the evangel or glad tidings about Jesus Christ had been preached "in all creation under heaven" or in the then-known world, Paul spoke of himself as having become its servant. He could speak of himself in this manner because he laboured to advance the good news about Christ. (1:23)

Although he had not personally ministered in Colossae, Paul wrote, "Now I am rejoicing in the sufferings for you." The fact that affliction, which included being imprisoned and chained, had come to be his lot gave him reason for inner joy, as this had happened to him on account of faithfully advancing the cause of Christ. In particular, this involved Paul's labouring primarily among the non-Jewish peoples and teaching that faith in the Son of God, not adherence to the Mosaic law, led to a divinely approved standing. As a result, Paul became an object of intense hostility to unbelieving fellow Jews. (Compare Acts 18:13; 21:27-29; 22:17-22) Because his suffering for the name of Christ mainly came about on account of being an apostle to the non-Jewish peoples, he could speak of suffering for them. This included the non-Jewish believers in Colossae. (1:24; and, Ephesians 5:27.) The end in view in Christ's reconciling work, realised in His finished sacrifice, is to present the believer holy, faultless and beyond reproof before God.

1: 24-29

Christ's glory proclaimed in Paul's ministry

Verses 24-25a By Paul's suffering

The apostle added that he was filling up the things “lacking of the tribulations of the Christ in my flesh for his body, which is the church” or the community of believers. (1:24) Paul could speak of filling up a lack, for the affliction he endured in his body had not come to an end. He knew that more suffering lay ahead prior to his completing his course in faithfulness. As a member of Christ's body, the congregation of believers, Paul referred to his “tribulations” or afflictions as being those “of Christ,” the head of the body. Whatever affects the members of the body also affects the head, and the Son of God considers the distress and suffering of his disciples as his own. (Matthew 25:34-45)

Paul's role in the “church” or the community of believers was that of a “minister” or “servant,” diligently working to advance their spiritual well-being. God had given him a stewardship, duty, or responsibility for believers, including the Colossians, “to fulfil the word of God.” (1:25a) His “fulfilling” God's word could mean making it fully known, not holding back any part of the message believers needed to know. (Compare Acts 20:20.)

Verses 25d-29 By his fulfilling the word of God

In past ages and past generations, this “word” or message proved to be a hidden mystery. It was hidden away or concealed from everyone, for the mystery was not revealed as it finally was to those who became “holy ones” or God's people in the first century after Jesus' death and resurrection. To the “holy ones,” God chose to make known “the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” The expression “the riches of the glory of this mystery” apparently describes the magnificence or the grandeur of this previously hidden message revealed in all its fullness or richness. Paul referred to the revealed mystery as being “Christ in you.” The Colossians, though formerly people of the nations without God or hope, came into a relationship with his beloved Son. Christ made his home with them, working within them to aid them to reflect the image of his Father in attitude, word, and action. As the head, he came to be attached to them as members of his body. Furthermore, they would become sharers in his glory or his matchless magnificence as the possessor of all divinely granted authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, Paul rightly called Christ “the hope of glory” or the one upon whom the fulfilment of their hope to share in his glory depended. (1:26, 27)

Paul's proclamation focused on Christ, and he did not limit his teaching to a select few. The apostle admonished "every man" or every person, which would have included his telling them about Christ's return in glory and how to escape the wrath to come upon those defiantly persisting in unbelief. (1 Thessalonians 1:10) The apostle also taught "every man" or every person "in all wisdom." His teaching harmonized with divinely granted wisdom and included all essential aspects of the message about God's Son. (Compare Matthew 28:20; Acts 13:23-41; 20:24-27; 2 Peter 3:15, 16.) Regarding the objective of his admonition and teaching, Paul added, "that we might present every man [everyone] perfect in Christ." For all to be "perfect in Christ" would denote their being full-grown members of Christ's body inseparably attached to him as their head and at one with him. (Compare John 15:4-10; 17:23.) Having this noble objective in view, Paul laboured with all his might. Although personally exerting himself strenuously, he did not do so in his own strength but with the aid of Christ's power at work in him.

Notes on Chapter 1:

After "God our Father" (1:2), other manuscripts add, "and [the] Lord Jesus Christ," "and our Lord Jesus Christ," and "and Jesus Christ our Lord."

The opening words of verse 5 (*diá tén elpída* ["because of the hope"]) could be linked with "we thank" in verse 3. It seems preferable, however, to view the words "because of the hope" as continuing the thought expressed in verse 4. A number of translations make this significance explicit. "We have heard of your faith in Christ and your love for all of God's people, because what you hope for is kept safe for you in heaven." (CEV) "When the true message, the Good News, first came to you, you heard about the hope it offers. So your faith and love are based on what you hope for, which is kept safe for you in heaven." (GNT, Second Edition)

A number of translations punctuate verses 11 and 12 in a way that conveys a different meaning for the expression "with joy." Instead of associating the joy with endurance and patience, these translations link the joy to the giving of thanks, using such renderings as "joyfully giving thanks" (NIV, NRSV), "to give joyful thanks" (REB), and "giving thanks with joy" (NJB) In the letter to the Philippians (1:4), Paul does speak about his praying "with joy." Endurance of suffering with joy, however, figures prominently in the Scriptures, and this provides a sound basis for concluding that the passage in Colossians has this significance.

After “Father” (in verse 12), certain manuscripts add “of Christ” or “and God,” or read “God the Father” and “the God and Father.” With reference to “fitted,” the oldest extant manuscripts say “you” (with specific reference to the Colossians), but many later manuscripts read “us.”

The style of the Greek text for verses 15 through 20 suggests that the words may have been part of a hymn. A number of translations have set off these verses according to a poetic arrangement (examples being CEV, HCSB, NAB, NJB).

In verse 19, the one who was pleased is not identified, and translators commonly have supplied “God” as the subject. When God is not supplied, the passage (1:19, 20) could be rendered as in the *New American Bible*, “For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things for him, making peace by the blood of his cross [through him], whether those on earth or those in heaven.” This rendering personifies “fullness” and could be taken to mean that Christ reconciled all to himself. As expressed in other parts of the Scriptures, however, humans are reconciled to God through Christ, and this is more likely the meaning in the letter to the Colossians. Therefore, God may rightly be understood as being pleased to have all fullness dwell in his Son and through him to effect the reconciliation. (Romans 5:10; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Ephesians 2:16)

A literal reading of verse 21 would be, “And once being alienated and enemies to the mind in the evil works.” In an effort to make the passage more explicit and understandable, translators have added words and conveyed varying meanings. “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.” (NIV) “And you who once were alienated and hostile in mind because of evil deeds, he has now reconciled...” (NAB) “And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled...” (NRSV) “Formerly you yourselves were alienated from God, his enemies in heart and mind, as your evil deeds showed.” (REB) “You used to be far from God. Your thoughts made you his enemies, and you did evil things.” (CEV) “At one time you were far away from God and were his enemies because of the evil things you did and thought.” (GNT, Second Edition) “This includes you who were once so far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions...” (NLT) “At one time you were separated from God. You were his enemies in your minds, and the evil things you did were against God.” (NCV)

In Luke 3:38, the first human, Adam, is identified as being a son of God. Through an act of disobedience to his God and Father, Adam alienated himself from him. As a result, all of his descendants came to be part of a human family

estranged from God. The evidence for the state of alienation is the internal awareness humans have of being flawed or sinful, unable to be the kind of persons they would like to be. The Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479 BCE) referred to this internal awareness when admitting his personal concern to be “failure to cultivate virtue, failure to go more deeply into what I have learned, inability, when I am told what is right, to move to where it is, and inability to reform myself when I have defects.” (Analects, Book VII, 3, translated by D. C. Lau) The flawed human condition repeatedly disrupts good relationships with fellow humans and, in its extreme manifestations, is responsible for horrendous acts of inhumanity.

Although permitting the first human pair to become parents, with their offspring becoming part of a flawed human family, God did not bar their children and later descendants from having a relationship with him. If they desired that relationship and wanted to do what is right, he responded to them as their loving and caring Father and God. (Compare Acts 10:34, 35; 14:14-17; 17:24-28; Hebrews 11:4-38.) Then, by sending his Son to the earth, he reached out to humans everywhere to cease being in a condition of estrangement and come to enjoy the dignified status of being his beloved children. By letting his Son suffer and voluntarily die a shameful death, God revealed the seriousness of sin and the greatness of his love for the human family in a way that nothing else could. By accepting the sacrificial death of Christ as the basis for being forgiven of sin and then ceasing to be burdened by the flawed human condition preventing an approved relationship with God, the individual is reconciled to him. For believers, the greatness of God’s forgiveness prompts a response of love and gratitude, and what that forgiveness involved on the part of God and Christ impresses on them the matchless depth of divine love. In the case of the individual believer, the personal conviction is: “God sent his Son because he loved me. God, through Christ, pardoned me. Christ died for me.” This conviction provides the motivation for wanting to live life as an obedient and loving child of God, fully reconciled to him.

Verse 29 does not identify Christ as the source of the energy energizing Paul with power. In the previous verse, however, Christ is mentioned and in his first letter to Timothy (1:12), Paul specifically speaks of being strengthened by the Lord Jesus Christ. A number of translations have, in fact, inserted Christ. “To this end I am toiling strenuously with all the energy and power of Christ at work in me.” (REB) “To get this done I toil and struggle, using the mighty strength which Christ supplies and which is at work in me.” (GNT, Second Edition) “I work very hard at this, as I depend on Christ’s mighty power that works within me.” (NLT) “To do this, I work and struggle, using Christ’s great strength that works so powerfully in me.” (NCV)

Colossians 2: 1-23

2:1-7

Christ the answer to doctrinal error

Verses 1 – 2a-b The conflict with error

Although Paul had not personally visited the believers in Colossae, Laodicea, and numerous other places, he wanted them to know about his great “struggle” for those who had not seen his face “in the flesh.” As evident from this particular letter, he was deeply concerned that proponents of error would not succeed in leading fellow believers astray. His “struggle” was one of anxious care or mental wrestling for his brothers in Christ, which struggle would have been reflected in the intensity of his prayers for them and in the depth of thought and the great effort his letters to them required. (2:1)

Erroneous teaching can have an unsettling effect on the “heart” or the deep inner self. (Compare Acts 15:1, 2, 24; Ephesians 4:14.) Paul’s objective, therefore, was to comfort or to reassure the hearts of the Colossians, leading to an inner calm. False teaching is divisive, gives rise to bitter arguments, breeds mistrust, and alienates those who are inclined to believe it from those who oppose it. The apostle was concerned that believers remain “united in love.” He wanted them to be in possession of “all the riches of the certainty of comprehension” or the truly valuable confidence from knowing that they correctly understood “the mystery of God,” summed up in Christ and relating to all that the Father accomplished through his Son. The spiritual struggle was to the end that God’s people at Colossae and Laodicea might be comforted or consoled by the truth, 2a; that they might be united in love, 2b; that they might have full assurance of salvation brought by understanding the mystery of God, which centres in the grace of God, 2c.

Verses 2c – 7 The answer to error

Paul recognized the inestimable value resulting from being confident about possessing the correct understanding, as this serves to protect one from being deceived. (2:2c)

Christ’s teaching and example provide believers with everything needed to conduct themselves as God’s beloved children. Christ is the depository of “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” In saying what he did, Paul wanted to shield the Colossians from being deluded by plausible or specious arguments. (2:3, 4)

Even though he was not “present in flesh” or personally with the community of believers in Colossae, he was with them “in spirit.” They were in his thoughts, and what he had learned about them prompted him to rejoice. Evidently based on what Epaphras had told him, Paul could see their “order” and the firmness of their faith in Christ. Their “order” may be understood to mean that their conduct harmonized with their identifying as Christ’s disciples. They were not disorderly like certain idlers in Thessalonica who, instead of working, injected themselves into the private affairs of others. (2 Thessalonians 3:11) Unlike some in Corinth who were disruptive when believers assembled, the Colossians observed proper decorum. (1 Corinthians 14:20-35) Their faith or unqualified trust in Christ as the Son of God and his sacrifice for them proved to be stable or strong.

When accepting Jesus Christ, the Colossians would have acknowledged him as their Lord and God’s Son who died for them and whom the Father raised from the dead. In keeping with their original acceptance or confession, they were to continue to walk “in him.” This would require their conducting themselves in harmony with his example and teaching, submitting themselves to him as their Lord. Their walk would be “in him” or in a state of oneness with him as members of his body, the community of believers of which he is the head. For them to be “rooted” in Christ would denote their being firmly and securely attached to him. He would also be their solid foundation. Inseparably united to him, they would be “built up” in him, continuing to grow or progress in their spiritual life. (2:6, 7)

2: 8-13

The peril of false philosophy

Verse 8 The warning

The “faith,” as the Colossians were taught it, incorporated all that they had learned about Jesus Christ and his Father. In this faith or body of belief, they were to be confirmed, established, or made strong. In view of all the blessings in which they shared and which they continued to experience because of their faith in Christ, the Colossians had ample reason to abound in thanksgiving. They needed to watch, being ever vigilant, lest someone make them captives, gaining control over them as if they were booty to be carried off. Paul identified philosophy, empty delusion, and human traditions as the means by which they could be victimized. Philosophy here would include speculative reasoning that appeared to reflect wisdom but was, in actuality, harmful foolishness. Although “empty” or hollow, the reasoning or argumentation would appear to be sound and therein would lie its persuasive power to delude. Proponents of error relied on “tradition,” second-hand information that had been handed down from

previous generations and accepted without scrutiny. The empty, speculative thoughts had their source in the “elements of the world,” not in Christ. (2:8)

Verse 9-13 The remedy

A number of modern translations have interpretively rendered the Greek expression *stoicheía toú kósmou* as “elemental spirits of the universe” (NRSV, REB) or “elemental powers of the world” (NAB). Those who did not know the true God did believe that numerous celestial spirits exercised control over them, and this had an enslaving effect. In view of the mention of “traditions of men,” however, it seems preferable to regard the “elements of the world” as being the basic principles operative in the world alienated from God. Any belief system that ignores Christ, implies that he is not the depository of all knowledge and wisdom, or conflicts with his example and teaching is of the world. (Compare 1 John 4:5, 6; also see the comments on these verses in the Commentary section.) The Colossians, therefore, had good reason to be on guard against anyone who did not have a proper view of Christ. It is uniquely in Christ that “all the fullness of divinity dwells bodily.” Embodied in him is everything that his Father is, or completely present in Christ is all that constitutes the divine. (2:9)

“In him” or by reason of their being at one with Christ, the Colossian believers shared in his matchless fullness. Therefore, with reference to their spiritual life, they lacked nothing and needed no supplementing from other sources. Further emphasizing the greatness of Christ, Paul added that he is “the head of all dominion and authority.” Accordingly, any other source for claimed enlightenment—either from the human or the spirit realm—would be vastly inferior and, in fact, injurious. (2:10)

By incorporation into Christ as members of his body or “in him,” the Colossians had been “circumcised.” This was not an operation performed with hands or of a physical nature but proved to be a removal of the “body of flesh” or the old sinful self. Paul called the nonphysical circumcision “the circumcision of Christ” or one which God’s Son effected. (2:11)

Before their baptism, the Colossians had repented of their sins. Then, “in baptism,” they were “buried” with Christ, dying to their former life of sin. “Through” or by reason of their faith in the active power of God who raised Christ from the dead, they were also raised in Christ to a newness of life. As persons “in Christ” as members of his body, they were no longer burdened by the old sinful self. That old sinful self had been stripped away and a new life as children of God and brothers of Christ had begun. When calling attention to God’s raising Christ from the dead, Paul revealed the greatness of the change

and the divine power at work in bringing it about at the time the Colossians were buried with Christ in baptism and raised in him. That this included more than the outward act of baptism on the part of the Colossians is indicated by the reference to their faith in God's power. (2:12)

In the past, they had been dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of their flesh. Although alive physically, they were condemned sinners with no future prospect other than a short life that would end at death. In their uncircumcised state, the Colossians were not in possession of the covenant relationship with God that circumcision represented. God, however, made them alive together with his Son, forgiving them (and all others who responded in faith) all their transgressions. (2:13)

2:14-17

The peril of legalism

Verses 14-15 Legal observances were done away in Christ

The Greek word *cheirógraphon* denotes a "handwritten document" and, more specifically, a certificate of indebtedness or record of debts. Decrees or legal requirements were linked to that "handwritten document." Including himself, Paul wrote respecting this document that it "stood against us." It appears that the apostle here referred to the Mosaic law with its specific decrees or legal demands and which made those unable to live up to the legal claims hopeless debtors. God wiped out this record of debt to the Mosaic law. He took it out of the way by "nailing it to the cross." Accordingly, both Jews and non-Jews gained an approved standing with God through faith in his arrangement for forgiveness of sins on the basis of his Son's sacrificial death. Through the victory his Son attained by his death, the Father stripped dominions and authorities of their power, openly or publicly exposed them, and triumphed over them. Thus the powers of darkness that people in the first century commonly feared and believed as needing to be appeased through the observance of special days and rituals were defeated, ceasing to have any hold on those who accepted the Son of God as their Lord and the one through whom forgiveness of sins had been made possible. (2:14, 15)

The Father, through his Son, had liberated the Colossians. Therefore, they were not to permit others to judge or condemn them on the basis of what they ate or drank or the observance of a festival, new moon, or Sabbath. Although the Mosaic law set forth regulations about food and drink as well as weekly, monthly, and yearly observances, these outward aspects of worship were but a shadow of a new arrangement centring in Christ. (Exodus 23:10-17; Leviticus

11:2-44; 23:3-44; Numbers 6:2, 3) They were like the shadow cast by a tangible object. To Christ belongs the reality or substance. (2:16, 17), the believer is complete in Christ and has been accepted by Him.

2:19-19

The peril of false mysticism

Verse 18 The form of the error

Verse 19 The reason for the error

The Greek word *katabrabeúo* could either denote to “decide against” or to “deprive one of a prize.” In verse 18, translators have variously rendered the term. “Let no one disqualify you.” (NAB) “Do not be cheated of your prize.” (NJB) The apostle’s thought appears to be that the Colossians should not let those whom he next described deceive them, thereby depriving them of what is rightfully theirs as children of God. The teachers of error either insisted on self-abasement or they feigned humility, as if not worthy to approach God directly, and advocated the worship of angels. These teachers of falsehood appear to have drawn on claimed visions to support their views. The Greek term *embateúo*, which follows “the things seen,” may be understood to mean “to enter,” “to take a stand,” or “to enter into” or “to investigate.” Translators have variously rendered the Greek text as signifying “access to some visionary world” (REB), going “into great detail about what he has seen” (NIV), “taking his stand on visions” (NAB), “pinning every hope on visions received” (NJB), “dwelling on visions” (NRSV), and bragging “about seeing visions” (CEV). The minds of the proponents of error gave evidence of a fleshly or unspiritual condition, as they had an inflated view of themselves. Possibly this hollow conceit arose from the things they claimed to have seen or their visions. They did not hold fast to the head or to Christ and, therefore, lost everything needful for the growth and nourishment of the members of his body. From him alone as the head, the entire body, with its joints and ligaments or unifying elements, is supplied and grows with the growth God gives. (2:18, 19) Apart from God’s Son, no spiritual growth exists.

2:20-23

The peril of asceticism

Verse 20a The believer’s emancipation from legalistic ordinances

Verses 20b – 23 Result of this emancipation

At the time of their baptism, the Colossian believers had died with Christ and came to enjoy a newness of life as liberated children of God. Therefore, they also died to the “elements of the world” or to the basic principles and beliefs that had formerly governed how they conducted themselves. Their former status was like that of small children in a state of ignorance and subjected to commands such as “don’t taste,” “don’t touch,” and “don’t handle.” Because of what Christ had done for them, the Colossians ceased to be persons needing to be treated like little children respecting matters of food and drink. They were no longer a part of the world alienated from God. Why, then, should they live as still in the world, submitting themselves to commands not to handle, taste, or touch things that perish when used? Upon being consumed, food and drink cease to be, and the regulations respecting such matters were “the commands and teachings of men.” (2:20-22)

These commands and teachings seemingly had an appearance of wisdom. There would have been a certain air of impressiveness about the self-imposed piety, with a focus on self-abasement and asceticism. In reality, though, a humanly devised routine of worship, a show of humility, and a severe discipline of the body had no value when it came to satisfying the cravings of the flesh. The sensual desires and passions remained unabated. (2:23)

Notes on Chapter 2:

With reference to the mystery (2:2), the words “of God, Christ” have the oldest extant manuscript support. Other manuscript readings include “of God,” “of Christ,” “of God and Christ,” “of God, which is Christ,” “of God [the] Father in Christ Jesus,” “of the God and Father of Christ,” and “of the God and Father and of Christ.”

In 2:5, the Greek word for “order” (*táxis*) can also denote “rank,” “post,” or “position.” This significance is reflected in the interpretive rendering of the *Revised English Bible*, “I may be absent in body, but in spirit I am with you, and rejoice to see your unbroken ranks and the solid front which your faith in Christ presents.”

There is considerable uncertainty about what may have been the original reading of the concluding words in 2:7. Manuscript readings include “abounding in thanksgiving,” “abounding in it [faith] in thanksgiving,” and “abounding in him [Christ] in thanksgiving.”

In verse 13, manuscripts read either “made you [the Colossians] alive together with him” or “made us [believers] alive together with him.” There are also manuscripts that do not include the pronoun “you” or “us.”

In verses 13 through 15, the Greek text does not specifically refer to God as the one acting. The previous reference to God in verse 12 and the context, however, make it clear that the reference is to the Father. In the case of verse 15, some translations have inserted Christ. “There Christ defeated all powers and forces. He let the whole world see them being led away as prisoners when he celebrated his victory.” (CEV) “And on that cross Christ freed himself from the power of the spiritual rulers and authorities; he made a public spectacle of them by leading them as captives in his victory procession.” (GNT, Second Edition) In the absence of Christ as an antecedent, it would appear preferable to regard the Father as the subject also in verse 15. Other translations have made this explicit. “In this way, God disarmed the evil rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross of Christ.” (NLT) “God stripped the spiritual rulers and powers of their authority. With the cross, he won the victory and showed the world that they were powerless.” (NCV)

In verse 15, the Greek term *thriambeúo* has been variously understood to mean “triumph over,” “lead in triumph,” “lead in a triumphal procession,” or “disgrace,” and this accounts for a variety of renderings. The word *staurós* does not appear in this verse, but translators, on the basis of verse 14, have often inserted “cross” for the masculine pronoun in the dative case (*autó*), which pronoun could be understood to refer to Christ. *The New Jerusalem Bible*, reads “him” and renders the passage, “He has stripped the sovereignties and the ruling forces, and paraded them in public, behind him in his triumphal procession.” *The New Life Bible* interpretively paraphrases the verse, “God took away the power of the leaders of this world and the powers of darkness. He showed them to the world. The battle was won over them through Christ.”

Colossians 3: 1-25 and 4: 1-18

3: 1-4

Union with Christ and a holy or sanctified life

Verses 1 and 2 Basis of a holy or sanctified life, and exhortation to that life

The opening word “if” (*ei*) here has the sense of “since.” Having been raised with Christ to a newness of life, believers should focus on the things above, where Christ is seated at God’s right hand. This would call for them to have noble thoughts, not being preoccupied with matters limited to the earthly sphere

of life, such as regulations respecting food and drink. Their minds should be on the things above, the things outside the earthly sphere, as their Lord is above and their hope is to be united with him. (3:1, 2)

Verses 3-4 Reasons for these exhortations

Paul again reminded the Colossians that they had “died,” ceasing to be the persons they once were as humans without God and any dependable hope. Theirs was now a life “hidden with Christ in God.” As a life “hidden with Christ,” it is intimately bound up with him. Believers are part of Christ’s body and, through him, have received a newness of life as beloved children of God. By reason of the Son’s oneness with the Father, this new life is “in God” as its ultimate source. (3:3)

With reference to the manifestation of Christ, manuscripts vary in referring to God’s Son as “your life” or “our life.” On account of Christ, believers enjoy a newness of life. He is their life. Through him they have come into possession of this life, and for him they live. At his manifestation, they are assured of being united with him and revealed in the transcendent glory of incorruptible or imperishable bodies in the sinless state. (3:4; compare 1 Corinthians 15:50-54.)

3:5-7

Pronouncing death on a sinful life

Verse 5a Death sentence declared

Verses 5b – 7 Results of failure to pronounce the death

In view of the indescribable splendour in which believers are destined to share, their conduct should be a reflection of their hope. Paul urged the Colossians to deaden their earthly body members, forcibly restraining them from engaging in divinely disapproved practices. He then listed sexual immorality, uncleanness or impure, defiling conduct (likely of a sexual nature), passion or lust, evil or corrupt desires, and covetousness. The Greek word for “covetousness” (*pleonexía*) denotes an inordinate desire for more than would be one’s rightful due or possession and may also be defined as meaning “greediness” or “insatiability.” It is an addiction for wanting more. The apostle referred to it as being idolatry. The object of the insatiable craving becomes the individual’s exclusive focus and thus an idol, and the greedy desire for the object is an idolatrous fixation. God’s wrath or his retributive judgment is certain to be directed against any kind of moral corruption. According to many ancient manuscripts, God’s wrath is to come “upon the sons of disobedience” or upon those who choose to live contrary to his ways. (3:5, 6) ‘Evil desire’ is the

insatiable craving or burning desire generated by such indulgence. ‘Greed’ the desire to have more and more, is idolatry because it relegates God to a secondary place or ostracises Him altogether (Ephesians 5:5). These sins bring ‘the wrath of God’ upon the unsaved, 6. Pollution by them will result in severe chastening of believers, 7. (1 Corinthians 3:12-17, 5:1-5).

3:8-17

Putting on the new self

Verses 8-9 Putting off the old

Verses 10-17 Putting on the new

Before accepting the message about God’s Son, the Colossians had “walked” or conducted themselves as morally corrupt persons. Continuing to direct his words to the Colossians, Paul added, “you lived in these,” meaning either that they lived the kind of life typical of the moral wrongs he had mentioned or that they lived among those who practiced such things and conducted themselves as they did. As persons whose lives were bound up with God’s Son, they needed to rid themselves of the attitudes, speech, and actions associated with their past conduct. The Colossian believers were to banish anger or a bad temper, fury or a tendency to flare up in rage, depravity or vice, defamatory or blasphemous speech, and filthy language. As members of the body of Christ, they were to speak the truth to one another and not be guilty of speaking lies to fellow believers. (Compare Ephesians 4:25.) Like a garment that is taken off, the “old man” or old self and all associated corrupt attitudes, words, and actions needed to be stripped away. Believers should then clothe themselves with the “new man” or the new self. That new self is “renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.” This is indicative of continual growth in ever closer conformity to the image of God. He is the “creator” of the new self, effecting the growth and transformation by means of his spirit. (3:7-10) The process of remaking, reshaping, or moulding, with ever-increasing knowledge in view, continues throughout the believer’s earthly sojourn. The apostle did not specify whether this knowledge relates to knowing God (a progressive growth in one’s personal relationship with him) or the ever-increasing knowledge of what constitutes a life that honours him and his beloved Son. As children of God enjoying a newness of life, the old distinctions (“Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, foreigner, Sythian, slave [regarded as a thing and not a person in the Roman world] and freeman”) that divided people one from another had been abolished. The Greek word for “foreigner” is *bárbaros* and basically denotes one whose speech would be unintelligible to the native populace, or one who did not speak Greek and would have been regarded as uncultured. The

Sythians were known for being extremely fierce and cruel. In the case of believers, social, cultural, and class differences no longer matter, “but Christ [is] all and in all.” For the believer whose hope and life is intimately bound up with him, Christ is everything. As the head, his guidance and influence are at work in all the members of his body and so he is “in all.” (3:11)

The Colossian believers were “chosen of God” to be his people. They were “holy” because of having been pardoned of their sins on the basis of their faith in Christ and were beloved of God as his adopted children. In keeping with their changed status, they needed to be fittingly attired with traits reflective of their newness of life. In a cruel world where pity was woefully lacking, Paul admonished the Colossians to clothe themselves with affectionate compassion, kindness, humility (often reflected in a readiness to serve others), gentleness or considerateness, and patience or forbearance. Although forgiven of their sins, believers are still subject to the pressures exerted by their flawed condition as humans. Therefore, as Paul admonished the Colossians, they needed to be tolerant or patient with one another and forgiving whenever there might be an occasion for complaint. As the Lord (according to other manuscripts, Christ or God) has lovingly pardoned believers, so should they. Upon all the noble attributes he mentioned, Paul urged the Colossians to put on love, for love is the strongest unifying force. The apostle referred to love as the “bond of perfection” or the perfect bond. (3:12-14)

The “peace of Christ” would be the inner tranquillity of which he is the source. For the “peace of Christ” to serve as the arbiter, umpire, or controlling element in the heart would mean that the deep inner self would be in a state of calmness stemming from the assurance of Christ’s abiding guidance, care, concern, and aid. The “peace of Christ” banishes internal feelings of undue disquietude, alarm, or foreboding. In one body, believers, as individual members thereof, were called to enjoy this peace, and Paul encouraged the Colossians to continue to be thankful. They had good reason to be grateful for all the blessings they had received and continued to enjoy upon accepting the glad tidings about God’s Son. (3:15)

For the “word” or message of Christ to dwell richly in the Colossians would signify its having become part of them in all its wealth or fullness, guiding or influencing their thoughts, speech, and conduct. There is a possibility that “richly” is to be linked with the words “in all wisdom.” This could mean that believers come into possession of a wealth of wisdom when the message about God’s Son becomes part of their deep inner selves. It seems preferable, however, to regard “in all wisdom” as applying to teaching. Numerous translations convey this significance. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you

richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another.” (NAB) “Teach each other, and advise each other, in all wisdom.” (NJB) “Let the message about Christ completely fill your lives, while you use all your wisdom to teach and instruct each other.” (CEV) The “wisdom” that would be the basis for teaching and admonishing, advising, or instructing would have its source in the “word of Christ.” (3:16)

The words “singing in your hearts to God” (or “Lord,” according to the reading of other manuscripts) probably are to be understood to mean that out of appreciation or gratitude in their hearts or their deep inner selves, the Colossians were to sing. They would sing psalms (compositions contained in the book of Psalms), hymns (praises directed to God), and spiritual songs (compositions dealing with spiritual matters). The mention of hymns and spiritual songs indicates that numerous Christian compositions already existed. (3:16)

Doing all things, whether in word or in deed, in the “name of the Lord Jesus” would denote letting one’s speech and action be of a nature that would honor Jesus Christ as Lord. Believers would never forget their being accountable and indebted to him, for he is the one who died for them. The Father is the ultimate source of all the joys and blessings in which believers share. Appropriately, therefore, they would thank “God the Father” through Christ, thereby appreciatively acknowledging that their standing as God’s children and all the blessings associated therewith have been made possible through the Son. (3:17)

3:18 – 4:6

A heavenly walk and domestic relationship

3:18-21 Wives, husbands, and children

3:22 – 4:1 Servants, masters

4:2-6 General principles

The approved relationship with God and Christ calls for the fulfilment of social duties. For wives, it meant respecting the headship of their husbands, submitting themselves to them. Such submission would involve cooperating with their husbands in caring well for the home and the family. In carrying out their responsibilities, wives would conduct themselves toward their husbands in a manner befitting their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. (3:18)

Husbands should love their wives, imitating Christ’s example of love for his disciples. (Compare Ephesians 5:25-31.) In the event problems or disagreements cropped up, husbands were to avoid becoming embittered toward their wives.

Their heeding Paul's admonition would promote a peaceful home atmosphere, not one repeatedly marred by harsh words and actions. (3:19)

The obedience of children to their parents in everything that could rightfully be required of them also had a spiritual reason. "This is pleasing in the Lord." Exemplary obedience pleases the Lord Jesus Christ and honors him, and it is the right course for all those who are "in the Lord" or at one with him. (3:20)

Paul urged fathers not to irritate their children, which would be the effect of harsh and unreasonable demands, inconsistent treatment of children for infractions, and displays of favouritism. Words and actions that irritate or provoke children could cause them to become dispirited or discouraged, depriving them of joy, a wholesome sense of well-being, and the motivation to be cooperative. (3:21)

Paul urged slaves to be exemplary in obeying their human masters in everything pertaining to their duties. Unlike slaves who rendered "eye service" or worked only when they were being watched and just enough not to incur displeasure, Christian slaves were not to labour merely to curry favour but to do so sincerely, from the heart, out of reverential regard for the Lord Jesus Christ. In whatever they did, they were to put their all into it or their whole "soul," working as for the Lord Jesus Christ and not simply for men. Their serving would be with the knowledge or awareness that he would reward them with the inheritance, having them share in the inheritance of everything that he had been granted. Emphasizing the aspect about whom they were serving, Paul added, "Slave for the Lord Christ." (3:22-24)

Whereas human masters might be unjust, the Son of God would never treat anyone unfairly. Wrongdoers would be repaid in kind, and the Lord Jesus Christ would not show favouritism or partiality. Therefore, Christian slaves could serve conscientiously, honouring him by their exemplary labours and confidently looking to him to right all injustices. (3:25)

Notes on Chapter 3:

In verse 3, P46 (from about 200) and fourth-century Codex Vaticanus do not include the words, "upon the sons of disobedience."

In verse 10, the context is not sufficient to establish the precise meaning of the words "renewed into knowledge" (*anakainoumenon eis epignosin*). This has given rise to a variety of renderings: "moulded afresh unto personal knowledge" (Rotherham), "moulded into full knowledge" (Weymouth), and "brought to know God" (REB).

In verse 15, “peace of Christ” has good manuscript support. Other manuscripts read “peace of God.”

In verse 16, the expression “word of Christ” has strong manuscript support. Other manuscripts read “word of God” or “word of the Lord.”

Instead of “God [the] Father” (verse 17), other manuscripts read “God and Father” and “Father and God.”

Christianity and slavery: Although Paul never condones slavery, arguing to the contrary in Galatians 3:28 that the slave and the free man are one in Christ, he does recognise it as part of the law of the land and an inherent part of Romans culture. As a result, he offers instructions to both slaves and slave owners concerning their behaviour under Christ. This should not be interpreted, however, as an acceptance of the practice (Philemon and Onesimus).

The apostle reminded Christian masters or slave owners that they had an Owner, Master, or Lord in the heavens. They were accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ, requiring that they treat their slaves justly and fairly. (4:1)

Paul admonished the Colossians to “devote” themselves to prayer. The Greek term for “devote” (*proskarteréo*) signifies to have a firm attachment to something or to hold fast to it. In relation to prayer, *proskarteréo* could include the thought of persevering or persisting in and highly appreciating the value and importance of prayer. “Remaining awake in it in thanksgiving” would mean remaining alert and truly heartfelt in prayer, guarding against becoming mechanical and merely repeating words without having the mind and emotions fully engaged. The addition of “in thanksgiving” suggests that a spirit of gratitude for all divine gifts and blessings should accompany prayer. (4:2)

Paul requested the Colossians to pray that God would open to him a “door of the word” or provide him with an opportunity to declare the message about the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wanted to continue declaring “the mystery of Christ,” and found himself in bonds because of having done so. The way in which non-Jewish peoples would become children of God had remained secret or hidden in past generations. The good news about Jesus Christ, however, revealed this mystery. It is the “mystery of Christ,” as it is a disclosed secret that is exclusively bound up with him. Paul wanted to be sure to be able to speak about the “mystery of Christ” in the manner that he should, making it clear to others. Therefore, he requested the Colossians also to include this aspect in their prayers for him. (4:3, 4)

Although enjoying a newness of life as children of God, the Colossians still lived among those who did not share their faith and needed to interact with them on a daily basis. With reference to those outside the community of believers, they needed to “walk in wisdom” or conduct themselves wisely. This would have included being exemplary in all aspects of life and not giving offense, choosing to refrain from activities that may not have been wrong in themselves but were unacceptable in the existing culture. (Compare 1 Corinthians 10:31-33; Titus 2:2-5.) At the same time, Paul encouraged the Colossians to make the best use of the time or opportunity. It would appear that this included using opportunities that might present themselves to share the message about God’s Son. (4:5) A number of translations paraphrase his words to convey this meaning in conjunction with the next verse. “When you are with unbelievers, always make good use of the time. Be pleasant and hold their interest when you speak the message. Choose your words carefully and be ready to give answers to anyone who asks questions.” (CEV) “Be wise in the way you act with people who are not believers, making the most of every opportunity. When you talk, you should always be kind and pleasant so you will be able to answer everyone in the way you should.” (NCV) “Be wise in the way you live around those who are not Christians. Make good use of your time. Speak with them in such a way they will want to listen to you. Do not let your talk sound foolish. Know how to give the right answer to anyone.” (NLB)

A more literal reading of verse 6 would be, “[Let] your word always [be] gracious, seasoned with salt, that you might know how you ought to respond to each one.” Believers should speak in a kindly and considerate manner to others or in a way that invites a favourable response. The objective would be to present the message about Christ in a manner that would appeal to the conscience of others. For expressions to be “seasoned with salt” suggests that the well-chosen words would be palatable to the hearers and not give rise to disputing. Moreover, the response given would be appropriate for the person who might raise a question.

4:7-18

A holy or sanctified life and Christian fellowship

Verses 7-15 The commendation of fellow workers

Verses 16-18 Instructions and salutations

Paul planned to send Tychicus to Colossae. He would provide the community of believers there with news about Paul. The apostle described Tychicus as a “beloved brother,” “faithful servant,” and “fellow slave in the Lord.” These

expressions reflected Paul's affection for and trust in Tychicus as one serving with him in the interests of Christ. (For other references to Tychicus, see Acts 20:4; Ephesians 6:21; 2 Timothy 4:12; Titus 3:12.) Besides informing the Colossians about all things concerning Paul, the visit of Tychicus would serve to "comfort [their] hearts," which could have included his allaying any troubling concerns they may have had about Paul's imprisonment. (4:7, 8)

The apostle informed the Colossians that Onesimus would be accompanying Tychicus. Paul referred to Onesimus as a "faithful and beloved brother" from among them. The apostle's letter to Philemon reveals that Onesimus had been a useless slave to his owner Philemon, may even have been guilty of theft, and, finally, ran away from his master in Colossae. Through contact with Paul, Onesimus became a believer and demonstrated himself to be a dependable brother in Christ, one for whom the apostle had deep affection. Although Paul would have greatly benefited from the continued assistance Onesimus would have been able to provide, he sent him back to Philemon. From Onesimus, the Colossians would also have been able to gain firsthand knowledge about everything pertaining to Paul in his imprisonment. (4:9)

The apostle included greetings from his fellow workers, Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus (also known as Justus), Epaphras, Luke and Demas.

The reference to Aristarchus as a "fellow prisoner" does not necessarily mean that Aristarchus was an actual prisoner. He may have chosen to share Paul's confinement in order to assist him. This is suggested by the fact that, in his letter to Philemon (verse 23), the apostle referred to Epaphras as "my fellow prisoner" and included Aristarchus among his fellow workers. (4:10)

Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, had greatly disappointed Paul in earlier years by returning to Jerusalem and not continuing to assist him and Barnabas in declaring the glad tidings about Christ in Asia Minor. (Acts 13:13; 15:37, 38) By the time Paul wrote this letter, he had come to have high regard for Mark, requesting that the Colossians welcome him whenever he might visit them. (4:10)

Paul specifically identified Aristarchus, Jesus (Justus), and Mark as the only Jewish believers working with him for the kingdom of God or in advancing the cause of Christ, God's appointed King. All three of these Jewish brothers had been a source of comfort to him. (4:11)

At the beginning of this letter, Paul had mentioned Epaphras from Colossae (1:7) and here included his greetings, calling him a "slave of Christ." Epaphras

showed his deep concern and love for Colossian brothers in the intensity of his prayers for them. With reference to this brother's supplications, Paul used the Greek word *agonízomai*, meaning to "struggle," "exert oneself," or "wrestle," suggesting great earnestness. He prayed that they would stand firm as mature or full-grown believers and "fully assured in all the will of God." This could mean that they would be solidly grounded in their faith and know for a certainty God's will for them. Paul solemnly confirmed that Epaphras labored hard for the believers in Colossae and also in the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. (4:12, 13)

When extending Luke's greetings, Paul identified him as the "beloved physician." (4:14) The fact that the apostle did not include Luke among the Jewish brothers reveals that he was one of Paul's loyal non-Jewish companions. It is noteworthy that, with the distinction between Jew and non-Jew having been abolished through the Son of God, Luke and Paul (the apostle to the nations) wrote the major portion of the collection of writings that became part of the Scriptures in the first century. Previously, the "sayings of God" had been entrusted exclusively to the Jews. (Romans 3:2)

Paul concluded with mentioning the greetings of Demas, another non-Jewish brother. (4:14) Toward the end of the apostle's life, Demas, on account of his love for the existing "age," forsook Paul. Possibly the dangers believers faced prompted Demas to cease being supportive of Paul and seek to shield himself from persecution, or he may actually have abandoned the faith. (2 Timothy 4:10)

Paul requested that the Colossians greet the brothers in Laodicea, Nympha, and the congregation meeting in the house of Nympha. Manuscripts vary in identifying the residence as "her" or "his" house. (4:15)

After the reading of his letter to them, Paul requested that the Colossians make it available for reading to the community of believers in Laodicea. As for the letter directed to believers in Laodicea (which has not been preserved or is conjectured to be the letter to the Ephesians [as the words "in Ephesus" are missing in certain ancient manuscripts]), Paul asked that it be read to the Colossians. (4:16)

Regarding Archippus, Paul wrote, "Say to Archippus, 'See that you fulfill the service which you have received in the Lord.'" The community of believers and Archippus himself would have known the nature of this special service or ministry. Having received it "in the Lord," Archippus would be discharging his duty in a way that would advance the cause of Christ. (4:17)

Paul had dictated the letter to the Colossians. To identify its being from him, he wrote the greeting with his own hand and asked them to remember his bonds, implying that they continue to pray for him. He concluded with the prayerful expression that the Colossians be the recipients of favor, grace, or unmerited kindness—all the privileges and blessings associated with their being God's beloved children. (4:18)

Notes on Chapter 4:

In 4:8, manuscripts either present Tychicus as letting the Colossians know about Paul ("the things concerning us," the "us" evidently being an editorial plural) or as coming to know how the Colossians were faring ("the things concerning you").

Questionnaire

Chapter 1

1. What title did Paul use to introduce himself? (1)
2. Who gave Paul this title? (1)
3. What are three facts about those to whom the letter was written? (2)
4. What two relationships do the words "saints" and "brothers" suggest? (2)
5. For what does Paul give thanks? (3-6)
6. Who was Paul's liaison with the Colossian church? (7)
7. How did Paul describe him? (7-8)
8. For what does Paul pray? (9-11)
9. What has been done for us through Christ? (12-14)
10. Who is the image of the invisible God? (13-15)
11. What is the extent of his creation? (16)
12. How could Jesus be before all things? (17)
13. What does "by him all things consist" mean? (17)
14. What two historic events clearly establish Jesus as Lord of the church? (18,20)
16. Is Jesus in the Godhead or is the Godhead in Jesus? (19,2:9)
17. What does the word preeminence mean? (1:18)
18. What is the extent of Christ's reconciliation? (20)
19. Who are the subjects of Christ's reconciliation? (21)
20. What was the method of Christ's reconciliation? (22)
21. What was the purpose of Christ's reconciliation? (22)
22. What was the condition of Christ's reconciliation? (23)
23. What was Paul's part in Christ's reconciliation? (23-25)
24. How did Paul define the mystery? (26-27)

25. How would you describe Paul's ministry? (28-29)

Chapter 2

1. What does Paul desire for the Colossians? (2-7)
2. By what means would some try to deceive Christians? (4,8)
3. How should we walk in Christ Jesus? (6-7)
4. How much of the Godhead dwells in Christ? (9)
5. What does "ye are complete in him" mean? (10)
6. What does Paul show is the New Testament circumcision? (11-13)
7. What was nailed to the cross? (14)
8. What are some things to which Paul referred when he said, "let no man judge you"? (16)
9. What does Paul call the above mentioned things? (17)
10. What other aspects of false doctrine did Paul refute? (18-23)
11. What phrases did Paul use in chapters 1 and 2 to describe "the Person of Christ"?

Chapter 3

1. What are Christians told to do? (1-2)
2. For what future event are we being prepared, and how does this give us incentive for right living? (4)
3. What are the sins which we are to kill? (5)
4. How does God treat those who are involved with the sins mentioned above? (6)
5. What sins of temper and speech are to be put off? (8-9)
6. When one is born again what distinctions lose their significance? (10-11)
7. What qualities should be put on? (12-13)
8. Above all these, what did Paul say to put on? (14)
9. What imperatives were given? (15-16)
10. What did Paul challenge us to do? (17)
11. What is significant about the order of the relationships in verses 18 - 25?
12. What command did Paul give to wives? (18)
13. What command did Paul give to husbands? (19)
14. How is the statement in verse 20 balanced by that of verse 21 ?
15. How is the statement in verse 22 balanced by that of 4:1 ?
16. What is not the proper way to obey? (22)
17. With what attitude should we do the things we do? (23)

Chapter 4

1. What aspects of prayer did Paul mention? (2-3)
2. Why did Paul want prayer for himself? (3)
3. What shows that Paul was in prison when he wrote this epistle? (3,10,18)
4. What pointers did Paul give regarding our conduct toward the unsaved? (5-6)
5. Who carried the epistle to the Colossians? (7-8)
6. For what three reasons did Paul send Tychichus to the Colossian church? (7-9)
7. Who accompanied Tychicus? (9)
8. Who sent greetings? (10-14)
9. What did Paul say about Epaphras? (12-13)
10. What did Paul say about Luke? (14)
11. Where did Paul want this epistle to be read? (16)
12. What did Paul want said to Archippus? (17)

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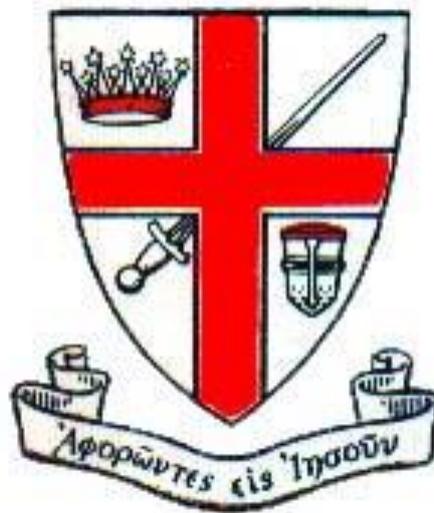
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