

COLOSSIANS

**An Explanation
with Notes and Quotes,
Illustrations and Applications**

G. Michael Cocoris

COLOSSIANS

**An Explanation
with Notes and Quotes,
Illustrations and Applications**

G. Michael Cocoris

© 2008 by G. Michael Cocoris

All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced (in whole or in part, edited, or revised) in any way, form, or means including, but not limited to, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or any kind of storage and retrieval system *for sale*, except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the written permission of G. Michael Cocoris, 2016 Euclid #20, Santa Monica, CA 90405, michaelcocoris@gmail.com, or his appointed representatives. Permission is hereby granted, however, for the reproduction of the whole or parts of the whole without changing the content in any way for *free distribution*, provided all copies contain this copyright notice in its entirety. Permission is also granted to charge for the cost of copying.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version ®, Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	3
HOW TO BE APPRECIATED.....	6
LET'S STOP OUR SHALLOW PRAYING.....	10
DON'T PUT JESUS FIRST.....	15
IS GOD MAD AT YOU?	20
IS MINISTERING WORTH IT?	23
HOW TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS	28
IS CHRIST ALL YOU NEED?	34
BEWARE OF FALSE SPIRITUALITY.....	41
HOW TO STOP COMMITTING A SIN.....	48
DRESS FOR SUCCESS.....	54
THE CHRIST LIFE.....	60
DEALING WITH PEOPLE	65
ONLY THREE THINGS CAN BE DONE.....	72
A PERSONAL TOUCH	76
BEWARE OF BEING SIDETRACKED	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY	87

PREFACE

The purpose of this commentary is to provide a practical explanation of Colossians. The objective is a balanced exposition—explaining the passage in context and applying its truths to life with illustrations. Some commentaries are, by design, of a technical nature, delving into the meanings of words and phrases even outside their use in the book under consideration. Those commentaries tend to ignore the context of the book and its application. Other commentaries go to the other extreme and concentrate on the application, often not fully expounding the passage. Commentaries should do both. They should offer a contextual exposition of the book and apply the truths of that book to life. Adding illustrations facilitates clarity.

First and foremost, this is a contextual exposition. The context is not just the paragraph or the chapter but the whole book. In studying any book of the Bible, the first question that should be asked is: “What is the subject of this book?” Each natural literary unit, whether a paragraph or a narrative, develops a subject. A legitimate exposition will show how the author develops his subject. That, and only that, is contextual Bible study. All details in a book must be explained in light of the message and structure of the entire book. Words only have meaning in a context. A detailed explanation of words and phrases ripped from their sentence and the broader context is not exposition. The flow of the thought of the passage in the context of the book is the message the author intends to convey.

The Bible was written for living (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Even the most brilliant explanation that stops short of the applications is an abortion of what God intended. Thus, the practical ramifications of every passage must always be considered.

The procedure of study I use is to first divide the biblical book into its natural literary units (narratives or paragraphs). Then, I analyze each unit. The analysis includes an outline of the development of thought in that unit (major points and sub-points), an explanation of each sentence, and a summary statement. After I have personally analyzed each unit, I read commentaries, deliberately reading commentaries from different theological perspectives. I credit commentators’ comments by putting their names in parenthesis, even if I had seen that point in the text during my study before I read their comments. Thus, each chapter of this material expounds a natural literary unit of the book of Colossians.

In the process of study, I also wrote a tentative title, introduction, and conclusion as if what I was working on was a sermon. If I stumble across an illustration, I include it, but, at this point, I do not search for illustrations. I write all of this for each literary unit in the book before preaching the first sermon in the book. As a result, when I begin speaking through the book, I have the whole book in mind.

As I prepare to preach each literary unit, I may change the tentative title, introduction, and/or conclusion. I rarely change the explanation of the text. It is as I preach each unit that I search for illustrations. Again, having studied the whole book first is helpful here. I sometimes found an illustration I knew would fit better later in the book.

The introduction of each chapter briefly relates that section to life and/or the context. The captions throughout the chapters are divisions of that portion of Scripture and correspond to the main points of a sermon. The italicized headings correspond to the sub-points of a sermon. Rather than footnotes, the author’s name is in parenthesis in the text. While applications are made throughout the exposition, the passage as a whole is summarized and applied at the end.

I wish to thank Brigitte Odom for proofreading this material.

May the Lord be pleased to use this approach to the Scripture to enlighten, encourage, and edify believers, thus glorifying His Son.

G. Michael Cocoris
Santa Monica, CA

INTRODUCTION

Colossians has been called “The most Christocentric book in the Bible” (Boa) and “The antidote to heresy.” Ephesians and Colossians have been called twin epistles.

Is Christ sufficient for all your spiritual needs? Surprisingly, many say or imply that the answer to that question is “No.” Oh, they would not deny that one needs to know Christ; it is just that they would like to add something else to that to aid and assist the process of maturity. Some add the rules and regulations of the Mosaic administration. Others want to tack on a revelation they claim is from God, while still others insist that some man-made regulations are needed.

A similar thing happened in Paul’s day. In that situation, he had to deal with all three of the additions mentioned above, which were rolled into one. Paul penned the book called Colossians to answer the critics and encourage Christians to keep moving toward maturity.

Author

Like other salutations of ancient letters, the book’s salutation describes the author and recipients and contains a greeting. The first verse of the first chapter identifies Paul and Timothy as the authors of this letter. It says, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother” (1:1). Evidently, however, the sole author was Paul, for he often refers to himself in the first person (1:25, 29; 4:7, 8; etc.). Three times, Paul identifies himself as the author (1:1; 1:23; 4:18). The personal details in the letter and the close parallels with Ephesians and Philemon fit Paul’s authorship. The external testimony to the Pauline authorship is both ancient and consistent. Paul identifies himself as an apostle and says he was an apostle “by the will of God.”

The authenticity of Colossians has been challenged. The first to raise questions against it was Mayerhoff (1838) on the grounds of its vocabulary and thought. For example, Colossians uses fifty-five words that do not appear in any of the other epistles attributed to Paul. The answer to that argument is simple. In this epistle, Paul is dealing with a different subject, namely, the Colossian heresy, which is not dealt with anywhere else. The other arguments against Paul’s authorship are equally weightless.

Recipients

Paul addresses the epistle to “the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, who are at Colosse” (1:2). In other words, Paul wrote to the church at Colosse, which was 100 miles east of Ephesus, only ten miles from Laodicea and 13 miles from Hierapolis (4:13, 16). There is no record of Paul visiting Colosse in Acts. He had never met them (2:1). On his third missionary journey, he spent three years in Ephesus. Perhaps during that time, Epaphras trusted Christ and carried the Gospel to the Lycus Valley (1:7; 4:12-13). In the meantime, Paul was arrested and imprisoned in Rome. Then, heresy threatened the church at Colosse. So, Epaphras journeyed to Rome to report to Paul on the conditions at Colosse. His visit prompted the letter, which was probably written about AD 61.

The believers at Colosse were saved, sound, and growing (1:3-8; 2:5). The heresy that threatened to sidetrack them was a mixture of Jewish legalism (2:16-17), mysticism (2:18-19), and asceticism (2:20-22). The essence of this false teaching was that Christians needed something besides Jesus Christ to meet their spiritual needs.

Paul concludes the salutation in Colossians with the standard Christian greeting: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2).

Paul wrote four epistles while imprisoned in Rome: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. In all four, he mentions his chains (Eph. 3:1; Phil. 4:14; Col. 4:10; Philem. 9). Therefore, Paul wrote Colossians from Rome in 61 AD. Of the four, Colossians was probably written first. Paul wrote it because of the need. Then, later, after reflection, he penned Ephesians. It seems evident that Colossians and Ephesians were written before Philippians or at least that Philippians was written last.

Message

Virtually everyone agrees that the subject of Colossians is Christ, but like the subject of any book, that subject needs to be narrowed. Colossians is not about everything concerning Christ. It deals with one aspect of Christ. What is it? Many would say that the theme of Colossians is the preeminence of Christ. That aspect of Christ is clearly in the book (1:18; 3:11), but to be even more precise, it would be better to say that Colossians’s subject is Christ’s sufficiency for the spiritual life.

In the epistle to the Colossians, Paul argues that Jesus Christ is the supreme Sovereign of the universe and He and He alone is sufficient to meet spiritual needs. Out of that basic concept comes two conclusions: 1) Beware of any teaching that suggests that you need something other than Jesus Christ. 2) Christ should have the preeminence in everything. So, the *message* of Colossians is that since Christ is the supreme Sovereign and sufficient Savior, believers should beware of any teaching that suggests they need something other than Jesus Christ and they should see to it that Jesus Christ has the preeminence in everything.

Structure

Colossians is a perfect example of the pattern of an ancient letter. It begins with a salutation, a thanksgiving, and prayer, followed by the body of the letter, and concludes with personal greetings and a benediction. As always, the salutation contains the identification of the author, the recipients, and a greeting. The body of the letter consists of a discussion of doctrine, defense, and duty. As in all of his epistles, Paul ends with grace.

I. Salutation	1:1-2
II. Thanksgiving	1:3-8
III. Prayer	1:9-14
IV The Body of the Letter	1:15-4:6
A. Doctrinal: Sufficiency of Christ Declared	1:15-2:7
1. Christ Suffered to bring us to Maturity	1:15-23
2. Paul also Suffered to bring us to Maturity	1:24-29
3. Paul Exhorted Believers to grow toward Maturity	2:1-7
B. Defense: Sufficiency of Christ Defended	2:8-3:4
1. Stated Positively	2:8-15
2. Stated Negatively	2:16-3:4
C. Duty: Sufficiency of Christ Displayed	3:5-4:6
1. In Personal Life	3:5-14
2. In Church Life	3:15-17
3. In Home Life	3:18-21
4. In Business Life	3:22-4:1
5. In Social Life	4:2-6
V. Greetings and Benediction	4:7-18

Purpose

The false teaching threatening the Colossians is described in detail in Colossians 2:16-3:4. It was a mixture of Jewish legalism, Greek philosophical speculation, and Gentile asceticism. Paul's primary purpose in writing is to warn the believers against such (2:4, 8, 16, 18, 20). Christ is sufficient. To reach spiritual maturity, a believer does not need rules, revelations, or regulations. Paul's purpose in Colossians is like a coin; it has two sides. One is positive; the other is negative. The negative side is to refute false teaching. The positive is to encourage believers to grow to spiritual maturity, which is defined in Colossians as giving Christ preeminence in everything (2:5-7).

Summary: Paul wrote to the Colossians to refute Judaistic mystical asceticism and to encourage believers to give Christ preeminence in everything.

Believers should give Christ preeminence in everything.

HOW TO BE APPRECIATED

All of us want to be genuinely appreciated. That's human nature. There's nothing wrong with that. The question is, "How does one legitimately get it?" Inventors are appreciated. People who work for thirty years for the same company receive a gold watch in appreciation. Does one have to do something great, big, or for a long time to be appreciated? In Colossians 1:3-8, Paul expresses gratitude to God and appreciation to the Colossians for the Colossians. This passage reveals how to be appreciated with faults and without doing something that takes thirty years.

The Welfare of the Colossians

Before beginning an explanation of the first paragraph of Colossians, it would be helpful to know two things. First, Paul wrote this book because the Colossians Christians were being threatened by false teaching and Paul did not want them to be sidetracked but to continue toward spiritual maturity. The false teaching is described in Colossians 2:16-3:4. It was a mixture of Jewish legalism, Greek philosophical speculation, and Gentile asceticism.

Second, it was customary in Paul's day for a letter to begin with a salutation, a thanksgiving, and a prayer. In his letters, Paul follows that format, expanding on various elements. His comments are often a hint about what is to follow in the body of the letter. The book of Colossians mimics the pattern. Paul opens with a salutation (1:1-2) and thanksgiving (1:3-8).

Faith He begins the thanksgiving by saying, "We give thanks to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard" (1:3-4a). The "we" is a reference to Paul and Timothy (1:1). Both Paul and Timothy shared in the report and the prayers (Eadie). The word "always" goes with thanksgiving, not with praying (Lightfoot; Eadie). Paul and Timothy always thanked God for the Colossians whenever their prayers included them (Westcott; Eadie). They had heard three things from Epaphras (1:7) about the Colossians that provoked them to thank God for them.

Paul thanked God for their faith. He says, "Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus" (1:4b). To which faith does Paul refer? Believers are saved by faith and they are to live by faith. Is Paul referring to the faith at justification or the faith which follows justification? The word "in" in the phrase "faith in Christ Jesus" indicates the sphere of faith, not the object of faith (Lightfoot). Paul is not saying, "The object of your faith was Christ," although that was true. He is saying, "The sphere of your faith is Christ." Christ was the territory, dominion, and jurisdiction of their faith. In short, he talks about the fact that they were walking by faith. It is possible to trust Jesus Christ for eternal salvation and not trust Him in temporal situations. People can trust Him to take away their sins and not trust Him to take away their worries.

An elderly farmer vowed he would never ride in an airplane. One day, an emergency arose and he had to fly to a distant city. When he arrived, a relative asked, "Did you enjoy the trip?" "Oh, it was all right," he replied, "But I'll tell you one thing. I never let my full weight down on the seats." Likewise, some believers trust Jesus Christ to get them to heaven but don't trust Him with the "whole load" along the way.

Love Paul and Timothy also thanked God for the Colossians when they heard of their "love for all the saints" (1:4c). It is easy to love saints. They are good and gentle, nice, and loveable. I

know everyone loves saints; you can't help but love them, but Paul says these believers loved *all* the saints. Not all saints are saintly; not all saints are loveable. Yet, Paul said the Colossians loved *all* the saints. They had an "all-embracing" love (Carson).

Have you ever seen a puppy that loved everyone? You know the kind. It is young and full of energy. He greets everyone with his tail wagging like a windmill in a strong wind. It doesn't matter to him if you're tall or short, rich or poor, famous or not; he loves all humans. Believers need to love all the saints like that. People need loving the most when they deserve it the least.

Hope Paul continues: "Because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven" (1:5a). This phrase is connected to faith and love. Some interpret it to mean that hope is the motivating power behind faith and love (Lightfoot). They sought to develop their faith and love because they hoped for eternal destiny. Others, however, interpret this to mean that the Colossians had hope laid up in heaven because they had faith and love (Hodges; see comments on 1:23). Whatever the exact explanation, Paul and Timothy thanked God for the hope of the Colossians.

The Colossians hoped that something would be laid up for them in heaven. The English word "hope" is nothing more than a wish, meaning one may hope something will happen even though it may not. Before the operation, we hope the patient will be okay. In the middle of the game, when things look bleak, we hope we will win. Hope in the Bible is not a nebulous dream. It is certain and secure. The Greek word translated "hope" means "expectation." Thus, "hope, which is laid up for you in heaven," means "the thing expected for you is laid up in heaven." The question is, "What is it that is expected?" According to Colossians 1:27, it is the hope of glory, that is, the certainty of coming glory. The Colossians were expecting that coming glory.

In this passage, Paul and Timothy thanked God for the Colossians' faith, love, and hope. The book's overall purpose is to encourage believers to grow to maturity. Faith, love, and hope are elements of maturity.

The Work of the Gospel

The Extent Paul adds, "which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world" (1:5b-6a). The expectation of the Colossians was a result of hearing the gospel, which had not only come to them but to the whole world. Some say the gospel going to the whole world by the time Paul wrote Colossians was hyperbole (Lightfoot), but this is not hyperbole (Alford). This statement implies that "there were some Christians everywhere" (Westcott).

The Fruit Paul continues, "and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth" (1:6b). The gospel had not only spread to the then-known world, but it had also produced fruit. The gospel is like a seed. It is a "reproductive organism, a plant whose seed is in itself" (Lightfoot). It was planted in them and, in their case, it produced fruit, namely, they knew the grace of God. Notice, the *gospel* came and they knew the *grace* of God. It did not say the gospel came and they knew the gospel. The gospel was the seed. Knowing the grace of God and the God of grace was the fruit.

This gospel, this good news, they heard was about the grace of God. The Bible teaches that all are sinners and deserve death, but God did them a favor, which is what the word grace means. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for sin and be raised from the dead—that's the gospel. That was done so people could have eternal life—that's heaven. So, Paul is saying that these believers had the hope of eternal life because of the gospel.

Suppose a father tells his son, “If you behave, I’ll take you to Disney.” Imagine that the boy doesn’t behave; he disobeys his mother and even throws a ball through the window. So, the father says, “All right, you have to pay for the window or no trip to Disney.” If the boy had disobeyed and wasted his allowance, he wouldn’t be able to pay. So, suppose the father says, “I’ll pay and you can go to Disney.” Then, the boy would again be expected to go to Disney because the father paid for what he had done. Likewise, the Colossians had a hope of heaven because they knew Christ had paid for their sin.

This grace they heard and knew was “in truth.” Paul mentions “truth” twice in two verses. It was a genuine item. All other religious messages are “guesses about God” (Barclay).

The Witness of Epaphras

Next, Paul mentions the work and witness of Epaphras (1:7-8). Epaphras did two things: he gave the good news to the Colossians and he gave a good report to Paul.

His Work Paul says, “As you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow-servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf” (1:7). The Colossians learned about the gospel from Epaphras. He was a dear (Greek: “beloved”) fellow servant, as well as a faithful, trustworthy, and reliable minister who gave out the gospel. Those faithful servants who give out the gospel will be “beloved” by those to whom they minister.

Epaphras gave the gospel to the Colossians, but it is also certain that he lived a godly life before them. He would not have been “beloved” if he hadn’t, but he did more than just “live the life;” he gave them the message verbally. They “heard” it. The message of the gospel needs to be given visually and verbally.

I once preached a series of sermons on evangelism, the point of which was that believers must witness. At the end of the series, a man in my church said, “My wife and I have concluded that all we can do is live a godly life before unbelievers.” Another church member told me, “My ministry is to pray.” Both are important, but neither is a substitute for telling the good news.

His Witness Epaphras not only gave the good news to the Colossians, he also gave a good report to Paul. As Paul says, “Who also declared to us your love in the Spirit” (1:8). Paul was in prison in Rome. Epaphras had journeyed there and related to Paul what had happened in Colosse. He told the apostle about their love (1:4) in the Spirit. The phrase “in the Spirit” indicates that their love was in the sphere of the Holy Spirit. This is the only reference to the Holy Spirit in Colossians. The Holy Spirit had “implanted and fostered” love in them (Bruce).

Summary: Paul thanked God for the spiritual growth of the Colossians (see their love, 1:4, 8) produced by the work of the gospel and the witness of Epaphras.

Be like Epaphras, witness, so you can see the gospel work, lives changed, and God praised. Be like Paul; thank God for believers who are growing. Be like the Colossians; be appreciated because of your love for others.

In a sense, this paragraph also teaches believers how to be appreciated. To fully appreciate that, the content of the paragraph needs to be stated chronologically. Consider the events in the order in which they happened.

1. Paul led Epaphras to Christ.
2. Epaphras went to Colosse with the gospel.
3. The gospel produced fruit and growth.

4. False teaching threatened the believers.
5. Epaphras visited Paul in prison in Rome and informed him about the situation in Colosse.
6. Paul wrote to refute the false teachers, but he began by thanking God for the spiritual growth of the Colossians, especially their love.

You can be appreciated, even though you have spiritual problems. The Colossians were growing. They loved all the saints. Yet, they were spiritually threatened with false teaching. Some in the congregation were, no doubt, flirting with these false ideas. Nevertheless, Paul said he appreciated what they were doing and that it was right.

You don't have to do something big to be appreciated; a little act of love will do. So, if you want to be appreciated, grow, love, and minister, people will thank God for you. Send a card. Make a call. Pay a visit.

One word of caution. Beware, not all you do will be appreciated. Some just never get it. While a few do, the important thing is that God will. When you stand before Him, He will say, in appreciation, well done, My good and faithful servant. So, we should do all that we do as unto Him.

Nevertheless, like Paul and Timothy, some will see and appreciate what you do and will thank you for it. Joseph Clark has put it poetically:

Thank God for you, good friend of mine;
 Seldom is friendship such as thine.
 How very much I wish to be,
 As helpful as you have been to me--
 Thank God for you.
 Of many prayer guests, one thou art,
 Of whom I ask God to impart
 Rich blessings from His storehouse rare,
 And grant to you His gracious care--
 Thank God for you.
 When I recall, from time to time,
 How you inspired this heart of mine:
 I find myself inclined to pray.
 God bless my friend this very day--
 Thank God for you.
 So often at the throne of grace
 There comes a picture of your face:
 And then instinctively I pray
 That God may guide you all the way--
 Thank God for you.
 Someday I hope with you to stand
 Before the throne at God's right hand;
 And to say to you—at journey's end:
 Praise God, you've been to me a friend--
 Thank God for you.

LET'S STOP OUR SHALLOW PRAYING

We all know we are to pray and that we are to pray for one another, but for what do you ask? Most Christians ask for one of three things: 1) If a person is lost, we ask God to save him. 2) If a person is backslidden, we ask God to restore him. 3) If a person is sick, we ask God to heal her. What do you ask for when praying for a Christian who is not backslidden or flat on his back sick? How do you pray for her if she is physically well and spiritually growing? It's like trying to buy a Christmas present for someone who already has everything.

Let me put it like this. Do you pray for your pastor? For what do you ask? That God may bless his ministry? Good. Do you pray for him personally? For what do you ask for him as an individual? That he may understand the text as he studies? Fine, but again, that's his ministry. What about him personally? For strength? That's physical. All of this is proper, but is there more?

"How does one pray for a growing Christian?" Paul and Timothy do just that in Colossians 1, and they never met the Colossians! Paul and Timothy thanked God for the Colossians and their spiritual growth. Then, he prayed for them, but they were growing, so why bother? Besides, if they were growing, for what would he ask?

The prayer of Paul and Timothy in Colossians 1:9-14 tells us how to pray for believers who are doing well. William Barclay, a scholar who has written a commentary on every book of the New Testament, said, "This passage teaches us more about the essence of prayer request than almost any other passage in the New Testament."

The Request

Filled Paul says, "For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (1:9). Since the day that Paul and Timothy had heard from Epaphras of the Colossians' growth in faith and love, they had not ceased to pray for them. Imagine they heard about these believers whom they had never met and prayed for them faithfully.

Their prayer is that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of God's will. The word "filled" suggests that knowledge of God's will "pervade all our being—thoughts, affections, purposes, and plans" (Vaughan). Apparently, the errorists claimed a kind of fullness of truth and blessing not found in the preaching of Epaphras. Paul constantly emphasizes true fullness. He repeatedly uses the word "filled" or "full" in Colossians.

Knowledge The Greek word translated "knowledge" is not the simple word knowledge. It has a prefix attached to it. The exact meaning of the addition of the prefix has been debated. Many, especially older interpreters, define this particular word as "full knowledge" (Lightfoot; Eadie; Bruce). Others conclude it means "knowledge directed toward a particular object" (J. A. Robinson, p. 254), "a deep understanding" (Carson), and "ever-growing knowledge" (Barclay). Regardless of the exact significance here, Paul's prayer is for more knowledge.

Again, the false teachers are in view. They, no doubt, promised that their teaching would put people "in the know," but their knowledge was false knowledge. To meet this, Paul prays for a full or more penetrating knowledge of God's will. The true antidote to heresy is always a deeper

and richer knowledge of the truth concerning Jesus Christ. A full rain barrel has no room for ditch water.

Knowledge of the will of God comes from the Word of God. It is not too much to say that all any believer needs to know about the will of God is in the Word of God. Although this verse does not refer to the Scripture, it is, without doubt, how believers today know the will of God (3:16).

Insight Paul's desire was that their knowledge of God's will would be "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." The Greek word rendered "wisdom" means "skill" and the one translated "understanding" means "perception, understanding." The word "insight" sums up the essence of these words. In other words, Paul is praying not just for knowledge but for wisdom, not just for knowledge but for understanding, not just for information but insight. This insight is to be spiritual; it is to be the insight into the will of God, which comes from the Holy Spirit.

The false teachers in Colosse were claiming knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. Paul is saying, "You need knowledge, all right—knowledge of the will of God. True, you need wisdom and understanding—wisdom and understanding that comes from the Holy Spirit.

Paul and Timothy were not praying that the Colossians would have knowledge of facts or data. They were praying that these believers would not just have information but insight. It is possible to hear and even know some information without fully grasping all that that information means.

Let me illustrate. An American pastor serving in London, Ontario, Canada, rented an old house. Next to the house was a very narrow driveway and on the other side of the driveway was a small hothouse. On one occasion, his oldest son, who was just a youngster, was in the driveway playing hardball. There were windows on both sides of the driveway—in the house and in the hothouse. The father called to his son and said, "Don't you see all those windows? Stop playing ball here. Go somewhere else to play." The son and his friends reluctantly left. A few days later, the father, again hearing activity in the driveway, went to the window to see his son and his son's friends once again playing in the driveway. Again, the father told his son, "Didn't I tell you not to play ball out here?" "Yes, sir," he said, "but we're not playing ball; we're just hitting stones." The son had information; he lacked insight. Likewise, Paul and Timothy prayed for spiritual insight into God's will.

The Result

Worthy Walk The first part of Colossians 1:10 gives the consequences (Lightfoot) or result (Eadie) of being filled with the insight into God's will, namely, "that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him" (1:10a). The word "worthy" carries the connotation of "becomingly." The result of being filled with the knowledge of God's will should be that believers live a life that is becoming of Christ.

A camera is a delicate instrument. Imagine a father buying one and his adolescent son treating it like a toy, banging it around, and dropping it. Such treatment is unworthy of a fine instrument like an expensive camera. That boy needed to know how to treat cameras. Likewise, believers need to be filled with insight into God's will so they can walk in a way that is becoming of the Lord.

Pleasing the Lord A worthy walk pleases the Lord. The ultimate aim of a believer's life should be to please the Lord. Of course, believers should walk worthy of the Lord because it is

right, and they should do it before others, but ultimately, what matters is pleasing the Lord. It is the attitude of a “yes man.”

There is a story of a young man who had the opportunity to study violin under a famous violinist. During his first recital, following each selection, despite the cheers of the crowd, the performer seemed dissatisfied. Even after the last number, with the shouts louder than ever, the talented violinist stood watching one older man in the balcony. Finally, the older man smiled and nodded in approval. Immediately, the young man relaxed and beamed with joy. The applause of the crowd meant nothing to him until he had won the hearty approval of his famous teacher. Similarly, believers must do all they do, seeking God’s approval first and foremost.

As a believer, you do not have to prove something; you need to please someone.

The Ramifications

Beginning at this point in the passage, Paul itemizes some elements that constitute a life pleasing to the Lord. In the Greek text, these are expressed by four participles rendered in English as 1) being fruitful, 2) increasing in the knowledge of God, 3) [being] strengthened with all might, and 4) giving thanks.

Production Paul says, “being fruitful in every good work” (1:10b). This is in the present tense, meaning that the Christian life is to exhibit continual fruitfulness, perennial fruit-bearing. The fruit consists of “every good work.” This is an unusual fruit tree. Most trees produce after their kind. This one makes every good work. Good works include works done for God (praise), for others (deeds of kindness), and perhaps even for yourself (see “joy” in Gal. 5:22). Good works also include hospitality (Titus 3:13-14). Good works are not just church works but any work that benefits someone. Works are the fruit, not the root, of a right relationship with God. D. L. Moody often said, “Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather.”

Personal Knowledge of God The next item in Paul’s list is “and increasing in the knowledge of God” (1:10c). The word “increase” means “to grow, to become greater.” The word “knowledge” is the same one used in verse 9. It means “full knowledge.” This is a personal knowledge of God, for Paul says “of God,” not “about God.”

It is possible to know 1) about someone, 2) someone, and 3) someone intimately. In this passage, Paul is talking about that third kind of knowledge. I knew about my wife before I even met her. Knowing about her made me want to know her. Then I met her. Once I knew her, I desired to increase my knowledge of her. Now, I’ve been married for years and I’m still learning.

God is much more complicated than any human being. Thus, all believers need to increase in their knowledge of Him. Being filled with His Word and walking with Him gives believers such knowledge.

Power The third specific Paul mentions is: “Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy” (1:11). As believers walk worthy, they are strengthened. As you do anything, you become stronger at it. That’s true of typing, playing the piano, or jogging. This verse says, “Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power;” that is, it is not according to *our* ability, but according to *His* power, yea, according to His glorious power. The word “glorious” means “brightness, splendor, glory.” It is that which radiates from the presence of God. Hence, it refers to the manifestation of the presence of God Himself.

What does it mean to have God’s power? When I think of God’s power, I think of Peter preaching at Pentecost and 3,000 are converted, or Finney walking into a factory and a woman

falling down and getting saved. Is that the power of God? Is that all there is to the power of God? Colossians 1:11 says God's power is "for all patience and longsuffering." The Greek word "for" denotes the issue of the process; that is, it is "leading to" patience and longsuffering. The Greek word translated "patience" means "endurance," which is in respect to things like trials. The person with endurance does not succumb to suffering. The Greek word rendered "longsuffering" has a particular reference to being patient with people. A person with this attribute does not hastily retaliate.

This is not a "grin and bear it" type of endurance, for the following phrase says, "with joy." The power of God produces endurance and patience with joy! As believers walk before the Lord, with Him, and rely on Him, the Lord gives them power and strength to endure, be patient, and do it with joy.

Praise A worthy walk also consists of praise. Paul's fourth and final participial phrase in this passage is "giving thanks to the Father" (1:12a). Having mentioned the Father, Paul adds one phrase on top of another to describe what the Father has done (1:12-14). In verses 12-14, there are five things the Father has done for which He should be praised.

1. The Father makes believers saints. The Father "has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light" (1:12). The Greek word translated "qualified" means "to render fit." "Partakers of the inheritance" means "part of the lot." God has rendered believers fit to share in the territory allotted to His people, the realm of light. This is a picturesque phrase built, in part, around an Old Testament concept. God gave the Promised Land to Israel and assigned them portions. Believers should thank God that He has allowed them to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints.

2. The Father delivers believers. God has "delivered us from the power of darkness" (1:13a). Notice that it is the *power* of darkness from which God has delivered us.

3. The Father translates believers. Paul adds, "and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love" (1:13b). In the ancient world when one nation conquered another, it was customary for the victor to transfer the population of the defeated country "lock, stock and barrel to some other land" (Barclay). Antiochus the Great transported at least 2,000 Jews from Babylonia to Colosse (Wiersbe). The believer's spiritual transfer is from darkness to light, from the power of darkness to the kingdom, or, as Lightfoot says, "From an arbitrary tyranny to a well-ordered sovereignty." Furthermore, the sovereignty to which we have been transferred is no less than that of God's Son. It is not that of an inferior angel or a false teacher (2:8) but of God's Son. This is the Son whom He loved, a phrase which is the strongest possible contrast to darkness. Believers should praise God because they have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

4. The Father redeems believers. Referring to Christ, Paul says, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (1:14). We were captured and enslaved people, but as believers, we have been redeemed. The metaphor changes from the victor who rescues the captive by forceful arms to the philanthropist who releases slaves by the ransom payment. The price was the blood of God's Son.

5. The Father forgives believers. Here, the essence of redemption is the forgiveness of sins.

In Colossians 1:12-14, Paul vividly describes what God has done for us in Christ. We were under the power of darkness. God delivered, redeemed, forgiven, transferred us to the kingdom of His Son, and made us partakers of the inheritance of the saints, which is in the realm of light. Perhaps this is against the background of what the false teachers were saying. The real redemption man needs is not a redemption from fate by Gnostic aeons but a redemption from sin.

In the context of this prayer, there is no doubt that these are works of God for which believers should praise Him. Believers have been transferred from darkness to light, from uselessness to usefulness.

Bishop Taylor Smith once said to a group of military men sitting around the table where a bowl had been placed upside down: “Do you know what’s inside that bowl? Darkness and uselessness.” Then he turned it over and said, “Now it is full of light and ready to hold fruit, soup, or something else for which it is suited. It is a converted bowl. For this conversion, believers should praise God.

Summary: Believers should pray that believers have spiritual insight into God’s will so that they would walk with the Lord with the result that they would be fruitful, productive, have personal knowledge of God, have power, and praise.

This passage spells out the pattern of the Christian life: God’s will followed by a godly walk and good works. First, there is knowing God’s will. Then, there is doing God’s will, producing a worthy walk and worthy works.

Nevertheless, first and foremost, this passage is a prayer. Proper prayer for Christians is that they have spiritual insight into the will of God and the will of God’s will will be a reality in their lives. That prayer is for every believer. Paul did not divide the Christians at Colosse into two categories: those for whom he thanked God and those for whom he prayed. We thank God for the growing ones and pray for the sick ones. Paul thanked God and prayed for all believers. No one has arrived. From his experience, Paul knew that mature Christians can have painful struggles (2 Cor. 12:1-10) and still have to grow (Phil. 3:7-16). No Christian is such a spiritual success that he or she no longer needs the prayers of others.

Perhaps the word that captures the essence of the desired result is “filled” (1:9). A sports fan is filled with his team’s knowledge. He loves his team, thinks about his team, and plans to go to games. We would say he is full of that team. It is all he thinks about and talks about all the time.

DON'T PUT JESUS FIRST

The speaker was sincere; he believed what he was saying and believed it very strongly. He was energetic and captivating. The teenagers sat quietly and listened: “You need to put Christ first!” the speaker exhorted. “He is God. He is Lord. He must be first and foremost. He must be before parents and peers, college and career. You need to put Christ first in your life.” I don’t know how often I’ve heard that kind of sermon at camp, youth rallies, and church. At one point in my life, I believed it and preached it. No longer! Over the years, I have come to believe that you should not put Christ first. You should not put Him before anything else. I am convinced that Paul would agree with that statement. I say that based on what he taught in Colossians 1:15-23.

In Colossians 1:15-23, Paul teaches that Christ is the supreme sovereign of the universe. To demonstrate that, Paul talks about the relationship of Christ to the Creator, the creation, and the church.

His Relationship to the Creator

The Body of the Book There is no formal ending to the prayer that Paul began in Colossians 1:9. He glides almost imperceptibly from the prayer to God to a point he wishes to make to the Colossians. So subtle is the transition that a casual reading doesn’t immediately pick up the change. A careful reading, however, indicates that the prayer fades in verse 14 and the preaching begins in verse 15. This begins the body of the book, which first deals with doctrinal issues (1:15-2:7).

The Image of God Speaking of Christ, Paul says, “He is the image of the invisible God” (1:15). To say that God is invisible is to say He does not have a body. A person is a being with a mind, emotions, and a will, not necessarily a body. John 4:24 says, “God is Spirit,” and Jesus Himself said a spirit does not have flesh and bones (Lk. 24:39). Thus, God is a Spirit; He is invisible. In the Old Testament, God appeared in various forms. In the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, but God the Father does not have a body. Jesus Christ, however, is the image of that invisible God.

The Greek word “image” means likeness, not just resemblance. We say to a person, “You remind me of someone I know; you resemble that person.” That is not the idea here. Image here means “likeness,” derived likeness; like the image on a coin is the likeness of the dye. It is not just a resemblance; it is a likeness. Phillips translates this: “the invisible expression of the invisible God.”

Jesus Christ is the sovereign of the universe. Chafer, the theologian, said, “The Son is not placed on a level with the creatures as opposed to the Father, but the Son is here placed on a level with the invisible God as opposed to the creatures” (Chafer, vol. 1, p. 314). Lord Byron put it like this: “If God is not like Jesus Christ, then God ought to be like Jesus Christ.”

His Relationship to the Creation

Sovereign over Creation Next, Paul describes Christ's relationship to creation. He says that Christ is "the firstborn over all creation" (1:15b). At first glance, this phrase appears to say that Jesus is part of the creation, a created being. In fact, a great debate arose in the fourth century concerning who Jesus was. Arius said that Jesus was a created being, the family's eldest member. He used this verse to prove his position. The Jehovah's Witnesses teach that same doctrine today.

To say that Jesus Christ is a created creature is inconsistent with the context. The next verse says, "For by Him all things were created" (1:16a). If He created all things, He is the Creator, not the created. Furthermore, to say that Jesus was created is inconsistent with the teaching of the New Testament. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." A few verses later, John said, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn. 1:14). The Word, who is deity, became a man. Paul does not hesitate to say that Jesus Christ was equal with God (Phil. 2:6).

What is the meaning of the term "the firstborn"? The Greek term means "the first to be born in a family," but the term "firstborn" is also a figure of speech. In ancient times, the eldest son, by right of being born first, received the birthright and was entitled to a double inheritance and the family leadership upon the father's death. The idea of headship soon overshadowed the concept of temporal priority. In fact, in Hebrew and Greek thought, it "has only very indirectly a time significance at all" (Barclay). Thus, while the term "firstborn" can mean "first in time," its predominant meaning is "first in rank." It became a title of the Messiah (Westcott; Barclay). Christ is sovereign over creation.

There is no doubt that the Bible uses the expression "firstborn" as a figure of speech. God called Israel His firstborn (Ex. 4:22), but many other nations existed before Israel, and there is no indication anywhere in the Bible that God had chosen any nation other than Israel. Thus, the expression "firstborn" in Exodus 4 must mean that God considered Israel His sovereign nation. In Psalm 89:27, God said, "Also I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." The second line in Psalm 89:27 explains the first line. The explanation is not that the firstborn was born first but that the *firstborn was the highest*.

Because of the context of Colossians 1:15 and the New Testament teaching concerning the person of Christ, the term "firstborn" in Colossians 1:15 must be taken as a figure of speech. Jesus Christ is the head, the natural leader over all creation. That does not mean He was born first, as if to suggest He is a created being. Christians call Christ the lily of the valley, but they do not mean to imply that He is a flower. They also call Him the bright and morning star, but He is not a heavenly body.

Source of Creation Jesus Christ is not only the Sovereign over creation, He is the source of creation. Paul goes on to say, "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers" (1:16). The word "for" (Greek: "because") gives the reason why Jesus Christ is the firstborn. He is the Sovereign over creation because He is the source of creation. As Alford points out, "Nothing so completely refutes the idea that Christ Himself is included in creation as the statement that He created all things." In the Greek text, "by Him" is "in Him," indicating that Jesus Christ was the source of creation. He was the source of its motive, desire, and design. Christ was the architect of the universe. He did not have to go beyond Himself to originate the desire or the design of it.

Jesus Christ created all things in heaven and on earth. This was no local or limited operation. He created the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the grass. He created things visible and invisible, both the material and the immaterial, the body and the soul, the water and the hydrogen and oxygen, the rocks and the atoms. His creation also includes all ranks, whether thrones, dominions, principalities, or powers. These four classifications are used elsewhere in the Scripture to describe the world of both good and evil angels (2:10; Eph. 1:21; 3:10, as well as 6:12). The false teachers who were threatening the Colossian believers had a heavenly hierarchy consisting of angelic emanations. In their view, a superior being created an inferior creature, and the latter, in turn, produced yet another lesser one. Paul insists that Jesus Christ is the creator, not simply of the lower modes of being, but the highest essences of the universe.

Agent of Creation Christ is not only the sovereign over creation and the source of it, but He is also the agent of it. Paul says, “All things were created through Him” (1:16b). There are two Greek words that could be translated “through.” One carries the connotation of direct, absolute agency (υπο). The other, the one used here (δια), describes meditorial agency. Milligan suggest, “This distinction throws light on Jesus’ relation to creation, implying that Jesus was not the absolute, independent creator, but rather the intermediate agent in creation (Jn. 1:3; Heb. 1:12)” (Milligan, cited by Dana and Mantey, p. 102). In other words, Jesus Christ was not only the architect but also the builder of creation.

The Purpose of Creation Christ is the end, the aim, and the purpose of creation. Paul adds, “And for Him” (1:16c). Alford said, “He is the end of creation containing the reason in Himself why creation is at all and why it is as it is.” Let no one say that Jesus Christ is a secondary source, for creation is *in* Him. Let no one surmise that He is an inferior agent; the universe was created *through* Him. Let no one suggest that He is a minor purpose; the whole world was created *for* Him.

Predecessor to Creation Furthermore, Jesus Christ is the predecessor to creation, for Paul goes on to say, “And He is before all things” (1:17a). This refers to the priority of time, not superiority in rank (Alford; Lightfoot; Eadie). In the Greek text, the word “He” is emphatic. The phrase “all things” is a reference to all creation. Paul emphatically declares that Jesus Christ preexisted before creation. He who made all things necessarily existed before them. Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am” (Jn. 8:58). He also said that He was with the Father “before the world was” (Jn. 17:5).

Preserver of Creation Finally, regarding His relationship to the creation, Christ is the preserver of it. Paul says, “And in Him all things consist” (1:17b). The Greek word “consist” means “to hold together.” Christ holds together creation. He makes it a creation instead of a chaos. He is the Elmer’s Glue of the universe.

People finally figured out how to untie one atom, and there was a tremendous explosion. Jesus Christ holds together all the atoms of the entire universe. If He did not exist, the universe would cease to exist.

A New York law firm was hired to get a clear title of a piece of property in Louisiana. They hired a New Orleans attorney to get the data from the records. He traced the title to 1803 and sent the information to New York. The New York firm, however, was not satisfied and requested that he go back further than 1803. The attorney in New Orleans replied, “Gentlemen, please be advised that in the year 1803, the United States of America acquired the territory of Louisiana from the Republic of France by purchase. The Republic of France, in turn, got it from the Spanish crown by conquest. The Spanish crown, having obtained it by virtue of the discovery of one Christopher Columbus, a sailor, who had been authorized to embark by Isabella, Queen of

Spain, who obtained sanction from the Pope, the Vicar of Christ, who is the Son and heir of Almighty God who made Louisiana.” No matter where you begin, if you trace creation back to its original source, you bump into Jesus Christ, the supreme sovereign over creation.

His Relationship to the Church

Paul moves from Christ’s relationship to creation to His relationship to the church. Christ is sovereign over the church and sufficient for the church because of who He is (1:18-19) and because of what He has done (1:20).

Who He Is Paul begins by saying, “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” (1:18). Jesus Christ is sovereign over the church because of who He is. Paul uses three figures in Colossians 1:18 to communicate that concept. Christ is the head of the body. The head is the leader or chief. Christ is not the chest or the arms; He is the head. This clearly refers to His supremacy. As head, He is the “ruling, guiding, sustaining power, the mainspring of activity, the center of its unity and the seat of its life” (Lightfoot). The second term Paul uses to describe Christ’s supremacy over the church is that He is the beginning. He started the church (Mt. 16:18) and, thus, is supreme over it. Paul’s third figure is that Jesus Christ is the firstborn from the dead. The expression “firstborn” was used in Colossians 1:15. Christ was the firstborn over all things; He is the firstborn from the dead. As in verse 15, this expression can mean either 1) first in time or 2) first in rank. Perhaps, here it is both. Jesus Christ was the first to be raised from the dead; thus, He has sovereignty that belongs to the firstborn.

The purpose for Christ being placed sovereign and supreme over the church is “that in all things He may have the preeminence” (1:18). The Greek verb translated “may have” means “might become.” In the Greek text, the word “He” is emphatic. Christ is placed as head over the church so that He may become preeminent in every area of its life, which is an excellent description of spiritual maturity.

With the word “for” (1:19), Paul introduces why Christ is supreme over the church. A careful analysis of verses 19-23 indicates that Paul gives two reasons why Christ is head over the church (see “and” in verse 20).

The first reason Christ is supreme over the church is because of who He is. “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (1:19). Some interpret this to mean that Christ is the fullness of God, that is, that He contains and represents all God is (Alford; Lightfoot). Others interpret this to mean that Christ is the fullness of all of God’s blessings, that is, He contains all the blessings that God has for us; every blessing is wrapped up in Him (Eadie; the aorist tense tends to support this view). However, both of these concepts are true. Colossians 2:9 says Christ is the fullness of God. Ephesians 1:3 teaches Christ is the fullness of God’s blessing. While both statements are true, in the final analysis, in this verse, Paul is probably saying that Christ is the fullness of God (the “and” of 1:20 proves this view is correct). In short, Christ is supreme over the church because of who He is.

What He Has Done Christ is also sovereign because of what He did: He reconciled us to God. Paul adds, “And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (1:20). God reconciled “all things,” that is, the whole universe, the material universe, as well as mankind, through Christ. By making peace through the blood of His cross, Christ reconciled us to God.

Summary: Jesus Christ is the Sovereign in the universe and supreme over creation, and because of His sacrifice, He is sufficient to bring the church to spiritual maturity.

Samuel Bronfman, the magnet of Seagrams, once arrived at an advertising conference and sat on the nearest available chair. “No, no, Mr. Sam!” blurted out one of the men, “Sit here at the head of the table.” “Young man,” said Bronfman, “*wherever* I sit is the head of the table.” Because of who He is in the universe and what He has done in the church, wherever He is, Jesus Christ is the Sovereign, supreme, and, thus, sufficient.

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that you *not* put Jesus Christ first, but this portion of Colossians emphatically declares that He is first and foremost sovereign and supreme. Is the point that we are to put Him first because He already is first? No. Don’t put Jesus Christ first, if you mean by that, you will leave Him out of everything else. Colossians 1:18 says He should be first *in everything*. This is the purpose clause of the passage. The purpose for His being supreme is to be first in everything.

Some put Him first in the week; they go to church. Then they leave Him out of the rest of the week. Some put Him first in the day; they have devotions. Then they leave Him out of the rest of the day. Some put Him first in the family; they say, “He’s boss here.” Then they leave Him out of family living. Some put Him first in their finances; they tithe. Then they leave Him out of the 90%. Some put Him first in their jobs; they say He’s before their work. Then, they leave Him out when they perform their work. If that’s what you mean by putting Him first, don’t.

Two believers sat in a cafe, eating lunch and discussing the Christian life. The younger said to the older, “I put the Lord first and it didn’t work.” Pulling out a paper napkin, the older Christian said, “You mean like this:

Lord
Family
Job
Church

The younger believer said, “Yes.” Then, the more experienced Christian explained, “Christ wants to be first—in everything. He’s not the first as in the first item in a long list; He is the center, as the center of a circle, so that He can be first in every piece of the pie.” Don’t put Him first; put Him first *in everything*.

IS GOD MAD AT YOU?

After a few drinks, a man was speeding down the highway. A police patrol plane overhead was clocking his speed. The police pilot radioed a patrolman in a car and the patrolman stopped the speeder. As he was writing out the ticket, the fellow asked, “How did you know I was speeding.” The cop pointed toward the sky with his pen, meaning, of course, the airplane. The drunk, not having seen the plane, thought the policeman was pointing toward God and said, “Oh, no, is He against me, too?”

Have you ever felt God was mad at you? Maybe it was when you didn’t make the team, get the girl or fellow, failed the test, or didn’t get the job or promotion. Perhaps it was when you didn’t get an answer to prayer. Possibly, it was when you thought about your past. A man once told me, “I knew God was mad at me for the first 21 years of my life. Then I got married and He proved it for the next two years.” Paul addresses this issue (Col. 1:21-23).

Separation from God

Estrangement Paul has been talking about Christ—who He is and what He has done (1:15-20). Now all of a sudden, he says, “and you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works” (1:21). He says we were alienated. The Greek word translated “alienated” means “estranged” and although the term “God” is not expressed, the idea of spiritual alienation and estrangement from God is plainly implied. When we were born, we were separated from God (Eph. 2:12). You sense that. God is distant and far away. It’s like being a stranger in a foreign country or at a party. It implies isolation, loneliness, and a deep sense of not belonging.

Enemies Paul develops the concept by saying, “enemies in your mind.” The Greek word rendered “enemies” means to be “hateful or hostile.” The hostility toward God is in our minds. The word “mind” can refer to “thought, disposition, or attitude.” Our whole disposition is affected. All of us have felt mental hostility toward God. Why did He make me like this: too short, too tall, not athletic, not intellectual, not pretty, not talented, not able to speak or hear or see? Or we have thought, why did He let this happen to me: being born in this family, having this brother or sister, mother or father, or relative? Why did He permit my friend to die? We begin to feel God is not fair. Then, we think about the world, the hunger, the injustice, the war, and we feel that at least somehow, God is to blame.

Evil Works Paul adds, “By wicked works.” The word “by” is misleading. The Greek text has “in” and it is a separate statement. Our hostility is first internal—in our minds, attitudes, and disposition. Then, it expresses itself in our performance—in the sphere of our works. This is our moral alienation from God. Evil, wicked works: war, murder, hate, and injustice are people’s doing, people apart from God.

Note the progression: estrangement (separation from God), enemies in mind (hostility toward God), evil works (sin against God). Is God mad? Yes. God hates sins. He has holy hatred and anger of it. People are God’s enemy. That’s not what we think. That is what God thinks!

Reconciliation to God

Reconciliation Why doesn't God do something? He has. Paul adds, "Yet now He has reconciled" (1:21). The Greek word rendered "reconciled" means "to change, exchange," especially money. If a customer came to your store with an English pound, German mark, or a Japanese yen, you'd say, "I cannot accept that. You must go to the bank and get it exchanged to dollars. That's the Greek word reconciled. Customers get their money changed to something acceptable. Here the Greek word means "reconciled completely." Reconciliation is usually mutual. Two people are separated. They are at odds. Then, after mutual hostility, there is a mutual concession. This Greek word for reconciliation, however, *never* denotes *mutual* reconciliation after mutual hostility. When I looked at my bank statement, I knew my bank and I needed to be reconciled. Only it was me who needed changing, *not* them.

Crucifixion God accomplished this "in the body of His flesh through death" (1:22). This is, of course, a reference to the death of Jesus Christ. The phrase "the body of his flesh" is "evidently a Hebraism" for the physical body (Bruce). Paul emphasizes that His body was a genuine physical frame, perhaps, because of the spurious spiritualism, which endangered the Colossian church. In verse 18, the reference is to Christ's spiritual body, the church. Here, it is to His physical body. God reconciled sinners through the death of His Son (1:20) because the death of Christ removed the sin barrier.

Years ago, a husband and wife became estranged and finally separated. They both left the city where they had lived and taken up residence in different parts of the country. Sometime later, on a business trip, the husband returned to the city where he had lived with his wife. While he was there, he went to the gravesite of his son. He was standing by the grave when he heard someone behind him. Turning, he saw his estranged wife. The first inclination of both was to run, but they didn't. As a result, they were reconciled. They were reconciled over the grave of their son. It took his death to reconcile them! It takes the death of Christ to reconcile people to God.

Now, God is not mad at you.

Presentation to God

The Presentation Paul says, "to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable in His sight" (1:22). While some take this as a reference to what God has already done (Lightfoot), "perhaps most" interpret this as "a yet future presentation to God (on Judgment Day)" (Vaughan). This is God's purpose in reconciling us to Himself. In a word, God's purpose is to present us mature (1:28) when we stand before Him. The Greek word translated "holy" means to set apart, separate, dedicate. God reconciled us to Himself, so we would be set apart unto Him.

Let me illustrate. I once went to a library to study. I found something I wanted to copy. The library had a copy machine, but it would only take dimes. All I had was dollars. The copy machine suggested I take my unacceptable dollar to a reconciliation machine (that is, a machine that changed bills into coins). I did that. Then my money was acceptable, but the copy machine was not completely satisfied. It explained to me that the reconciliation (change) was due to separation. It insisted that I put the coin in its mouth. Likewise, God has changed us (made us acceptable), so we will be separated *unto* Him.

The Greek word rendered "blameless" means "without blemish." In the Old Testament, the sacrificial victim had to be unblemished. When we are separated unto God, we are without

blemish. When we are separated unto Him, we are loving and unblemished by hate. When we are separated unto Him, we are trusting; when we are trusting, we are unspotted by doubt and disbelief. The phrase translated “irreproachable in His sight” means “not called into account.” When we are separated unto Him, we are without blemish; when we are without blemish, we are not called into account.

The Condition For all of this to be accomplished, there is a condition. Paul continues, “If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I Paul, became a minister” (1:23). If believers continue in the faith, they will be presented mature at the Judgment Seat of Christ. In the Greek text, the word translated “if” is a first-class condition, which means it can be translated “since.” Paul assumes that the Colossians will continue. Paul piles one word on top of another to emphasize continuing. The Greek word translated “grounded” means “to lay a foundation.” The one rendered “steadfast” means “seated.” and “moved away” can mean “earthquake-stricken” (Wiersbe, who says Colosse was in a region known for earthquakes). The “hope of the gospel,” that is, the expectation of the gospel, which is heaven (1:5, 27), is the foundation. If believers remain seated and do not move away from it, they will end up mature (1:5; they had hope laid up in heaven because they had faith and love).

Paul reminds them that this gospel was the one they had heard (1:7) and that it “was preached to every creature under heaven” (Greek: “preached in all creation under heaven”). To motivate them to continue, he reminds them of the universality of the preaching of the gospel (1:6). He also reminds them that he, who was in prison for the gospel, was a minister of this gospel. He was continuing and so should they.

When asked what he saw during the Battle of Waterloo, an old soldier replied, “Nothing but smoke and dust.” When asked, “What did you do?” The old man said, “Do! Why I stood by my gun.” That is what God wants us to do. Whether we see any progress or not, whatever anyone else does, we are to stand by our guns.

Summary: God has reconciled sinners to Himself, so He can present them mature in Christ.

God is not mad at those who have trusted His Son and who are growing toward maturity. After languishing for months in Hitler’s prison, Martin Niemoller emerged, saying, “It took me a long time to learn that God is not the enemy of His enemies!”

Remember the estranged couple, who were reconciled because of the death of their son? You need to stand at the grave of God’s Son. Look at the cross where Christ died and realize that He died for your sins so that you can be reconciled to God. Then, trust Christ for the gift of forgiveness and reconciliation.

IS MINISTERING WORTH IT?

Have you ever asked yourself, “Is it really worth it?” Take your job as an example. You get up to fight the body and the blues on Monday morning. You fight the traffic to get to work only to fight the battle there. And there is a battle at work with fellow workers, the boss, the customers, the red tape, the delays, etc. Or take marriage. Some married couples will not be able to understand what I am about to say—those who have been married for a week—marriage is not all roses; at least there are thorns on those bushes. Family living can be a hassle. Just about the time you think you might get ahead financially, one of the kids has to have three stitches, and you get three bills: doctor bills, hospital bills, and drug bills. Or take the grass. You cut it and it grows right back. If you have two or three kids, someone always has to have his nose bent out of shape, and when everyone blows at the same time, you can’t help but ask, “Is it worth it?” On top of that, the pastor tells you that you should minister to people. So, you try, but people don’t want to hear what you have to say. They don’t understand. They have questions you can’t answer and you can’t help but ask, “Is it really worth it?”

In Colossians 1, Paul discusses the ministry. In the process of discussing the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ to bring believers to spiritual maturity, Paul mentioned the gospel (1:23). He then adds, “Of which I, Paul, became a minister” (1:23). Later in the passage, he repeats almost the same phrase: “Of which I became a minister” (1:25). These two parallel phrases seem to form the two parts of the discussion of the ministry in Colossians 1:23-29. Technically, in the first part of this passage, he is talking about being a minister of the gospel (1:23-24), and in the second part, he is talking about being a minister of the church (1:25-29). Be that as it may, he is talking about the ministry throughout the passage.

The word “minister” is used in the New Testament, both formally and informally. It is used in the formal sense of a deacon (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). It is also used for the ministry of angels (Mt. 4:11; Heb. 1:14), of women in giving and in food preparation (Mt. 8:15; Mk. 15:40, 41), as well as of preachers (1 Cor. 3:5).

The Ministry Consists of Suffering

Paul’s Suffering Paul says the ministry consists of suffering. After saying that he became a minister of the gospel, he says, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you” (1:24a). When Paul penned these words, he was in prison in Rome. This is no doubt a reference to that suffering. He tells the Colossians that his suffering was for them because they were Gentiles and he was in prison for preaching the gospel to Gentiles. His preaching of the gospel of the grace of God to the Gentiles had incurred the wrath of the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem and landed him in prison in Rome.

Paul’s Fulfillment What is startling is that he also says, “And fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (1:24b). Does Paul mean to imply that Christ’s suffering for sin was not complete? Many Roman Catholics have interpreted this to mean that the sufferings of the saints are needed to supplement the sufferings of Christ. A sign in a Catholic hospital read, “Don’t waste suffering; offering your suffering to Jesus for souls” (Vaughan). There is no way that this can mean that Paul is saying

the sacrifice of Christ is not sufficient. That would be a “blatant contradiction of his whole position” (Carson) and is ruled out by the present context (Bruce), which says that God has reconciled “all things to Himself ... having made peace through the blood of His cross” (1:20) and that God has “reconciled” us to Himself “in the body of His flesh through death” (2:22). Besides, the Greek word translated “afflictions” is never used in the New Testament for the atoning death of Christ and it “certainly would not suggest a sacrificial act” (Lightfoot).

Did Christ not cry on the cross, “It is finished,” indicating that His suffering for sin was completed? After the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, did He not sit down at God’s right hand to symbolize the completion of His sacrifice for sin? Surely, His sitting at the Father’s right hand was not an indication that He was tired or resting. Did He not sit down because His work was finished?

To understand this statement of the apostle Paul, it is necessary to remember that there are different kinds of suffering in the New Testament. There is suffering for sin, which Christ did on the cross. That suffering is indeed finished. There is also suffering for righteousness’ sake (Mt. 5:10; 1 Pet. 4:12-16). There is also suffering for service. While believers do not enter into suffering for sin, they do suffer with Christ in service. Those sufferings are not complete (Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 8:17; Jn. 15:18-19). The sufferings of Paul in the service of Christ were not redemptive but ministerial. Paul suffered in his body for the sake of the body of Christ, the church. Those sufferings of Christ are not yet complete, even until this day.

The simple reality is that there are sufferings in the ministry. Paul talked about enduring hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 2:2). He also referred to both physical and psychological sufferings (1 Thess. 2:2). Throughout church history, Christians have been beaten and killed for the cause of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, Paul says that he is speaking as a fool. Then, he catalogs a long list of things he suffered and endured because of the ministry. If I did the same, I would say that I have missed meals and lost sleep many times because of the ministry. On several occasions, I’ve been so exhausted I was certain I was going to collapse.

The psychological abuse is worse than physical abuse. You can always eat or sleep and recoup. The misunderstanding, the misquoting, and the picky, petty criticism are much tougher for me, at least. I have been criticized for preaching too long and for not preaching long enough, forgiving long invitations, giving short invitations, moving around too much on the platform, and not moving around enough. Once, within a short period of a week, I was told that I used the personal pronoun “I” too much and that I didn’t use it enough. I have also been criticized for wearing the color gray too much and having my hand in my pocket.

Consider the suffering many have endured in evangelism. People laugh at believers behind their backs, calling them fanatics and nuts to their faces. There is simply no question about it. The ministry consists of self-denial, sacrifice, and suffering.

The Ministry Consists of Serving the Word

Message Paul discusses the fact that the ministry consists of serving the Word. He says, “Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you” (1:25). The Greek word translated “stewardship” means “dispensation, economy or administration.” In Ephesians 3, the parallel passage to this one, Paul speaks of “the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you” (Eph. 3:2). Paul adds that this message was given to him “for you,” which means “to them and other Gentiles” (Vaughan).

The message that Paul preached had been hidden. He puts it like this: “The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints” (1:26). The Greek word translated “mystery” can be misleading. The English word implies something unknown and even unknowable, but in the Greek New Testament, the word “mystery” means something that can only be known by revelation. It is a secret, a sacred secret. Paul is saying that the message he preached had not been revealed to past ages and generations, meaning, of course, in the Old Testament. He says the same thing in Ephesians 3:5, “Which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men.” Although this message was hidden from past generations, it was revealed to Paul. Here, he says it had been revealed to the saints. In Ephesians, he is more specific: “As it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Eph. 3:5). God revealed this message, which had been hidden and has now been revealed to the saints through the apostles.

What is this message of which Paul speaks? He says, “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (1:27). The message is that Christ in you, that is, the Gentiles, is their hope of glory. The phrase “in you” has been taken to mean “among you Gentiles” (Alford; Lightfoot; Carson) and as a reference to the “indwelling of Christ in His people, whether Jews or Gentiles” (Eadie; Bruce; Vaughan; although Bruce concludes “neither sense should be excluded”).

Some have interpreted this to mean that the mystery was that Gentiles would be saved (Carson), but that cannot be right because the Old Testament is filled with prophecies concerning the salvation of Gentiles. In Ephesians, Paul explains that the mystery is “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). In other words, the message, that is, the mystery Paul preached, was that both Jews and Gentiles would be fellow members in the church and that Christ would dwell in believing Gentiles. This is the Gentiles’ hope of glory.

Method Next, Paul discusses the method of his ministry. Speaking of Christ, he says, “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom” (1:28a). Several words in this verse describe Paul’s ministry. For example, Paul *preached*. The basic idea behind this Greek word is to announce or declare. This particular word, which occurs here with an added prefix, is used elsewhere in the New Testament of the ministry of evangelism. Evangelism is not a discussion; it is a declaration. There may be a discussion, and perhaps there should be, but that is for clarification, not negotiation. The basic method in the ministry of evangelism is proclamation. As the gospel is proclaimed and people believe, spiritual babies are born. Paul *warned* every believer. The Greek word translated “warned” means “to put in mind, to admonish.” It always implies blame. It was used of a soldier out of rank who was admonished to step back in line. After the spiritual baby is born, he or she needs to be admonished and confronted. Paul also *taught* every believer. This, of course, refers to instruction. Spiritual babes must be taught what to believe and how to behave. The phrase “in all wisdom” should probably be connected with both warning and teaching, but it at least modifies teaching. The admonishing and instruction of believers are to be done in the sphere of wisdom.

The purpose of Paul’s ministry was “that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (1:28b). Earlier in Colossians 1, Paul said that God had reconciled believers to present them “holy and blameless and irreproachable in His sight” (1:21-22). Here it is Paul who is to present them, not God (2 Cor. 11:2). Apparently, the fact that God may present believers to His Son does not exclude the fact that ministers will be involved in the process. For that matter, individual believers must be involved in the process of continuing in the faith to make certain that they are

presented mature (1:23). This presentation will take place at the coming of Christ (1 Thess. 2:19-20; 5:23).

Paul adds, "To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily" (1:29). The ministry he has just described demands a great deal of effort. The Greek word translated "labor" means "to work with effort and toil." It was used of the labor athletes put forth in training, highlighting the weariness and toil of labor. The Greek word translated "striving" means "to struggle." Eadie says it refers to intensely struggling. This was no light work or pastime; it demanded every faculty and fiber of Paul's being, and yet, at the same time, all of his efforts were according to the work of God in him, which was powerful on his behalf. In the final analysis, God's energy enabled him to put forth the effort he made for the ministry.

Summary: The ministry consists of suffering and service.

Paul brings all of this up here to point out that the purpose of the service and the suffering is that believers might be brought to maturity. In the previous paragraph (1:15-23), Paul taught that Christ had to suffer for believers to be presented mature before God. In this paragraph, he is teaching that others have to suffer if believers are to be brought to maturity.

If the service of Christ involves so much hardship and suffering, is it worth it? Paul would answer that with an emphatic yes! In fact, he began this discussion of the ministry by saying, "I now rejoice in my sufferings for you" (1:24). He does not explain why he said he would rejoice, but he most assuredly says that he did. While Paul does not explain why he considered suffering in the service of Christ a joy in this passage, there are clues in other passages he wrote. For example, in Philippians, he said, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (Phil. 3:10). He considered sharing the suffering Christ experienced part of being conformed to Christ.

In 2 Corinthians, he said, "as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ (2 Cor. 1:5). Paul felt that his suffering for Christ helped him to understand what others were going through so he could minister to them.

A little boy asked the pet store owner how much he wanted for the puppies he had for sale. He was told between \$30 and \$50. The little boy only had \$2.37, but he asked if he could at least look at them. The store owner whistled and out of the kennel came Lady, followed by five balls of fur. One puppy was lagging behind the others. Immediately, the little boy singled out the lagging, limping puppy and asked, "What's wrong with that little dog?" The store owner explained that the veterinarian had discovered it didn't have a hip socket and that it would always be lame and limp. The little boy said that he wanted to buy that puppy. The store owner said, "If you really want him, I'll just give him to you."

Obviously upset, the little boy looked straight into the store owner's eyes and, pointing his finger, said, "I don't want you to give him to me. That little dog is worth every bit as much as all the other dogs and I will pay full price. In fact, I'll give you \$2.37 now and 50 cents a month until I have him paid for." The store owner replied, "You really don't want to buy this little dog. He is never going to be able to run and jump and play with you like the other puppies." Upon hearing that, the little boy reached down and rolled up his pant leg to reveal a badly twisted, crippled left leg supported by a big metal brace. Then he looked up at the store owner and softly replied, "Well, I don't run so well myself and the little puppy will need someone who understands!" (Dan Clark, "Weathering the Storm," *Chicken Soup for the Soul*).

Besides being part of being conformed to Christ and making it possible to minister to others, suffering for Christ in His service has its personal benefits. There is no joy like the joy of serving

the Lord. There is satisfaction in eating a big, thick, juicy steak, solving a puzzle, reading a book, watching a well-performed play, and seeing the world, but there is no satisfaction like the satisfaction and joy of serving the Lord.

There is no exhaustion quite like the exhaustion of serving the Lord. Digging ditches, sweeping floors, mopping decks, working with people, writing papers, and delivering speeches can produce physical and mental exhaustion, but there is no exhaustion like the exhaustion, satisfaction, and joy in serving the Lord.

Nor is there any reward quite like the reward of serving the Lord. Human recognition and reward are nice, but in the work of the Lord, they are not necessarily necessary. The reward the Lord gives is both now and later, and no human reward conceivable by people is worth compared to hearing Him say, "Well done." Serving the Lord is joyful because it is doing something that lasts.

Several hundred years ago, during a period in English history when believers were killed for their faith, Hugh Latimer and others were burned at the stake. When he was tied to the stake along with his friend Ridley, Latimer said, "Be of good cheer, Mister. By the grace of God, we'll light a candle that shall never be put out!" He could say, "Be of Good cheer in suffering for Christ unto death."

Commenting on the martyrdom of Latimer, Ridley, and Crammer, one historian wrote, "Nothing strengthened the cause of Protestantism more than the death of these brave martyrs" (Cairns, p. 332)

Is ministering to others worth it? Without a doubt!

HOW TO ENCOURAGE OTHERS

A fellow walked into the office of a friend of mine, ceremoniously rolled up his sleeve, pointed toward his arm and said, “Give me an emotional fix!” What he was saying was, “I am discouraged; encourage me.” Everyone needs encouragement. The discouraged need encouragement. Physical exhaustion can promote discouragement. So can personal failure, criticism, or just everything going wrong. The discouraged need an emotional fix. Those feeling down need encouragement. There are times when you are not discouraged. You’re just down. Maybe the difference is degree; you’re not exhausted but just tired. There’s no criticism, but neither is there praise or appreciation. Everything is not going wrong; it’s just going slow. Those feeling down need an emotional fix. Even those who are encouraged need encouragement. When the team is ahead, the crowd still needs to cheer them on to victory. Everyone can identify with the need for encouragement.

Well, what about the flip side? It’s one thing to receive encouragement, but how does one give it? We all identify with the fellow who walked into my friend’s office, but what about my friend? How does one encourage another? How do you give an emotional fix? The happy types try to give encouragement by being all smiles, slapping the discouraged fellow on the back, and shouting, “Well, praise the Lord, brother! Just keep on keeping on!” When someone does that to me, I think to myself, “He just doesn’t understand.” It’s like the sign that said, “Confidence is what you have before you understand the problem.”

In Colossians 2:1-7, Paul encouraged the Colossians to go on to spiritual maturity. Before that passage, he pointed out that Christ suffered so that believers could be presented mature in Christ (1:15-23). He has also said that those in the ministry suffer to bring people to spiritual maturity (1:24-29). Beyond the suffering of Christ and the sufferings of those who minister the Word, believers must be encouraged to move toward maturity personally. That’s what Paul does in this passage. Here is his formula for encouraging others.

Tell Them You Are Concerned

The Concern Paul begins by expressing his deep concern for them. He says, “For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you” (2:1a). The Greek word translated, “conflict” means “contest, struggle, trial.” It is the Greek word from which we get the English word “agony.” This is not a struggle with false teachers but a struggle in prayer (Alford; Bruce; Barclay). This same word, which was used in Colossians 1:29, is used of Epaphras in Colossians 4:12, where Paul said that he was “always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

H. C. G. Moule comments: “Prayer, genuine and victorious, is continually offered without the least physical effort or disturbance. It is often in the deepest stillness of soul and body that it wins its longest way. But there is another side of the matter. Prayer is never meant to be indolently easy. However simple and reliant it may be, it is meant to be an infinitely important transaction between man and God, and therefore very often, when subjects and circumstances call for it, it has to be viewed as a work involving labor, persistence, conflict, if it would be prayer indeed” (Moule, p. 124).

The Extent Paul's concern extended beyond the Colossians, for he says he had this conflict and prayer "for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" (2:1b). Laodicea, which was twelve miles from Colosse, is mentioned because of its proximity to Colosse and because it was exposed to the same doctrinal perils as the Colossians (4:16). The problem is the last clause: "as many as have not seen my face in the flesh." It can mean: 1) Paul had not seen the Colossians or the Laodiceans, or 2) it can refer to a third group beyond the Colossians and Laodiceans. Most commentators conclude that the Colossians had not seen Paul face to face (Alford; Lightfoot; Eadie; Bruce).

The Purpose Paul's concern was for their encouragement, unity, and maturity. The purpose of his struggle and prayer for them was "that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and understanding" (2:2-3). The Greek word translated "encouraged" means "to call to one's side, comfort, encouragement, exhortation. There is always the idea of "enabling a person to meet some difficult situation with confidence and gallantry" (Barclay). It was used of a military leader talking to his men who had lost heart and courage and who were utterly dejected. He talked to them in such a way that their morale was strengthened and they were willing to do battle.

Paul also wanted them united, with love being the element of their union. Error begets suspicion, alienation, and disruption. One wonders if his neighbor is infected with the false teaching and how far; the neighbor reciprocates with curiosity and doubt (Eadie). Love is needed to bind them together. Being united in love is the safeguard against error. No doubt, the believers at Colosse were fragmented because of the false teaching and the false teachers. Paul wanted them knitted together in love. The phrase "knit together" is a metaphor from medicine, which means "to join or unite together." Leaders should not be out of joint with each other.

Let me illustrate. The California redwood trees are the tallest trees in the world, reaching as high as 300 feet. One would think that a tree that high would have a deep root system. Most trees have a root system, which is as deep as the tree is tall and as wide as the widest branches, but that is not true with the California redwood. The redwood has a very shallow root system but grows in groves. The roots of all the trees in the grove are intertwined. They are "knit together," interlocked. Thus, the redwoods still stand when the storm comes and the wind blows, but they are not standing alone. All the trees support and protect each other.

Paul's concern extended to them "attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding" (2:2a). Being knit together in love brings an inward wealth, which consists of full understanding. Being knit together in love produces the conviction and confidence, the fixed persuasion, that one comprehends the truth and that it is the truth he comprehends. The expression "knit together" suggests that God's revelation cannot be understood "in isolation from the fellowship of other Christians" (Vaughan). The revelation of God cannot be known apart from the "brotherly love within the community" (Bruce). Such full assurance of understanding would certainly fortify against error.

There once was a little boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer and started his journey. When he had gone about three blocks, he met an older woman. She was sitting in the park, staring at some pigeons. The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed the old lady looked hungry, so he offered her a Twinkie. She gratefully accepted it and smiled at him. Her smile was so pretty that

the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a root beer. Once again, she smiled at him. The boy was delighted. They sat there all afternoon, eating and smiling, yet never said a word. As it grew dark, the boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave. Before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the woman, and hugged her. She gave him her biggest smile ever.

When the boy opened the door to his own home a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" He replied, "I had lunch with God." But before his mother could respond, he added, "You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!" Meanwhile, the woman, also radiating with joy, returned to her home. Her neighbor was stunned by the look of peace on her face, and she asked, "What did you do today that made you so happy?" She replied, "I ate Twinkies in the park with God." But before her neighbor responded, she added, "You know, he's much younger than I expected."

What Paul wanted the Colossians to be fully persuaded of and understand was "the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:2b-3). Earlier, Paul mentioned the mystery (1:26) and explained that it was "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (1:27). As we have seen, he elaborates and expands on that concept in Ephesians, where he explains that the mystery was that Jews and Gentiles would be members of the same body in Christ. He also explains in Ephesians that this mystery is "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10). Here, he claims that all the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge are in Christ.

Although Colossians 2:1-3 is one long, sometimes complicated and complex, sentence, the thought is rather simple. Paul is telling the Colossians that he is concerned that they and others be united in love and that they be fully persuaded of the mystery of God. In a sense, he is talking about their spiritual growth and maturity, yet spiritual growth is related to their relationship with each other.

Paul states his concern for the Colossians and others positively in Colossians 2:1-3. In verse 4, he states his case negatively. He says, "Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words" (2:4). The Greek word translated "deceive" means "to miscalculate, to reason falsely, hence, to mislead." The false teachers in Colosse were attempting to do this with "persuasive words." The Greek word "persuasive" means "persuasive, plausible." It was used of the persuasive speech of a lawyer's argument. This kind of persuasion would make the worst case appear better and enable a criminal to escape the punishment he deserves (Barclay). What the false teachers said sounded reasonable.

False doctrine is not always all false. Error is usually not all error. If it were, it would never succeed. Often, false doctrine is a half-truth and can sound reasonable and logical. It can "make sense." It is possible to start with the truth and, by false reasoning, end up in error. For example, "There is no hell," they say, but they do not start there. They say, "God is love. A loving God would not want anyone to be punished forever and ever." It is true God is love, but it is not true that there is no eternal punishment. Such reasoning leaves out the justice of God.

Thus, in essence, Paul says, "I don't want you to be led astray. Rather, you need to be united in love to know the truth." In Colossians 2:1-4, Paul desires to encourage believers and motivate them to unity and maturity. He begins by saying, "I am concerned about you and I want you to know that I am concerned. There is a lesson here. If you want to encourage someone, start by telling them that you care about them and want them to know about your care."

By the way, this ministry of encouragement should extend to people you do not know or know well. You might sense that someone in the congregation is lonely, but you should not approach him or her because you don't know that individual. In this case, Paul had never seen these people, yet he told them he was concerned about them.

Tell Them What They Are Doing Right

Colossians 2:5 begins with the word “for.” In other words, this is why Paul expressed his concern for and warned them. What follows is his expression of the fact that they were doing well. First, he acknowledges that he is not physically present with them.

Not Present Paul says, “Though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ” (2:5). Although he was removed from them physically, he felt a sense of oneness with them spiritually. He was not there personally, but he was there mentally.

But Rejoicing Paul was not physically present but rejoiced over what he heard about them. Moreover, he lets them know that, in his opinion, they are doing well. For one thing, they had order. The Greek word translated “order” was a military term connoting the orderly array of a band of disciplined soldiers. It means to stand shoulder to shoulder. The Praetorian Guard, which guarded Paul while he was in prison in Rome, might have suggested this image. At any rate, the Colossians had a harmonious and undivided church.

They also had steadfastness. This Greek word means “to make firm or solid, to make strong.” Like the word for order, this was from the vocabulary of military life. It means something like our concept of a “solid front” (Lightfoot). Paul envisions the situation at Colosse to be like that of an army under attack and affirms that their lines are unbroken and their discipline intact. Their faith is firmly fixed in Christ.

There is another lesson here for the ministry of encouragement. Paul begins this paragraph by telling them he wants to encourage them. Now he is telling them that they are doing well. When you wish to correct or encourage someone, start with what they are doing right. One lady who wanted to help another Christian said to her, “I might as well be blunt: you blew it.” That is not the way to begin.

Rod Cooper said, “I almost flunked the first grade. I was a terrible reader. We had three reading groups in my school. The highest group happened to be the Owls. They were in the trees above everybody else. The next group happened to be the Giraffes—head and shoulders above the rest of us. I was in the third group, the Humpty Dumptys. We were on the wall, off the wall, in the wall, and out! We just couldn't get it together. We struggled. My mom saw me coming home discouraged and down every day. She started reading with me every night. I came home one day with a C on one of my papers, and I gave it to her. She smiled and started to cry. She said, “Oh, Rodney, I'm so proud of you.” She made my favorite dinner and let me stay up late. I'm thinking, Gee, if this is what a C will do! What do you think that did for me? It spurred me to want to do my best. That's what encouragement does. It makes you want to move on when you feel like quitting. I didn't make it to the Owls. I got to the Giraffes, and I got out of first grade. Here I am. Today, my mom introduces me, ‘This is my son.’ She'll put her arm around me, ‘This is my son, Doctor Cooper.’ Then she'll look at me and wink just to remind me from where I've come.”

Tell Them What to Do Now

Exhortation Based on what he has already said (“therefore,” 2:6), Paul directly exhorts them by telling them, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him” (2:6). The exhortation is to walk in Christ, here described as “Christ Jesus the Lord,” which is the only place in Paul’s letters where he uses this title of Christ. The expression “Christ Jesus the Lord” has been taken to mean “Christ Jesus, as their Lord” (Bruce), but it is better to understand this phrase as meaning “the Christ, even Jesus the Lord” (Lightfoot). The word “Lord” means “God.” The word “Lord” comes from the personal name of God in the Old Testament (Carson). The order of the words in the title “underscores” the “divine nature of the Son.” What does the phrase “as you have ... received Christ ... so walk” (2:6) mean? Some have interpreted this to mean that they had received Christ by faith, so now they were to walk by faith (Wiersbe). Paul’s point is that their initial acceptance of the gospel is to be the pattern of their walk (Carson). They received Christ as God. Now they should continue in that belief.

Explanation This walk Paul desires for them is described with three phrases. Paul said, “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving” (2:7). The Greek text says, “Having been rooted, be being built up.” In other words, having been rooted like a tree, they were to be built up like a house. He tells them, “You have been rooted; don’t be uprooted. Rather, grow.” Furthermore, he wants them to be established in the doctrine they had been taught. The Greek word translated “established” means “firm, secure” in the sense of a legally guaranteed security. They were to be confirmed in the faith that Epaphras had taught them. Some take off like a rocket and fall like a rock. Paul’s third phrase to describe their walk is “abounding in it with thanksgiving.” It would have been easy to complain and be negative in their situation. One of the ultimate virtues of walking in Christ is an attitude of gratitude.

Dear God, Even though I clutch my blanket and growl when the alarm rings, thank God that I can hear. Many are deaf. Even though I keep my eyes closed against the morning light as long as possible, thank God that I can see. Many are blind. Even though I huddle in my bed and put off rising, thank God that I have the strength to rise. Many are bedridden. Even though the first hour of my day is hectic, when socks are lost, toast is burned, and tempers are short, thank you, God, for my family. Many are lonely. Even though our breakfast table never looks like the pictures in magazines and the menu is at times unbalanced, thank you, God, for the food we have. Many are hungry. Even though the routine of my job is often hard, thank you, God, for the opportunity to work. Many have no job. Even though I grumble and bemoan my fate from day to day and wish my circumstances were not so modest, thank you, God, for all I have. Many have nothing.

Summary: The way to encourage and exhort others is by telling them you care for them, that they are doing some things right, and then directly exhorting them to be grounded, to grow, and to be grateful.

We tend to think of ourselves when we are having a hard time. Paul was in prison, and he encouraged others. When we see others who need to grow, we want to kick them in the seat of the pants, but as someone has said. A pat on the back is only a few vertebrae away from a kick in the pants, but it is miles ahead in terms of results.

The bottom line for all of us is to be thankful.

For fifty years, Hannah R. Higgins, of Australia, was bedridden, suffering intently from a bone disease that had cost her the use of her legs early in life. She bore her trial with patience.

Being established in the faith, she abounded with thanksgiving. In her book, *Cloud and Sunshine*, written when she was seventy-seven years old, she said, “I long for all to prove, as I do, that with our loving Savior’s help, it is possible to be happy under very trying circumstances.” People who visited her called her place of suffering “thanksgiving corner.” Instead of wallowing in pity, she ministered to others from her bed. She sent messages to the ends of the earth full of encouragement. She had over two hundred missionaries on her prayer list, and each one received a letter of encouragement from her at least once a year.

IS CHRIST ALL YOU NEED?

At age eighteen, I trusted Jesus Christ. I knew that I had eternal life. I didn't know much about the Bible, but I knew that I knew the Lord. I began to witness immediately. It wasn't long before I met someone who asked, "Have you been baptized for the remission of sins?" I had been baptized, but not "for the remission of sins." According to that fellow, I wasn't saved until I had that baptism for the remission of sins. I began to feel like I needed something else. I knew I had trusted Christ, but I felt there was something more, at least something I didn't have. Before I could fully settle that issue, someone else asked, "Do you keep the Sabbath day? I wasn't sure which day was the Sabbath, but according to him, until I kept the Sabbath day, something was lacking in my spiritual life. Then another hit me with, "Have you received the baptism of the Holy Spirit?" I didn't even know there was such a thing! So, of course, theologically, he turned me every way but loose.

Have you ever felt that you needed more than what you had spiritually? The doctrines of others may have made you feel as if something were lacking. The experience of others made you feel that there was something more. Or, your own failure may have caused you to wonder. If you've ever tried to break a sinful habit, you may have concluded that there was something you didn't know or didn't have. That's the way the Colossians felt. They trusted Christ and knew it, but false teachers told them they didn't know it all or have it all. It is difficult to identify the exact nature of the Colossian heresy because there is no direct account of it in the book. Its main features can be known from the allusions made to it. The error seemed to be a mixture of Jewish legalism, Greek philosophical speculation, and Gentile asceticism. Lightfoot called it Gnostic Judaism.

Thus far in this book, Paul has urged the Colossians to grow to maturity. Now he warns, "Beware lest anyone cheat you" (2:8a). The Greek word translated "beware" means "look, discern, take heed." Paul is telling them to be on their guard (Eadie). He is not saying that what he warns against has taken place, only that it could happen. The Greek word translated "cheat" means "to carry off as a spoil, to be led captive." It was used of the abduction of a virgin. More frequently, it was used of taking captives in war and leading them away as booty. The false teachers are depicted as men stealers wishing to entrap the Colossians and drag them away into spiritual enslavement. Like a slave trader, they wanted to kidnap believers and sell them as a slave into false doctrine.

The danger is that they would be cheated "through philosophy and empty deceit" (2:8b). The Greek word translated "philosophy" means "the love of wisdom." Today, the word is associated with Greek philosophy, but the philosophy Paul speaks of here is not necessarily Greek. Josephus called the doctrine of the Jewish sect philosophy. The "philosophy" in Colosse was a Jewish legalism mixed with speculation and mysticism, which afterward expanded into Gnosticism (Alford; Eadie). The sixteenth-century philosopher Frances Bacon wrote, "A little philosophy inclines man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy brings men's minds about to ... Providence and Deity." Theology does the same thing. The phrase "empty deceit" further describes this philosophy. It was an empty delusion, a hollow sham. There was no reality about it. Phillips's translation calls it "high-sounding nonsense."

The next three phrases in verse 8 begin with "according to." In the Greek text, this construction indicated a norm or standard. The standard of the false teaching was "according to

the tradition of men” (2:8c). Tradition is that which is handed down. If it is handed down from God, it is good and proper (2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6). In this case, however, the tradition was from men. Furthermore, it was “according to the basic principles of the world” (2:8d). The phrase “basic principles” means “elements.” This teaching had to do with the elements of the world, that is, with the material and the external, that which was evident to the senses, the visible, the material, in contrast to the spiritual and invisible. Moule calls it a “materialistic teaching” bound up with the world alone and contrary to the freedom of the Spirit. The whole problem is summed up in the last phrase of verse 8: “And not according to Christ” (2:8e). For the false teachers, Christ is not the standard by which the false ideas are judged. It was not in accord with Him. Anything that takes believers away from Him, adds to Him, or supplements Him will capture and cheat them.

The Place of Christ; He is the Fullness of God

Fullness Paul now begins to explain in detail why following the traditions of men cheats the believer (see “for,” 2:9). He says, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (2:9). When the Colossians first heard these words read in their assembly, what jumped out at them was the word “fullness.” The false teachers evidently used that term. To them, the fullness was a succession of angelic beings. Paul gives their term a different twist. The real fullness was not a string of unseen powers; it was in Christ. He is “the entire fullness of the Godhead ... the totality of the divine powers and attribute” (Lightfoot).

Godhead The key word is “Godhead.” That Greek word is only used here in the New Testament and means “deity.” A similar but weaker word denoting divine nature is found in Romans 1:20. The word used here is an abstract term connoting not just divine qualities but the very essence of God. Trench translates it “absolute, essential deity.” Alford says it means “The essential being of God.” H. C. G. Moule explains it to mean “The whole glorious total of what God is, the supreme nature in its infinite entirety.” Paul is thus affirming that all God is, is in Christ.

Bodily Furthermore, Jesus Christ is all the fullness of the Godhead, bodily. God took on a body. God became a human. Christ is God in bodily form. In the words of John, the apostle, “The Word became flesh” (Jn. 1:14).

There is more here than the incarnation. The word “dwells” is in the present tense. If only the incarnation were in view, it would be in the aorist tense, which indicates a past completed act. Christ is deity not only in birth but also in life and His continual existence after the resurrection. The present tense also indicates that Jesus Christ still has a material body, although He now has a resurrected, immortal, incorruptible body. As Gromacki says, “He did not surrender His deity at His incarnation, and He did not give up His humanity at His resurrection.”

Jesus Christ is 100% God and 100% man. He is not 50% God and 50% man, 75% God and 25% man, or 99.44% God and the rest man. He is very God of very God, and yet, He is very man of very man.

A cultist once challenged a Christian with: “You said that Jesus Christ is co-equal with the eternal Father, but He cannot be, for no son is ever as old as the one who has begotten him.” The Christian replied, “You just called God the eternal Father; have you ever thought that statement through? Don’t you realize that God can only be an eternal Father if He has an eternal Son? If you rethink your position in the light of Scripture, you’ll see that the eternal Fatherhood of necessity demands eternal Sonship.”

The Position of Christians: They are Complete in Christ

Complete Paul now turns his attention toward believers. He says, “And you are complete in Him” (2:10a). The Greek word translated “complete” means “filled up, made whole, complete.” This is a direct reference to verse 9. Paul’s argument is forceful. Christ is all the fullness of God and believers are complete in Him. Their fullness comes from His fullness; they are full and complete (Lightfoot). They don’t need any other “supplementary source of grace” (Alford). Calvin wrote, “‘Ye are made full’ does not mean that the perfection of Christ is transfused into us, but that there are in Him resources from which we may be filled that nothing be wanting in us.” As Wesley put it, “Thou, O Christ, art all I need, more than all in Thee I find.”

The all-sufficiency of Christ is further affirmed in the statement that He is “the head of all principality and power” (2:10b). He is the head in the sense that He is the sovereign, supreme Lord over all that exists. Whatever powers and authorities there are in the universe, He is over them. There are “no exceptions” (Eadie).

Believers’ completeness in Christ is now expounded in more detail by mentioning two things that happened to them when they were united to Christ. They were spiritually circumcised and spiritually raised from the dead.

Spiritual Circumcision Paul says, “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ” (2:11). In direct obedience to the command of God, Abraham was the first to practice the rite of circumcision (Gen. 17:9-14, 23-27). From that point on, all the male physical descendants of Abraham had the foreskin cut away as an outward sign of their participation in the Abrahamic Covenant. It was made with hands, that is, it was physical and it affected an external organ of the body. Believers in Jesus Christ experience spiritual circumcision. As Paul explains, their circumcision is made without hands, that is, it is not physical, it is spiritual. This idea is not exactly new; spiritual circumcision was taught in the Old Testament (Deut. 30:6). Furthermore, spiritual circumcision relates not to an external organ but to one’s inward being. Elsewhere in the New Testament, it is called the circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29).

Paul explains the nature of spiritual circumcision when he says, “By putting off the body of sins of the flesh.” Their phrase “putting off” conveys the idea of stripping off and casting away. The body of the sins of the flesh is the sum total of sin. Paul calls this the “circumcision of Christ,” meaning the circumcision which Christ affects. Christ, not Moses, performed this spiritual circumcision.

Thus, believers have a spiritual circumcision. It is not physical but spiritual; it is not external but internal; it is not partial but complete; it is not by Moses but by Christ. As Lightfoot said, “You don’t need the circumcisions of the flesh if you have received the circumcision of the heart.”

The next verse explains when this took place: “buried with Him in baptism” (2:12a). Technically, the tense of the word “buried” in the Greek text (aorist passive participle) can indicate either antecedent or simultaneous action (Dana and Mantey, p. 230). The baptism here is undoubtedly contemporary with circumcision (Alford).

This baptism has been interpreted as water baptism, which is obviously inaccurate. For one thing, Paul has just emphasized that this is a spiritual, not physical operation. People may be buried in baptism without being submerged in water in the same way that they can be circumcised without the spilling of blood (Eadie). Furthermore, he says that it is “through faith” (2:12). This “radical transformation” is “effected through faith” (Carson). Therefore, this refers

to spiritual baptism, which occurs when a person trusts Jesus Christ. First Corinthians 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have been made to drink into one Spirit.” Water baptism is the outward counterpart of spiritual baptism. In the New Testament, baptism is often viewed as death rather than washing (Moule). Believers were buried with Christ. Burial presupposes death. When Jesus Christ died on the cross and was buried, all believers were spiritually identified with Him. Part of a believer’s completeness in Christ is that he has died with Christ, a truth Paul repeatedly teaches in his writings.

The second thing that happens to believers when they are united with Christ is that they are raised from the dead. Paul says, “In which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (2:12b). All humans are born spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1), which means they were born separated from God. When people trust Jesus Christ, they are raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. The phrase “faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” is another way of saying “faith in Christ who rose from the dead” (Rom. 10:9).

Thus, Colossians 2:10-12 teaches that believers are complete in Christ. The word “complete” (2:10) is a nautical term. As a ship is supplied and fitted for a journey so that it has everything it needs to make the trip, so the Christian is complete in Christ and ready for the voyage of life in Christ. In being buried with Christ in His death and raised with Christ in His resurrection, believers have all they need spiritually.

In a small-town church in upstate New York, a rector was pastor of a church for over thirty-five years. When he retired, a young priest replaced him. After only a short time, he began to perceive that the people were upset at him. Eventually, he asked one of the lay leaders what was wrong. The man said, “I hate to say it, but it’s how you do the Communion service.” The young man was bewildered. “What do you mean?” He asked. He was told that it was not so much what he did as it was what he left out. He was not aware of anything that he left out of the Communion service. He was told that when the previous rector administered communion, he’d always go over and touch the radiator. Having never heard of that liturgical tradition, he called the former rector, who explained that before he administered the chalice to the people, he always touched the radiator to discharge the static electricity so I wouldn’t shock them. For over thirty-five years, the people of his congregation had thought that was a part of the holy tradition. That church has now gained the name “The Church of the Holy Radiator.”

You have all you need in Christ. Don’t add the radiator.

The Possessions of the Christian

In Colossians 2:13-15, Paul enumerates some of the results of the believer’s position in Christ. These are their possessions, which include forgiveness of sins (2:13), freedom from the Law (2:14), and freedom from satanic power (2:15).

Forgiveness of Sin Paul says, “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (2:13). Before being in Christ, believers were dead in that they were uncircumcised in their flesh. There are two interpretations of the phrase “uncircumcision of your flesh.” One is literal (Eadie; Moule), and the other is figurative (Lightfoot, who says that while the literal is not excluded, the spiritual is most prominent). The literal interpretation says this means that they had not had the Jewish rite of circumcision, that is, they were Gentiles. Paul told the Ephesians,

“Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands” (Eph. 2:11). The figurative interpretation says that the word “flesh” here is a reference to the sinful disposition. If that is the case, this is a reference to what Paul mentioned in verse 11, where he told them, “In Him, you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ” (2:11). The literal interpretation is probably the correct one, although the literal interpretation implies the figurative one. Not having the Jewish rite implies being separated from God and being in sin. In that state, God made them alive with Christ, all of which is a repetition and application of Colossians 2:11-12. The practical possession is that God has forgiven *all* trespasses.

When you trusted Christ, you received the forgiveness of *all* your sins. You do not need to add anything to that. You do not need “baptism for the remission of sins.” You have the remission of *all* sins the moment you trust Christ.

Freedom from the Law The believer possesses the forgiveness of sins and freedom from the Law. Paul states, “Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (2:14). The phrase “the handwriting of requirements” is a reference to the Mosaic Law (Eph. 2:15). The Ten Commandments were requirements (Greek: “decrees”) written on tablets of stone with the finger of God. That Law was against us. It was like an indictment drawn up against a prisoner and was an I.O.U., a document of indebtedness. It was against us or, to state the case a little stronger, it was contrary to us. Homer Kent, Jr. likens it to “an unpaid bill turned over to a bill collector.” Carson explains, “The law of God not only stated our guilt but cried out for the penalty due to such guilt.” Gromacki says, “The law was the prosecuting attorney, judge, jury, and executioner of the sinner.”

In His death on the cross, Christ dealt a death blow to the Law. That is expressed in several ways in this verse. Paul says He “wiped out the handwriting of requirements.” The Greek word translated “wiped out” signifies a cancellation or an erasing. When a debt was canceled, a large “X” was placed on the document. In a similar fashion, the ordinances of the Mosaic Law declared that sinful man owed a debt of death; by His death, Christ canceled the debt. Secondly, Christ has “taken it out of the way,” which means He removed it; He carried it off. In the Greek text, this phrase is in the perfect tense, indicating that Christ did it in the past and it is still out of the way. This describes a permanent removal. Believers need to have no fear that the penalty of a broken law will return later to haunt them. Thirdly, Paul says Christ “nailed it to the cross.” This may allude to the ancient custom of nailing a copy of a nullified degree in a public place.

The writing against us has been erased. The document, contrary to us, has been torn up. The notice contrary to us has been cast aside. Believers are freed from the Law.

In California, motorists can pump their own gas at self-service filling stations. After living in California for twenty years and getting used to pumping my own gas, I took a trip to Portland, Oregon, where there is a law against motorists pumping their own fuel. That law bound me until I once again entered California. In California, I was free from that law. In Christ, I am free from the Mosaic Law. I do not have to keep the Sabbath. I am not under the law. I died to it!

Free from the law, O happy condition,
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission;
Raised by the law and bruised by the fall,
Grace hath redeemed us once for all.

Once for all, O sinner, receive it;
Once for all, O brother, believer it;
Cling to the cross, the burden will fall,
Christ hath redeemed us once for all.

Freedom from Satanic Power Believers' possessions includes freedom from satanic powers. Paul explains, "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it" (2:15). Principalities and powers are spiritual forces that are in rebellion against God. H. C. G. Moule calls them "the dreadful hierarchy of evil." These are hostile, demonic forces. This is an allusion to the supernatural powers that are prominently figured in the Gnostic system. Christ has spoiled those forces. The Greek word translated "disarmed" means "to strip off." The imagery is that of a conquered antagonist being stripped of his weapons and arms (Eadie). Christ disarmed the principalities and powers. Then, He made a public spectacle of them; He made a show of them openly, which is an allusion to a triumphal procession. Christ exposed them to public disgrace, making them a public spectacle by exhibiting them to the universe as His captives.

Furthermore, Paul states Christ on the cross was "triumphing over them in it." Although the word "it" in the Greek text is capable of being rendered as masculine, that is, "him," it is best understood as a reference to the cross. To the casual observer, the cross was an instrument of death and a symbol of defeat, but Paul pictures it as Christ's place of victory. There He completely and irrevocably subjected the demonic forces to Himself.

The reference to a public spectacle and triumphing are allusions to the triumphal procession. After a victorious campaign, a conquering general returned home to lead a parade of victory. The conquering hero, riding at the front in his chariot, led his troops through the streets of his hometown. Behind them trailed the company of vanquished soldiers and captives, which were the spoils of war. Christ is pictured as the conquering general. The principalities and powers are the vanquished displayed as the spoils of battle before the entire universe.

Summary: Because Christ is the fullness of the Godhead bodily, those who are in Him are complete and should not let anyone kidnap them away from Him.

Believers should be aware of cults, isms, and emphases that do not center on Christ and His Word. That does not mean they have to learn all about every cult, but it does mean that they must know about Christ to spot a cult. If believers understand the true teaching of Scripture, they can spot the false. If they know what a straight stick looks like, they can identify a crooked one.

Believers should also believe that they are complete in Christ. Believers feel inadequate, inferior, and insecure. They are! The problem is that everyone is trying to get believers to feel adequate and secure apart from Christ. Believers need to realize that they are complete in Christ and relax. Oh, they will fail, but they are complete nonetheless. Others may say they are a dud; God says, "You are complete." Believe Him.

As a believer, you do not have to be, prove, or find something. You have all you need in Jesus Christ. Beware of looking elsewhere. Believe you have all you need in Him.

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

On Christ the Solid Rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

An aged silver miner spent his life searching for silver in the mountains of California. He became so obsessed with his search that his wife and children finally left him. When he died, the few people who came to bury him found in his possession a note instructing them to bury him under his cabin. As they dug his grave, they found the famous Comstock Silver vein, the richest in California history. The miner was sitting on top of everything he needed, but he spent his life looking for it elsewhere. If you have Jesus Christ, you have all you need spiritually. There is no need to look anywhere else.

BEWARE OF FALSE SPIRITUALITY

God wants you to be spiritual; the world, the flesh, and the devil prefer you carnal. How does the enemy defeat us spiritually so that we end up carnal? The standard answer is sin. Obviously, there is truth to that answer, but what does the enemy do besides the obvious overt sins? The list of weapons is like a list of the enemy of America, long. Here is a suggested abbreviated list.

Materialism. Materialism is not what you have or how much you have; it is your attitude toward material things. Believers can get so caught up in material things and neglect spiritual things.

Business. Business can be motivated by materialism, or it can be motivated by pride. You can just get caught in the rat race of modern living. Believers can become so busy that they have no time for spiritual things.

The possibilities are endless. The point is that sin, materialism, business, etc., can all sidetrack believers and defeat them spiritually. There is another weapon in the enemy's arsenal that is just as effective but much more subtle. Because it is subtle, believers are not as aware of it and, therefore, it gets some when sin and materialism don't. The weapon is false spirituality.

In one sense, the issue in the book of Colossians is false spirituality. False teachers peddling false doctrine and false spirituality were endangering the spirituality of the believers. Paul writes to answer them and reassure believers. After instructing them, he warns them specifically of the danger they face. Although the false teaching was probably a unit in Colossians 2:16-3:4, Paul divides it into three parts. Each part contains a command and a reason for the command.

Beware of Legalism

Let No One Judge You Legalism is the doctrine that teaches that one must keep the Mosaic Law to be right with God. That is what Paul has in mind when he says, "Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths" (2:16). The word "therefore" points back to the preceding verses (esp. 2:14) where Paul demonstrated that by His death, Christ nailed the Law to the cross eliminating it from the believer's life. Now he gets specific, urging believers not to let anyone judge them concerning the specifics of the Mosaic legislation. The false teachers and their converts were no doubt constantly criticizing the believers at Colosse for their lack of conformity to the Mosaic Law.

When Paul says "in food or in drink," he is referring to the Mosaic dietary laws concerning clean and unclean food (Lev. 10:9; 11:34, 36; Num. 6:3). Later, Paul warned Timothy against those who commanded others to "abstain from foods" (1 Tim. 4:2), which is referring to eating meat (1 Tim. 4:3). The false teachers at Colosse probably went far beyond the Mosaic Law, as did the Pharisees. They probably forbade wine and animal food altogether (Lightfoot).

There is today a growing group that will tell you that to be spiritual, you must live by the Mosaic dietary laws and not eat meat. When I lived in Tennessee, my house was just a few miles from a Seventh-Day Adventist college. They served hamburgers but didn't make them out of meat; they made them out of soybeans, and they didn't call them hamburgers; they called them "protein burgers." If someone wants to be a vegetarian and not eat meat, that is acceptable, but

don't say that abstaining from meat makes you spiritual and don't tell me I have to do that to be spiritual.

When Paul says, "a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths," he refers to the Jewish calendar's annual, monthly, and weekly holy days. The festivals were Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles (Ex. 23:14-18). The new moon marked the observance of the lunar calendar (Num. 10:10; 28:11; 1 Sam. 20:18). It was a day of rest, fellowship, worship, and eating. The Sabbath is an obvious reference to the weekly observance of Saturday. On that day, Israel did not work but rested and remembered the divine work of creation and her covenant relationship with God (Ex. 20:8-11; 31:12-18).

Some insist on the observance of Saturday as the Sabbath. The World Wide Church of God, founded by Herbert W. Armstrong, even went further and observed the annual feasts. In their view, to be spiritual, one must observe the Old Testament holy days. As F. F. Bruce points out, if this passage were considered, the "Sabbatarian controversies among Christians would be laid to rest."

The Law was a Shadow Paul insists believers are not under the Law. For them, it has been done away (2:14). Now he says believers should not let anyone judge them concerning the specifics of the Law because it was "a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (2:17). The rules of the Mosaic legislation were shadows of things to come. The ordinances of the Law were not "abiding realities" (Carson). The reality is Jesus Christ.

Let me put it like this. The false teachers came to the Colossians and said, "You are believers; that's great, but the New Testament is built on the Old Testament. You need the Old Testament, too." They concluded that Christians must follow the dietary food laws and the divine feast days. Paul says, "You have it backward. Christ is the substance; Moses was the shadow." In other words, Christianity was not fashioned to resemble Judaism, but Judaism was fashioned to resemble Christianity (Eadie). The Old Testament was a figure, a type, a picture.

Imagine a husband going overseas and leaving a picture of himself with his wife. The wife looks at the picture daily and longs for her husband. When he returns, he gets up for breakfast, but there is no breakfast. She is so busy clinging to and meditating before his picture that she ignores him. The husband would probably say, "That's only a picture; you've got the substance. Forget the picture! You have the person!"

Some believers get nervous when they hear that the New Testament teaches believers that they are not under the Law, including the Ten Commandments. They think that being under the Law of Moses leaves the believers lawless. You don't need a rule to tell you not to eat rotten eggs.

Focusing on the rules and dutifully obeying them may make you think that you are spiritual, but in reality, that is a false spirituality. True spirituality is conformity to Christ, not obedience to rules.

Beware of Mysticism

Let No One Defraud You Next Paul warns about mysticism. Webster defines mysticism as, "The doctrine or belief that direct knowledge of God, of spiritual truth, etc., is obtainable through immediate intuition or insight, and in a way differing from ordinary sense perception or the use of logical reasoning." That seems to be what Paul has in mind when he says, "Let no one defraud you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen" (2:18a). There is a textual problem in verse 18. Some manuscripts

do not contain the word “not” (see “visions he has seen” in the NASB; “what he has seen” in the NIV; and “going on in detail about visions” ESV). The majority of manuscripts, however, have it, as does the *King James Version* and the *New King James Version* (see Eadie). Gromacki explains, “The area of intrusion is debatable. He moved into either the realm of the invisible (“into those things which he has not seen”) or the dominion of the visible (“those things which he hath seen”). The reason for the difference may lie in the supposition that the false teachers claimed to have special visions and revelations, which they alone witnessed. In any case, they elevated extra-biblical content and based their authoritative teaching on what they had personally experienced” (Gromacki, pp. 120-121).

Those things which they had “not seen” are “things which are not visible to the eye of mortals” (Barnes), “things he could have no certain knowledge of; as of angels, whose nature, qualities, works, and ministrations, he had never seen with his bodily eyes; nor could ever discern with the eyes of his understanding any such things in the Scriptures, which he ascribed to them; but they were the birth of his own mind, the fruits of his own fancy and imagination, things devised in his own brain” (Gill). Vaughan says that the thought is that the false teachers were dealing with mysteries of which they had no immediate knowledge (Vaughan, p. 83 fn.). Bruce says the “fleshly mind” is the mind taken up with sense perceptions,” including those received in a state of ecstasy.”

They had concluded that angels should be worshiped (Alford; Eadie). Several centuries after this was written, Christians prayed to angels (Bruce). Perhaps they reasoned that God was too majestic and distant to be addressed, so they invented these intermediaries. H. C. G. Moule quotes Quesnel, a Roman Catholic, as saying that “angels will always win the day over Jesus Christ, despised and crucified if the choice of the mediator is left to the vanity of the human mind.” Some today use this same argument. They go through Mary or a saint.

Such a teacher, according to Paul, was “vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” (2:18b). The term “puffed up” suggests a pair of billows. It depicts a person being inflated with conceit. “Vainly” indicates that this conceit was groundless. The fleshly mind is dominated by the unrenewed nature and unenlightened by the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, these teachers came in humility. The Greek text indicates that the means by which the teachers were attempting to act as an umpire was by willful (self-imposed) humility. This humility was a false humility. Humility is a Christian virtue, but it was a vice for them. Their humility was a “cloke for pride” (Lightfoot). Imagine someone saying, “Oh, you can’t go directly into the presence of God.” That sounds so humble, but it isn’t.

Paul insists, “Let no one defraud you of your reward.” The Greek word translated “defraud” means “let no one act as an umpire against you.” According to Lightfoot, the prominent idea in the word is deprivation. Some interpret this to mean, “Don’t rob me of the prize of God’s high calling in Christ Jesus.” Gromacki says that one possibility is that Paul is saying believers could lose their reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ if they failed to maintain their doctrinal steadfastness (2 Jn. 8).

Not holding to the Head The problem is their relationship to Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to say that they were “not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase which is from God” (2:19). The Greek term translated “holding fast” describes a firm grip, a tenacious hold. The Head, of course, is Jesus Christ. If they preached the Mosaic ceremonies’ preeminence, they could not hold fast to Christ. If they worshiped angels, they could not adore Christ. This is profoundly serious because Christ, as Head, is the source of nourishment and growth. The body, the church, is joined to the

Head by joints and ligaments. There is growth when every member is nourished (supplied with strength) and knitted together (united). It is a growth that comes from God. Without this contact with Christ, the false teachers could not possibly contribute to the church's growth.

Some claim to have had a revelation or an experience and think that the revelation or experience makes them spiritual. The truth is that they are proud of their experience and want you to have it so you can be as spiritual as they are. Beware.

Beware of Asceticism

Do not Subject Yourself Part of the false teaching threatening the believers at Colosse was asceticism. Webster defines asceticism as the doctrine that "through self-torture or self-denial, one can discipline himself to reach a high state spiritually or intellectually." That is what Paul is talking about when he says, "Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations" (2:20). When people trust Christ, they are spiritually buried with Him (2:12). Among other things, that means they are dead to the "basic principles of the world," the same expression used in verse 8. As in verse 8, it means "basic elements," with the material and the external, evident to the senses, the visible, the material, in contrast to the spiritual and invisible. It has been suggested that this expression refers to "ritualistic observances" (Alford) and "Jewish customs" (Eadie). The regulations that Paul is speaking of here are man-made mandates (2:22). These ascetic restrictions were man-made rules imposed as a means of gaining favor with God.

Such regulations consisted of "do not touch, do not taste, do not handle" (2:21). This verse is probably a quote from the false teachers themselves (Lightfoot). Some interpret this list in a Jewish context (Barnes). In that case, prohibitions would be applied to eating certain kinds of foods and contact with things regarded as ceremonially unclean. Others insist these regulations must be seen in a Gnostic context (A. T. Robinson). From the Gnostic point of view, the body, and for that matter, all material things, is viewed as evil. The way to holiness is to deny the body's desires and appetites. For the ascetic, the body is a thing to be punished and buffeted; it is the enemy. At any rate, Paul uses a descending order in the terms, the climax being reached in the last words, "Don't even touch!"

Asceticism in extreme forms has existed and even been widespread throughout church history. In the third and fourth centuries, people starved themselves until they became emaciated. To even bathe the body was thought to be sinful. During this period, it was not uncommon to neglect the body to the point of it becoming a breeding place for lice. One author speaks of lice dropping from people as they walked, which was considered a sign of special holiness. Milder forms of asceticism exist today. Some Christians have a list of things not to do to be spiritual. Some have a list of the "filthy five," or the "sinful six," or the "nasty nine," or the "dirty dozen."

Reasons Paul gives three reasons why asceticism should be rejected. In the first place, these restrictions do not apply to believers. As Paul says in verse 20, "If you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world" (2:20a). In the Greek text, "if" is a first-class condition, which means that this statement is assumed to be true. It should be translated "since." When believers trust Jesus Christ, they are buried with Him by baptism and die to sin (Rom. 6:2), self (2 Cor. 5:14-15), the Law (Rom. 7:6), and the world (Col. 2:20; see also Gal. 6:14). At conversion, the connection with the basic principles of the world of legal and ascetic ordinances is severed. When freed from prison, one is no longer subject to the rules of the prison, so why should he put himself back under them? Those restrictions no longer apply.

Furthermore, the prohibitive lists are the types of things “which all concern things which perish with the using” (2:22a). No doubt, the list included certain foods that were not to be eaten (see “do not taste,” 2:21). Asceticism often leads to vegetarianism. Paul argues that these are the kinds of things that perish when they are used. Kent observes, “How can such things have authority over a man if he can destroy them by using them up?”

Secondly, these restrictions are of human origin. Paul says that they are “according to the commandments and doctrines of men” (2:22b). In the Greek text, the two words “commandments” and “doctrines” are closely linked together. Both describe the same ascetic prohibitions. Paul’s point is that all such regulations originate in the will and word of men.

Thirdly, the restrictions are ineffective. Paul says, “These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (2:23). Paul grants that this list of man-made regulations has a show of wisdom. The ascetic rules masquerade as wisdom. On the surface, they seem reasonable and wise, but what appears to be reasonable is only an appearance of wisdom. In reality, they are expressions of self-imposed worship. Calvin defines self-imposed religion as “voluntary service, which men choose for themselves at their own option without authority from God.” It might seem like the doctrines of wise men, “but this religious devotion is self-imposed” (Carson). The true worship of God must be “in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:24).

People practicing the neglect of the body may appear humble, but their humility is false. While parading under the guise of humility, asceticism pampers human pride, but the most damaging and damning blow Paul makes at ascetic practices is that it has no value against the indulgence of the flesh. All of the restrictions people put on the body are not able to prevent them from sinning. Thus, asceticism is ineffective; it simply does not work. Neglecting the body may appear as wisdom, humility, and spirituality, but asceticism cannot prevent sin in the final analysis.

Eadie puts it like this, “A man might whip and fast himself into a walking skeleton, and yet the spirit within him might have all of its lust unconquered, for all it had lost was only the ability to gratify them. To place a fetter on a robber’s hand will not cure him of covetousness, though it may disqualify him from actual theft. To seal up the swearer’s mouth will not pluck profanity out of his heart, though it may, for the time, prevent him from taking God’s name in vain. To lacerate the flesh almost to suicide merely incapacitates it for indulgence but does not extirpate sinful desires. Its air of superior sanctity is only pride in disguise—it has but a ‘show of wisdom’ and is not.”

Seek Spiritual Things

Paul has told the Colossians what to avoid and reject; he now tells them what to put in its place. Gromacki points out that “the transition between the false and the true doctrine is made in two ways. First, the logical connective ‘then’ ... joins them. Second, there is a parallelism in the identification of the believer with Christ in His death and then in His resurrection (2:2, see 3:1).” Paul gives two commands (see “seek” in 3:1 and “set” in 3:2), and reasons why they should be obeyed (see “for” in 3:3).

Seek Heavenly things Paul begins by saying, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God” (3:1). The Greek word translated “seek,” when used metaphorically, means “to search after, inquire into, desire,

demand.” The things above contrast the things on the earth (3:2), that is, the legalistic, mystical, ascetic practices of the false teachers and sins.

Believers are in Christ, who is sitting at the right hand of God. It is only logical, then, that they would be seeking heavenly things. The kind of things that Paul has in mind are probably the list of virtues given in Colossians 3:12-17. Thus, believers should strive for Christ and the things above, like an athlete striving to win, a doctor trying to save a dying patient in an emergency room, or a lawyer determined to win a jury.

The seats in the United States Senate are arranged so the Democrats sit on one side of the aisle and the Republicans sit on the other. Hubert Humphrey once said on the floor of the Senate, “You must remember that in politics, how you stand depends on where you sit.” As believers, we are in Christ and He is sitting next to the Father, which means we are seated there too. Where we sit should determine where we stand and where we walk.

Set Your Mind on Heavenly Things The second command Paul gives is: “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (3:2). The first command, “seek,” deals with the will, the aim, the practical pursuits of the believer; the second, “set,” refers to the mind. To set the mind on something is more than just thinking about it. The concept involves the whole bent of the inner nature, including the mind, the heart, and the will. The inner self is not to be directed toward earthly things, that is, the rules, revelations, and regulations mentioned above and the list of sins, which follow in this passage. Instead, the inner self is to be directed toward Jesus Christ and spiritual things.

Barclay puts it like this, “from now on, the Christian will see everything in the light and against the background of eternity. He will no longer live as if the world was all that mattered; he will see this world against the background of the larger world of eternity.”

The Reasons Paul gives several reasons why the believer should seek spiritual things (see “for” in 3:3). For one thing, he says, “For you died” (3:3a). This is a repetition of what Paul said in Colossians 2:20. Furthermore, believers have been raised with Christ (3:1). After death, there is resurrection. The “if” of verse 1 is not intended to express doubt. In Greek, it is a first-class condition, which assumes the reality of the statement and should be translated “since.”

Warren Wiersbe tells the story of two sisters who enjoyed wild parties. Then, one day they were converted. Shortly after that, they received an invitation to a party. Their RSVP read, “We regret that we cannot attend because we recently died.”

Because believers have died with Christ and have been raised with Christ, Paul can say, “Your life is hidden with Christ in God” (3:3b). When people die physically, they are hidden in the earth. When people trust Christ, they die, and their lives are hidden in Christ (Barclay). Their life does not belong to this earth, the material, or the visible. Their life belongs to the heavenly realm, to the spiritual, to the invisible.

Finally, Paul argues, “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (3:4). Believers’ life is hidden now; it will be manifested later (Phil. 3:20-21; 1 Jn. 3:2). It is concealed now; it will be disclosed later. Their life is not taken up with ritual or ceremony; it is Christ! It is not wrapped up in the physical and the visible; it will be revealed only at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This statement is intended to draw the stark contrast between the externals of the false teacher and the inner life of true spirituality.

Summary: Don’t let anyone put you under a false spirituality, telling you that you need rules, revelations, or regulations instead of seeking Jesus Christ. Because of what believers are, have been, and will be in Christ, they should reject all false views of spirituality and seek

spiritual things. Christ has met every spiritual need. Believers are complete in Him and, thus, should seek Him and spiritual things.

To put the same thing another way, what has legalism done for you that you should live by the rules? What has mysticism done for you that you should live by revelations? What has asceticism done for you that you should live by regulations?

Over the years, I have watched the enemy knock off one believer after another. I have seen sin get some; I have seen intellectualism and materialism get others, but it seems that false spirituality gets as many and, perhaps, more than these other things. The tragedy is that when false spirituality gets believers, they do not know they have been gotten. They think they got it when the truth is that it's got them.

An aged Christian mother listened to her son describe his brother's sudden rise to wealth. After talking about his brother's money, luxurious home, and fabulous car, he declared, "He's certainly getting on in the world!" The mother looked at her son and sadly asked, "Which world?"

HOW TO STOP COMMITTING A SIN

The lady in my office explained: “My problem is my tongue. I say things and repeat things I know I shouldn’t. The Lord has convicted me. I have decided to stop at least a hundred times but discovered I can’t. How can I?” Men have said the same thing about profanity. A man said something similar: “I blow up at my wife and kids. After I do, I feel horrible. Now I know that as a Christian, I should stop, but how?” Then there was the young girl who told me, “I’ve learned to enjoy sex, but I’m not married. I know it’s wrong. I really want to do what is right, but I find myself right back in bed. How do I stop?” All Christians have a problem with some kind of sin and ask, “How can I stop committing a sin?”

It seems that all preachers have a solution, a sermon entitled “How to Have Victory Over Sin.” There are as many outlines, formulas, and steps as Bible versions and translations. Sometimes, the advice is even contradictory. One will say, “Die daily,” and another will say, “Be determined.” My favorite story about victory over sin is about the fellow who went to an old-fashioned mourner’s bench to get victory. Several saints kneeled beside him to pray for him and counsel him. One said, “Turn loose, brother, turn loose!” Meanwhile, the saint on the other side whispered in his other ear, “Hold on, brother, hold on!” The counseling is confusing.

How does a believer stop committing a sin? Paul answers that question in Colossians 3:5-11, employing three imperatives (3:5, 8, 9).

Put it to Death

Paul instructs believers, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth” (3:5a). The word “therefore” marks not just a new paragraph but a whole new section of the book of Colossians. Before this point, Paul had taught that Jesus Christ is the supreme, suffering Sovereign and a sufficient Savior. Believers are complete in Him. When they trusted in Christ, they were united with Him in His death, resurrection, and ascension. Based on their position, they should put to death their members who are on the earth.

What does Paul mean by “members which are on the earth” (see “on the earth” in 3:2)? Is he saying, “Put to death the *physical* members of the body, for example, the hands, the feet, the eyes, etc.”? The answer is “No” because he explains the members as fornication, etc. He uses the term “members” morally, not physically (Lightfoot). It is not the eye, foot, or hand, as they are in themselves, or as they belong to the physical body, but as they belong to and are subjecting to the old man (Eadie). It is the body’s members “as put to earthly purposes” (Moule). Paul says, “Reduce your feet, hands, etc., to a state of death in regard to their sinful actions and desires” (Alford). He is calling for slaying the practices that make use of the body. He does not suggest believers suppress or control evil acts and attitudes. The course of action he is suggesting is much stronger and more severe. He is saying, wipe them out. “Slay them utterly” (Vaughan). The verb is in the aorist tense, describing a decisive action.

Paul lists five sins that are to be put to death: “fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desires, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (3:5b). The first four forms two pairs, with the first being specific and the second being general.

Fornication The Greek word translated “fornication” is any sexual immorality. It is the broadest and most general Greek word for illicit sexual activity. Originally, it denoted the practice of consorting with prostitutes. It eventually came to mean habitual immorality.

Uncleanness The Greek word rendered “uncleanness” has a wider reference than the word “fornication.” It is uncleanness in any form, including that which is impure in thought, word, and action; Phillips calls it “dirty-mindedness.” It has also been suggested that Romans 1:24 supports the notion that this word has a note of perversion (Carson).

Passion The Greek word translated “passion” means “uncontrolled desire.”

Evil Desire The next Greek word translated “evil desire” is a more general word than passion. Lightfoot says it refers to all ungoverned passion and applies it to gluttony and intemperance.

Some say that all four of these words refer to sexual immorality (Vaughan; even the next word, “covetousness,” has been linked with sexual immorality; see Carson.). While other sins may be included, sexual sins certainly are. Sexual sins should be slain.

The ancient world regarded sex as an appetite to be gratified, not something to be controlled (Barclay). Hugh Hefner is reported to have said, “Sex is a biological necessity. Find yourself a girl who is like-minded and let yourself go. It is no different than eating and drinking.” God says sex is good in its place. Out of its place, it is destructive, like a fire in your home. A fire in the fireplace and under control is good and great. A fire out of the fireplace and out of control is destructive. The problem with forbidden fruit is that you have to pay for crop failure afterward.

There is one more sin in this list. Paul adds, “and covetousness, which is idolatry” (3:5c). The Greek word translated “covetousness” is a compound word made up of the two Greek words for “more” and “to have.” It means “the desire to have more.” Trench says, “Having more ... eager and unscrupulous in getting.” The idea is grasping, a ruthless desire for and seeking after material things. The Greeks described it as “insatiate desire.” They said you might be as easily satisfied with it as filling a bowl with a hole in it with water (Barclay).

A teacher instructed his class to write a composition on “What I would do if I had a million dollars.” The class consisted of a delightful potpourri of Americans of all ages and colors, including immigrants from five continents and young international students. The room was quiet for thirty minutes as the students struggled to express their dreams in English. Then, one student stalked up to the teacher’s desk and flung down two pages of crossed-out and written-over figures: “Not enough, Teacher!” she proclaimed in disgust. “I gotta have another \$100,000!”

This attitude is identified with idolatry because the lust for wealth puts things in place of God. Lightfoot says, “The covetous man sets up another object of worship besides God. There is a sort of a religious purpose, a devotion of the soul, to greed, which makes the sin of the miser so hateful.” “Every one of us is, even from his mother’s womb, a master craftsman of idols” (Calvin).

Such sins are inappropriate in the life of the believer. Paul explains, “Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you also once walked when you lived in them” (3:6-7). Elsewhere, the expression “the sons of disobedience” refers to unbelievers (Eph. 2:2; 5:6), Who are children of wrath (Eph. 2:2-3). The “wrath of God” is His displeasure over sin. It presently rests on those who have not trusted Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:36). The present tense of the word “comes” indicates a “present reality” (Carson). Eadie says the wrath of God is more than chastening. It is the direct “punitive indignation frequently inflicted here in the form of physical debility and disease, remorse, and stupefaction.” Moule renders the wrath of God as “disaster from God.” One expression of divine wrath occurs during the Tribulation (Rev.

6:17). These sins are inappropriate for the believer because they are characteristic of the unbeliever.

Another indication that these sins were characteristic of unbelievers is that the Colossians themselves once participated in them (3:7). Paul's statement implies that these believers were now dead to such things (2:20; 3:3). The paradox is that although believers died to these sins when they trusted Christ, they are now to put them to death in everyday experience. Because believers are dead with Christ and risen with Christ, they are to mortify their members who are on the earth. They should not do the things that they did because they are not the people they were. Believers are to "realize experimentally, "what, from the viewpoint of eternity, is an accomplished fact" (Carson). They are to be in practice what they are. In short, be what you are (Bruce).

Augustine lived an immoral life until he trusted Christ. After becoming a Christian, he met an immoral woman who had been his companion before conversion. As they passed each other, she called to him, but he did not reply. "Augustine, it's me, your old friend," she said. "But I'm not the same old Augustine," he replied.

Put it off

Paul now turns his attention to another list of sins. This time, he tells believers to put them off. This is a continuation of the same thought under a different figure. He says, "But now you must put off these" (3:8a). The term "put off" was used of taking off a garment. These sins are to be set aside, like taking off a coat.

Sin of Disposition Paul lists five sins: "anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth" (3:8b). Anger is a settled feeling of hatred. Wrath is a sudden and passionate outburst of anger. It has been called hot anger. Malice is bent on harming others. It is spite that prompts us to injure our neighbor. Weymouth calls it "ill will." *Today's English Version* translates it "hateful feelings." Remember, the end never really justifies the meanness.

These three refer to sins of disposition. Perhaps there is a progression. If so, if you first put off anger, you will not end up spiteful. Maybe that is why Paul says, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Eph. 4:26). McGee concurs, suggesting that anger becomes wrath when we develop an unforgiving spirit, and malice is congealed anger; it is anger that has been nursed along. As Will Rogers said, "People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing."

Sins of Speech The last two sins in this list concern speech. Blasphemy can mean either: 1) slander; 2) blasphemy. Insulting speech toward man is slander, and toward God, it is blasphemy. In this passage, Paul is speaking about slander. In other words, don't talk with your mouth full of people.

Filthy language can refer to either 1) filthy talk or 2) abusive speech. A filthy, foul mouth erupts from a dirty heart. Clear, clean speech is the overflow of a pure heart. Thus, profanity, dirty jokes, and gossip ought not to come from the mouth of one whose heart has been cleansed. It could mean "obscene language" (Barclay).

Someone has suggested that homosexuality is a symptom of the sickness of our society. The tongue is the symptom of the weakness of the church. Abraham Lincoln is reported to have said, "There is so much good in the worst of us and so much bad in the best of us that it hardly behooves any of us to talk about the rest of us."

Put it away

The Sin At this point, instead of giving another list of sins, Paul singles out one sin. He says, “Do not lie to one another” (3:9a). The special treatment of this sin makes its condemnation more emphatic. To lie is to tell a deliberate untruth or to distort the truth by only revealing part of it or exaggerating it. Many people, who would never think of sexual sins, think nothing of telling lies, especially ones they consider to be “only stretching the truth.”

A sausage manufacturer advertised rabbit sausage. Upon inspection, the Food and Drug Administration found less than 1% rabbit and over 99% horsemeat. “How can you call this rabbit sausage?” asked the inspector. “Because,” replied the manufacturer, “it is half rabbit meat. It’s made of one horse and one rabbit.”

The Reason Paul explains the reason why believers should stop lying by saying, “since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (3:9b). The “old man” is what believers were before they became Christians. When people trust Christ, they put off that old life. Paradoxically, although believers have put off the old man with his deeds (3:9), they must then put off the actual practice of those deeds (3:8). At any rate, Paul is teaching that believers ought not to lie because they have put off the old life. This is the same argument Paul has used throughout the passage (2:20; 3:3, 7).

Furthermore, as Paul goes on to say, believers “have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (3:10). The new man is what believers are now that they are in Christ. It is not the old made new or the old reformed or refashioned; it is a new creation (Gal. 6:15), having no connection whatsoever with the old. In the Greek text, the word “renewed” (3:10) is a present passive participle, which should be translated “is being renewed.” The present tense indicates that this is a continuous process. The new man does not decay or grow old but is constantly renewed. The passive voice indicates that believers do not renew themselves, but some outside force is doing the renewing. Renewing is the process of progressive sanctification whereby the Holy Spirit transforms believers into Christ’s likeness (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:16; Titus 3:5).

In the Greek text, the word “in” in the phrase “in knowledge” (3:10) indicates the goal. The goal of the renewing process is knowledge. The word translated “knowledge” indicates that this is a fully comprehensive personal knowledge (1:9). Paul wanted to know Jesus Christ in a personal, intimate way (Phil. 3:10). This may be an allusion to the boasted knowledge of the false teachers (2:2).

The standard of the renewal is “according to the image of Him who created him” (3:10). God created man in His own image (Gen. 1:26, 28). The image consisted of the capacity for knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). Sin marred that image in man, though he still retains it (Gen. 9:6; Jas. 3:9). Through regeneration and sanctification, the image of God is gradually restored in man. Christ is the image of the invisible God (1:15). Thus, as the image of God is restored in believers, they are conformed more and more to Christ.

Believers should stop lying (or never start) because they have been changed and are being changed. They have been changed in that they have put off the old man and have put on the new. They are being changed in that the new man is being renewed to conform them more and more to Jesus Christ. In the final analysis, it is Christ that matters.

Paul emphasizes the point that it is Christ that matters and not human distinctions. He says, “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all” (3:11). Perhaps Paul brings up this issue because the

sins mentioned in verses 8 and 9 are those that come from a lack of respect for people (Carson). In this new realm, distinctions of racial privilege, religion, culture, and social standing practically cease to exist. Christ occupies the whole sphere. He is all; He is everything (that is all that matters) and in all. This is an emphatic way of saying Christ is everything. He is all that matters.

Four divisions of humanity, which don't matter, are given by the apostle Paul. Race is indicated by the phrase "neither Greek nor Jew." All non-Jews, regardless of their national origin, were classified as Greeks. Religion is identified by the phrase "circumcised nor uncircumcised." The circumcised, of course, were the Jews and proselytes. All others were considered uncircumcised. Culture is expressed by the words "barbarian and Scythian." The Greek word "Barbarian" means a man who says "bar-bar" (Barclay). Barbarians were considered to be ignorant of the language and culture of the Greeks and Romans. The word "Scythian," which comes from the two words "Russia" and "Syberia," was a synonym with the Greeks for the wildest, lowest, crudest type of barbarian. They were proverbially savages (Barclay). Social standing is marked by the words neither "slave nor free." Paul could have included other divisions and distinctions, such as gender, such as male and female.

Paul's point is that in this new realm, all that matters is Christ, not human divisions and distinctions. That does not mean that people in Christ lose nationality, culture, social standing, or gender identification. Later in this chapter, Paul distinguishes between wives and husbands and between slaves and masters. These distinctions have not totally ceased, nor can they be ignored. One cannot maintain precisely the same relationship with a barbarian as with a scholar. However, these racial, cultural, and social distinctions cease to be important to the believers; they lose their significance. Christ becomes supreme; He is all that matters.

So, believers should stop lying because of who they are. One of the Greek fathers said, "Falsehood ill became them who avowed themselves disciples of Him who said, 'I am the truth' (Eadie).

A handsome-looking black lad was for sale at a slave auction during the Civil War. A potential buyer asked, "If I buy you, will you be honest and truthful?" The young man, who was a Christian, replied without hesitation, "I'll be honest and tell the truth, sir, whether you buy me or not." That should be the attitude of all believers. They should not tell the truth because of external circumstances, expediency or because honesty is the best policy. They should tell the truth because they know the One who is the truth.

Summary: Because of who you are in Christ, and because He is all, and should be in all, put off the old man. In short, stop sinning. Or, to use Paul's three imperatives: put sin to death, put sin off, put sin away.

How do Believers stop committing a sin? The answer is they stop it. Other factors play a part. Believers should walk in the Spirit to not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). Meditation is important. The believer should not concentrate and meditate on sin but on spiritual things (3:1-2). Fellowship helps. Indeed, believers should not make provision for the flesh to fulfill its lust (Rom. 13:14), but when all is said and done, the issue is that believers must assume responsibility by the grace of God in the power of the Holy Spirit to stop sin.

This passage argues that because of what believers are in Christ, they can stop it. They are in Christ; Christ is in them; they are a new creation. They have the ability to choose not to sin.

A believer constantly hounded and defeated by a temper justified himself by saying that he got it from his father: "He had a very short fuse, and I'm just like him," he explained.

A pastor asked, "Are you born again?"

“Yes,” he replied.

“Were you born of God?” came the next question.

“Sure,” the man responded.

“Is God your Father?” the pastor asked.

“Of course,” said the man.

“Well, what kind of temper did you get when you were born again? What kind of temper does your heavenly Father have?” inquired the perceptive pastor.

Think about that.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

John T. Molloy was an English teacher at a prep school in Stanford, Connecticut. To supplement his low income, he got a summer job doing government research in education. His research project was to study the effects of clothing on learning in the classroom. His series of experiments convinced him that clothing worn by teachers substantially affected the work and attitudes of students.

The next summer, again needing work, he got a job at an elegant, expensive Fifth Avenue clothing store in New York City. He applied what he had learned in his research project to attorneys. He concluded that clothing in the classroom was also true of clothing in the courtroom, namely that the clothes said something about credibility. As a result of these and other experiences, he became a wardrobe engineer.

He spent the next fifteen years researching 15,000 executives and professional men. He concluded that most American men dressed for failure, but some dressed for success. So, he wrote the book *Dress for Success*.

There is a wardrobe of the soul, as well as the body. Some people dress for failure in their spiritual lives. Such garments should be taken off and discarded. On the other hand, some believers dress for success. In Colossians 3:12-14, Paul tells believers what to put on to be successful in their spiritual life. To succeed in their spiritual life, believers must remove the old garments of vices (3:8) and put on the new clothes of virtues (3:12).

Before describing the garments of spiritual success, Paul gives reasons why these garments should be worn. He says, “Therefore, as *the elect of God, holy and beloved*” (3:12a). For one thing, believers are new people. Colossians 3:12 begins with, “therefore.” Since the believers have put off the old man and the new man (3:9-10), they should put on the following virtues. They should put them on because of who they are: a new person in Christ. Believers are also “the elect of God.” Some people have an allergic reaction to the word “elect.” It is not a germ or a disease. It is a perfectly good, healthy biblical word. It simply means “to choose, select.” Christians are God’s chosen ones. How the choice is made is another issue that has caused great debate. Believers are “holy.” The word “holy” means “set apart.” It comes from the same root which was rendered “saints” in Colossians 1:2. Believers are chosen by God to be set apart unto Him. Believers are “beloved.” The Greek word translated “beloved” is the Greek word for “love,” reminding believers that they are dear to God.

Thus, believers are not only new individuals, but they are also chosen of God, set apart by and for God, and loved by God.” In other words, they are created new, chosen, consecrated and, cared for by God. So, they should wear these spiritual garments.

The argument is not that since you are going to do this, wear this; as saying to a person, “Since you are going to a formal affair, wear a tuxedo.” The argument is, “Since you *are* this, wear this,” as to say to a policeman, “Since you are a policeman, wear this uniform.”

What follows in this passage are eight virtues. In a sense, there is no division among these eight virtues. In another sense, there is. Love is put into one category. The grammar of the Greek text indicates that forbearance and forgiveness are divisions of patience. The other four seem to be characteristics of graciousness. These observations lead to a three-fold division of the passage.

Put on Graciousness

Tenderness Paul says, “Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness” (3:12b). The first garment in Paul’s list is “tender mercies.” The Greek text says, “heart of compassion,” but the Greek word for “heart” was also used for the liver, the lungs, and even the stomach. It was a word used of the body’s internal organs and implied tenderness and softness. This Greek construction, “inward parts of compassion,” is a Hebraism, which should be translated “compassionate heart,” or, as Williams does, “tender-heartedness.” Vaughan says this phrase refers to pity and tenderness toward the suffering and miserable. Moule calls it “ready sympathy.” Songer says, “The expression means to feel so deeply for another person that one experiences the pain of another, suffering with him or her. Compassion describes God’s attitude toward those cast down (2 Cor. 1:3). As Eadie says, “The Colossians were not to cherish a hard and unrelenting disposition that was slow to remit punishment.”

In the ancient world, there was no provision for the aged. The treatment of the mentally ill was “unfeeling and inhuman” (Barclay). The suffering of animals was nothing to them. Barclay, a scholar from England, goes so far as to say, “It is not too much to say that everything that has been done for the aged, the sick, the weak in body and in mind, the animal, the child, the woman has been done under the inspiration of Christianity.”

Kindness The next item is “kindness.” This Greek word translated “kindness” means “goodness, kindness.” For the ancient Greeks, this word combined the ideas of goodness, kindness, and graciousness. In Romans 11:22, it is contrasted with severity. Trench says this virtue penetrates nature, melting all that would have been harsh and austere. Ellicott defines it as the sweetness of disposition. Eadie suggests that the phrase just before this one refers to feelings, while this term implies that it is a form of kindness that is serviceable to others.

Late one night, two tired, older people entered a third-class hotel in Philadelphia. Addressing the night clerk, the husband pleadingly said, “Mister, please don’t tell us you don’t have a room. My wife and I have been all over the city looking for a place to stay. We did not know about the big conventions that are here. The hotels at which we usually stay are all full. We’re dead tired and it’s after midnight. Please don’t tell us you don’t have a place we can sleep.” The clerk looked at them for what seemed to be a rather long moment and said, “Well, I don’t have a single room except my own. I work at night and sleep in the daytime. It’s not as nice as our other rooms, but it’s clean. I’d be happy for you to be my guests for the night.”

The next morning at breakfast, the couple sent for the night clerk. When he arrived at their table, they thanked him for his kindness and astonished him by saying, “You are too fine a hotel man to stay in a hotel like this. How would you like me to build a big, beautiful, luxurious hotel in New York and make you the general manager?” The elderly gentleman introduced himself to the night clerk: “I’m John Jacob Astor.” Thus, the forty-seven-story Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, with 1900 rooms, was built in New York and that night clerk became one of the best-known hotelmen in the world.

That story is an excellent illustration because it illustrates tender-heartedness, kindness, goodness, and graciousness. The difficulty with it is that it seems to imply that one should do a deed of kindness to get something, or at least if you do deeds of kindness, you will receive something in return. That would be to miss the point. Believers do deeds of kindness, not because of what they will get but because of who they are.

Kind hearts are the gardens,
Kind thoughts are the roots;
Kind words are the flowers,
Kind deeds are the fruits.
Take care of your garden,
And keep out the weeds;
Fill it up with sunshine:
Kind words and kind deeds.
Longfellow

Humility The next garment is “humbleness of mind.” In Greek, this phrase is a single word that means “lowliness of mind, humility.” It is not just being modest. Instead, it is esteeming ourselves as small because we are. Trench says, “It is thinking truly, and because truly, therefore lowly.” Humility is not how one acts or speaks but how one thinks. It is humbleness of *mind*. The false teachers in Colosse exhibited false humility (2:18, 23). Believers are to experience and express true humility. Humility is a willingness to subject oneself to others out of concern for them. Humble people are willing to give up their rights and privileges to help others (Phil. 2:3, 5-11).

Martin Luther illustrated humility by telling the story of two old goats. They met on a high, narrow ledge on a mountainside far above a deep, fast-flowing river. There was not enough room on the narrow path for them to pass each other, and neither could turn back, for there was not an inch to spare. If they butted at each other, both would fall into the water below and be drowned. Luther concluded, “Nature’s God has taught the one goat to lie down and let the other pass over him, and then they both get to the end of the day safe and sound.”

Meekness The fourth garment is “meekness.” When the modern ear hears the word “meek,” the mind thinks “weak,” but this is not true. The Greek word rendered “meek” was used to describe a soothing wind, a healing medicine, and a wild horse who had been brought under the control of a bit and bridle. The wind could have become a storm. The medicine could have killed, and the horse could have broken loose, but in each case, the power was under control (Wiersbe).

Meekness pictures strength under control. It combines the ideas of gentleness and meekness. It is the opposite of rudeness and harshness (Lightfoot), arrogance, and self-assertiveness (Vaughan). According to Vaughan, it is the special mark of men who have a delicate consideration for the rights and feelings of others. Meekness is “Christian courtesy” (Carson).

Songer says, “Meekness involves a happy willingness to bear up under difficulty while remaining loyal to one’s commitment to God. The opposites of meekness are arrogance, pride, impatience, and irritability in dealing with others. To be meek in relation to God is to be giving one’s strength to God’s requirements; in relation to persons, it is a willingness to share your strength with others.” Trench says it is not only an outward behavior but an inward grace.

Warren Wiersbe captures the thought of these verses when he writes that believers should put off the “grave clothes” of the old life and the “grace clothes” of the new life in Christ.

Put on Patience

Patience Paul continues, “longsuffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must*

do” (3:12c-13). The fifth garment is “longsuffering.” The Greek word translated “longsuffering” means “patience.” It is a compound word made up of two Greek words: long and wrath (passion or hot temper). Trench says that patience is the long holding out of the mind before it gives room to action or passion. We speak of being short-tempered; this is being long-tempered. This particular Greek word has a reference to people. There is another Greek word, sometimes translated as patience, but more accurately is endurance concerning things. Lightfoot says patience is the opposite of resentment, revenge, and wrath. “How poor are they that do not have patience!” said Shakespeare’s Iago.

Technically, everyone has patience. All wait in line and traffic, but most need more of it often. Emerson said, “A man is a hero not because he is braver than anyone else, but because he is braver for ten minutes longer.”

The Talmud records a legend concerning an aged man whom Abraham invited to share his tent but refused to join him in prayer to one God. Abraham learned that the man was a fire worshiper and drove him from his tent. That night, God appeared to Abraham in a dream, saying, “I have born with that ignorant man for seventy years. Could you not have patiently suffered him one night?”

Forbearance The sixth item is “bearing with one another.” This virtue and the next one is a continuation and expansion of patience. The Greek word translated “bearing” means “to endure.” This word describes waiting with composure under injury or provocation until those who have caused the offense come to a better mind (Eadie, Carson). Vaughan suggests that the man who is truly longsuffering will manifest that attitude in at least two ways: 1) by his willingness to bear with those whose faults and unpleasantness are an irritant to him and 2) by his willingness to forgive those against whom he has grounds for complaint. Forbearing suggests the thought of putting up with things a person dislikes in others.

Forgiveness The next garment is “forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do” (3:13b). The Greek word translated “complaint” means “to find fault, blame,” not in the critical sense of the term but in the legitimate sense of the term (Alford; Eadie). Paul is saying that believers are to forgive when they have grounds for blame or find fault in another. Notice carefully that even a just ground for complaint is not a legitimate reason for resentment and retaliation. This forgiveness is mutual (see “one another”). In a conflict, there is often mutual blame and, thus, the need for mutual forgiveness. Rarely is one person solely to blame in a conflict between two believers or between a married couple.

The striking part of Paul’s statement is that believers are to forgive even as Christ forgave them. Pardon is a divine prerogative. Therefore, this statement implies that Christ is divine, but even more striking is that believers are to forgive *as* He did! That implies many things, but it at least includes the idea of forgiving and forgetting.

Joe was dying and wanted to do everything right before he left. For years, he had been at odds with Bill, formerly one of his best friends. They hadn’t spoken to each other for some time. Wanting to straighten things out, he sent for Bill to come and see him. Graciously, Bill consented. When he arrived, Joe told Bill that he was afraid to go into eternity with bad feelings between them. Very reluctantly and with great effort, Joe apologized for what he had said and done. Reaching out to shake Bill’s hand, he asked for forgiveness. Everything seemed just fine until Bill was on his way out the door. As he left, Joe cried, “But remember, if I get better, this doesn’t count!” That’s not biblical forgiveness.

To forgive as Christ forgave also implies that there will be fellowship after the forgiveness. An evangelist once rebuked a lady with an unforgiving spirit toward someone who had offended her. Upon reflection, she replied, “Well, I guess I’ll pardon her, but I don’t want anything more to do with her.” That’s not the way Christ forgave us.

Put on Love

Love The eighth and last item in Paul’s clothing store is love. Paul says, “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (3:14). In the Greek text, the phrase “above all” is “upon” and can mean either 1) over (Lightfoot) or 2) in addition to (Eadie). Lightfoot says that love is the outer garment that holds others in place. Love is a bond that binds together. It was used of ligaments in Colossians 2:19. Love is the virtue that unites and holds together all of the graces mentioned in this passage.

The Greek word translated “love” means “to seek the highest good for another.” It is not an emotion; it is an act of the will. As someone has pointed out, feelings fluctuate. Even loving husbands do not always feel their love. The most devoted mother is not always aware of her affection. Although no flood tide of emotion overwhelms her heart, she would be horrified at the suggestion that she did not love her child. Feelings are affected by health, circumstances, and physical comfort. Seasickness can rob a person of all sense of love, even on a honeymoon. Feelings are tidal. The restless tides of feeling could never be a true index of deep and constant love. Therefore, as John says, Let us love in deed (1 Jn. 3:18).

Summary: Because believers are in Christ, they should put on godly virtues, and by doing so, they will be dressed for a successful spiritual life.

Believers should replace vices with virtues. Colossians 3:5-11 teaches believers to put off vices, while Colossians 3:12-14 instructs them to put on virtues. Together, this forms the principle of replacement. Virtues are to replace vices in the believer’s life. Some have gone so far as to suggest that the five vices of verse five are to be replaced with the five virtues of verse twelve (Scott and Beare, cited by Vaughan). While that may be stretching the point too far, by putting these two commands in juxtaposition, Paul is clearly teaching that believers are to replace rags of vice with the garments of virtue.

Believers are to put on Christ (Rom. 13:14). In the final analysis, these virtues are the characteristics of Christ (Bruce). The virtues listed here all deal with personal relationships. Nothing is said about cleverness, diligence, and punctuality. Those who are like Christ have developed the ability to be gracious, patient, and loving.

Believers are to develop these virtues by discipline. Galatians 5:22-23 lists three of these virtues as fruits of the Spirit, namely, kindness, meekness, and longsuffering. Squeezing the figure of fruit, some have insisted that the fruit of the Spirit is automatic. According to them, if believers follow specific steps toward a Spirit-filled life, the fruit of the Spirit will be spontaneous and automatic. This passage, however, lists some of those same virtues and instructs *believers* to put them on. That suggests effort and discipline. That is not to say that God is not involved in the process, for He obviously is. It is to say that believers are also involved in the process and that the fruit will not grow without their involvement.

A man who owned a vacant lot overgrown with weeds decided to clean it off and plant a garden. After much toil and time, a beautiful flower garden replaced a weed-infested lot.

Admiring the beautiful flowers, a neighbor said to the Gardner, "Isn't it amazing what God can do?" To which the Gardner replied, "You should have seen it when the Lord had it by Himself!"

THE CHRIST LIFE

As you read Colossians 3:1-14, a passage that enumerates one principle after another on the spiritual life, you get the impression that the spiritual life depends solely on you. You are told that you must seek, you must set your mind, you must put off, and you must put on. It might be legitimately asked, “Where is the Lord in all of this?” Are believers to do this alone, or does the Lord help? Where is the Lord in the spiritual life?

The advocates of “the Christ-life,” one form of the deeper or victorious Christian life movement, claim that Christ and Christ alone lives the Christian life in and through the Christian. Although this teaching has many elements, two of the most prominent are: 1) Christ lives in believers and wants to live His life through them. 2) Believers should stop trying to live the Christian life and start trusting the indwelling Christ to live it through them. Thus, according to this view, the Christian life is subjective in that Christ lives within and passive in that believers do nothing and Christ does it all.

In the book *How to Live the Victorious Christian Life*, by an unknown Christian, the author says, “He (Christ) wants to come Himself into our lives to dwell in our hearts and live His life in us. What a wonderful thing this is!” (unknown author, p. 33). “This Victorious Life is a *gift* and is not to be secured by any struggling or striving on our part. It is not a thing to be attained by long and laborious effort. It is not a thing we can reach gradually by growing more and more like Christ. This must be clearly seen” (unknown author, p. 65). “Let go—surrender: then “let God” do His part. But God will not allow any effort or struggle on your part to help Him. Salvation is entirely a gift of God: entirely of grace (unknown author, p. 67). “We have proved by our own experience that we cannot be good by self-effort. Stop trying to be good. Stop struggling and let the Savior do the great work for you” (unknown author, p. 71).

In his book, *The Saving Life of Christ*, Major Ian Thomas says: “To be *in Christ*—that is, redemption; but for Christ to be *in you*—that is sanctification; to be *in Christ*—that makes you fit for heaven; but for Christ to be *in you*—that makes you fit for earth. To be *in Christ*—that changes your destination; but for Christ to be *in you*—that changes your destiny! The one makes heaven your home—the other makes this world His workshop (Thomas, p. 19). Later, Thomas says, “It is only the life of the Lord Jesus—His activity, *clothed* with you and *displayed* through you, that ultimately will find the approval of God. As a forgiven sinner, you are a member of ‘a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Christ Jesus (1 Pet. 2:5). It is the Lord Jesus Christ alone who makes your sacrifices acceptable to God. Only what He does in you and through you merits His approval, and God can and will accept nothing less!” (Thomas, p. 30).

Such is the Christ-life. Is it correct? Does Christ work through the Christian? Is the Christian to do nothing? Is the Christian life subjective (Christ through me) and passive (I do nothing)? In short, where is Jesus Christ in the Christian life?

Answers to those questions can be found in Colossians 3:15-17. Throughout the third chapter of Colossians, Paul talks about the Christian life. Now, he talks about Christ and his relationship to Christian life.

Let the Peace of God Dominate Your Heart

Personal Paul says, “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts” (3:15a). What is the peace of God? Elsewhere, Paul speaks of peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1) and the peace of God, which comes through trusting Him in every situation in prayer (Phil. 4:6, 7). The peace spoken of here is not the former but the latter. It has been described as “that calmness of mind which is not ruffled by adversity, overclouded by sin or a remorseful conscience, or disturbed by the fear, and the approval of death” (Eadie), “that inner calmness of emotions and thought which rest on the assurance that God is too good to be unkind and too wise to make mistakes” (Gromacki).

This peace, which comes from trusting God, is to rule in the heart of believers. The Greek word translated “rule” means “to act as umpire,” hence, “to arbitrate or decide.” The peace of God is to be the umpire (Lightfoot), the arbitrator (Bruce), the decider (Barclay). Lightfoot says, “Wherever there is a conflict of motives or impulse or reasons, the peace of God must step in and decide which is to prevail.” Having peace *with* God through faith in Jesus Christ and the peace *of* God through trusting Him in every situation in prayer, believers are to let the peace of God be the determining factor and, thus, the dominant factor in their hearts in every situation. In other words, they will not do anything which would rob them of their peace.

A friend of mine lives by this principle. When trouble, trials, tribulations, and turbulence hit his life, he is always at peace. Once, when I knew he was under tremendous pressure, I asked him if the pressure was getting to him. He immediately said, “No, I’m not going to let this destroy my peace.” He was fully aware of the problems. He knew he had some responsibilities in that situation. He also knew some things were beyond his control, but he chose not to worry personally or cause division and discord publicly in the midst of the situation. Peace was the umpire for him. In the midst of the storm, he was calm—by choice.

Social While on one level, the peace of which Paul speaks is personal (see “in your hearts”—3:15a), on another level, Paul is speaking about peace in the church, for he goes on to say, “to which also you were called in one body” (3:15b). In fact, this can be seen as a continuation of the appeal for loving concern expressed in verse 14. If so, the peace of verse 15 is the peace between Christian community members. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that in verse 15, Paul says believers are called to peace within the church. Christ has made peace between believers and God and between themselves (Eph. 2:14-18). Therefore, believers are to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). This is done, in part, by letting peace be the umpire in any dispute or potential dispute that might arise in the assembly.

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul deals with a situation where a believer is married to an unbeliever. He instructs the believer to stay married to the unbeliever, but he says if the unbeliever chooses to depart, let him. Don’t fight and don’t fret. In the midst of that discussion, he says, “God has called us to peace” (1 Cor. 7:15). In other words, in the midst of serious and difficult trouble, Paul argues that peace should be the umpire. It should be the determining factor concerning what is to be done.

Chrysostom illustrates it: “Suppose a man is to have been unjustly insulted. Two thoughts are born of the insult, one urging him to vengeance and the other to patience, and these wrestle one with the other. If the peace of God stands as an umpire, it bestows the prize on the one which calls for endurance and puts the other to shame” (Chrysostom, cited by Eadie).

Paul almost abruptly adds, “and be thankful” (3:15c). The passage’s structure seems to suggest that this imperative is connected with letting the peace of God rule in a person’s heart

and publicly in the assembly. More specifically, believers are to be thankful that God has called them to peace in one body. Grateful people acknowledge God is in control of their lives and circumstances, and He orders all things for their welfare. As believers recognize that and are thankful, peace reigns. Paul earlier prayed gratitude would be a mark of their lives (1:12). Here, he exhorts them to thankfulness.

When he was seven, his family was forced out of their home, and he went to work. When he was 9, his mother died. He lost his job as a store clerk when he was 20. He wanted to go to law school but didn't have the education. At age 23, he went into debt to be a partner in a small store. Three years later, the business partner died, and the resulting debt took years to repay. When he was 28, after courting a girl for four years, he asked her to marry him, and she turned him down. On his third try, he was elected to Congress at age 37 but failed to be re-elected. His son died at four years of age. When this man was 45, he ran for the Senate and lost. At age 47, he ran for vice president and lost, but at age 51, he was elected president of the United States. The man was Abraham Lincoln, who learned to face discouragement and move beyond it. Did you know that Abraham Lincoln established the annual Thanksgiving celebration during the Civil War in 1863? Lincoln had learned how important it is to stop and thank God in the midst of great difficulties

Let the Precepts of Christ Dwell in Your Mind

The Command Paul's second command in this passage is, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom" (3:16a). The phrase "the word of Christ" can either be a subjective genitive (the word Christ speaks) or an objective genitive (the word about Christ). The first would refer to what Christ spoke on the earth and what He revealed directly to His apostles (Jn. 14:26; 15:7). It would be synonymous with the Scripture (Alford; Lightfoot). The second possibility is that this refers to the Scripture, which speaks explicitly about Christ and His work. The difficulty in deciding between these two interpretations is compounded by the fact that this is the only place in the New Testament where the phrase "the word of Christ" occurs. More than likely, the phrase means the Scripture, being synonymous with the phrase "the word of the Lord" (1 Thess. 1:18; 4:15; 2 Thess. 3:1).

The Word of God is to dwell in the believer richly in all wisdom. The Greek word translated "dwell" means "to be at home, inhabit." The Greek word translated "richly," of course, means "abundant." Furthermore, this abundant dwelling of the Word is to be in all wisdom. Paul's prayer was that the Colossians might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (1:9). That prayer is answered when they allow the Word of Christ to dwell in them richly in all wisdom because it is the Word of God that contains the will of God.

Paul's imagery suggests that the Word of God can be outside of believers as a lesson to be learned. Or, the Scripture could be inside believers, but only as an occasional guest. He desires that the Scripture would not only feel at home inside the head and heart of believers but would so abundantly be inside of them that they would be filled with wisdom (Eadie). Do the Scriptures feel at home in you?

Have you deposited enough Scripture to your account so that your balance could be described as rich? If so, you have the resources for the demands of life's decisions. The reserves of some believers are so low that they are bankrupt.

The Result The result of a rich indwelling of the Word of God is first "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (3:16b). Teaching, of course, is instruction. The Greek word translated "admonishing" means "to put in mind" and implies

blame. The essence of admonition is warning and correction. Paul used this word of his ministry (1:28). Erdman suggests that teaching specifically concerns doctrine and admonition concerns life.

The two ministries of teaching and admonishing are to be conducted by psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Many insist that a distinction should not be made between these three types of songs. According to that view, this is not a breakdown of ancient hymnology; instead, these three emphasize the rich variety of music. If there is a distinction, it is that psalms are sacred songs sung to musical accompaniment. Trench says it refers to the psalms of the Old Testament. Hymns are songs of praise addressed to God, whereas spiritual songs are songs that are spiritual, composed by spiritual people and which move in the sphere of spiritual things.

The second result of a rich indwelling of the Word of God is that believers will be **“singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (3:16c)**. The Word of God is to dwell so in believers that it finds spontaneous expression in music to the Lord. The phrase “with grace” can mean either “under the inspiration of grace” or “with gratitude.” Such music is not from the lips to impress men but from the heart to praise the Lord.

When the Word dwells in believers properly, it comes out in music that ministers to others and to the Lord. The truth is that whatever is in the heart comes out. Believers need to make sure that the right thing goes in so that the right thing will come out.

According to the U.S. Public Health Center in Atlanta, Georgia, over a million people are bitten by man’s best friend every year. One man theorizes when a dog’s diet is lacking in vitamin B-1, it is irritable, fearful, and quarrelsome. Likewise, when a believer’s diet is lacking in vitamin B (Bible), their heart is not at peace and they bite people. On the other hand, if their mind is feasting and feeding on things above, they will bless people.

Let the Praise of Christ Determine Your Speech and Actions

As unto the Lord Paul says, **“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (3:17a)**. The phrase “the name of the Lord Jesus” usually means “by His authority.” Here it no doubt has the more general meaning of “in recognition of His authority,” that is, to act with the conviction of His approval, His praise. Thus, whatever believers say or do should be done under the complete authority and approval of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, doing all in the name of Christ is the main theme of the epistle (Carson). It is giving Christ pre-eminence in everything.

All words and works should be done with the attitude of **“giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (3:17b)**. Being constantly aware of the Lord’s authority and constantly seeking His approval will produce gratitude in the hearts of believers. We speak of praising God; one day, God will praise us (1 Cor. 4:1-5). The future praise of God should determine what believers do today.

The atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan, on August 9, 1945. Nagasaki was the center of Japanese Christianity. The Christian community there had survived three centuries of persecution. They worshiped underground and endured martyrdom. They were only allowed to live their faith in public at the turn of the century. Then, in 60 seconds, they were wiped out. The survivors’ response wasn’t anger. Takashi Nagai, who lost his wife in the blast and who later died from the effects of radiation, said that God had specially chosen the 8,000 Christians who died instantly in the blast as an expiation from all sins committed during the war. Nagai said,

“Let us give thanks that through this sacrifice, peace was given to the world and freedom of religion to Japan.”

Summary: Believers are to let the peace of God and the precepts and praise of Christ control their hearts, their minds, their speech, and their actions.

How does this answer the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter concerning the Christ life? This passage indicates that the Christian life is neither all subjective nor all passive. The Christian life is more objective than subjective. There is no doubt that Jesus Christ lives inside believers (Col. 1:27; Gal. 2:20); nor is there any doubt that Jesus Christ enables believers and works in them (Col. 1:29). It is not too much to say that “Christ is my life” (Col. 3:4), and yet the Christian life is more objective than subjective; it is His peace, precepts, and praise, not just His person inside, that controls believers. The Christian life is more active than passive. Believers are to trust the Lord (Gal. 2:20), but at the same time, believers are to exert effort (Gal. 5:16). Believers are to put to death (3:5), put off (3:8), put on (3:12), let the peace of God umpire (3:15), let the Word of Christ dwell (3:16), and do all in the name of the Lord Jesus (3:17).

That doesn’t mean that believers do it all. Obviously, God is at work in believers’ lives, but it does mean that they should adopt the attitude: “Although I cannot do everything, I can do something; and what I can do I ought to do, and what I ought to do, by God’s grace, I will do.”

Ian Thomas recommends a prayer: “Lord Jesus, how I thank Thee that Thou hast not only redeemed me with Thy precious blood, reconciled me to God and established peace between my guilty soul and God my maker, but I thank Thee that Thou art risen from the dead that at this very moment Thou dost indwell me in the person and power of Thy divine Spirit; that Thou hast never expected of me anything but failure, yet Thou hast given me Thy strength for my weakness, Thy victory for my defeat, Thyself for my bankruptcy! I step out by faith into a future limited only by what Thou art! To me, to live is Christ! For Thy name’s sake, Amen.”

I would suggest a prayer like this: “Father, thank You for saving me and giving me Your peace and Word. I confess I have wrong desires and motives and have sinned, but based on Your Word, I have decided to (you fill in the blank). With all of my heart, mind, and strength, I am going to do it. Grant me Your grace in the process.”

DEALING WITH PEOPLE

Many years ago, the University of Chicago and the Y.M.C.A. conducted a survey to determine what adults wanted to study. They chose a typical American town and spent thousands of dollars interviewing adults. They asked 156 questions, such as: “What is your business or profession? What is your education? How do you spend your spare time? What is your income? What are your hobbies? What are your ambitions? What are your problems? What subjects are you most interested in studying?” That survey revealed that health was the prime interest of adults and that their second greatest interest was people: how to understand them and get along with them, how to make them like you, and how to win them to your way of thinking.

In the heyday of his activity, John D. Rockefeller told Matthew C. Brush that “the ability to deal with people is as purchasable a commodity as sugar or coffee. I will pay more for that ability than any other under the sun.” Dale Carnegie said, “Dealing with people is probably the biggest problem you face, especially if you are a businessman. Yes, and that is also true if you are a housewife, architect, or engineer. Research made a few years ago under the auspices of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teachers uncovered a most important and significant fact—a fact later confirmed by additional studies made at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. These investigations reveal that even in such technical lines as engineering, about 15% of one’s financial success is due to one’s technical knowledge and about 85% is due to skill in human engineering—to personality and the ability to lead people.”

Dealing with people is one of the biggest problems believers, and for that matter, all people face. How does one get along with people? Does the Bible offer any insight? The answer is, “Yes.” Consider Colossians 3:18-4:1.

The structure of this passage is simple. Paul speaks to wives (3:18), husbands (3:19), children (3:20), fathers (3:21), servants (3:23), and masters (4:1). Hundreds of years before Christ, Aristotle stated that the three great pairs of relationships were husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant. This passage deals with those three great pairs of mutual relationships, yet a single thread is running through these verses.

Wives and Husbands

Wives “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (3:18). The word “submit” does not imply that a wife is inferior to her husband. The Greek word translated “submit” is a military term which means “to place or rank under, to subject.” A wife is no more inferior to her husband than a private is to a sergeant. Furthermore, here, submit is in the middle voice, indicating that the submission is to be voluntary. This is not something forced upon a wife by a demanding husband but something she chooses to do. This submission is to her own husband. Paul is not teaching that women as a class are to submit to men as a class.

The reason that a wife is to submit to her husband is that it is fitting in the Lord. The idea in the Greek word “fitting” is that which is becoming or proper. Wifely submission is proper not only in the natural order (even pagans would have taught that in Paul’s day) but also in the Christian order.

Some Christians have argued that verses such as Galatians 3:28, which teach that there is no distinction between male and female in Christ, indicate that men and women are equal and, therefore, wives do not have to submit to their husbands. Submission is old-fashioned and out of place in Christianity. There is a new order in Christ! Litfin puts it like this. “According to feminists, Galatians 3:28 teaches that God has created in Christ a whole new order of relationships. The hierarchal view of social relationships is the product of the old order stemming from the fall. In the new order, all distinctions based on race, economic status, or sex are to be eliminated. In Christ, ‘relationships between men and women should transcend the male/female division.’ Thus, gender becomes irrelevant in shaping social roles and relationships.” Litfin adds, “The Boldreys write, ‘Galatians 3:28 does not say ‘God loves each of you, but stay in your place; it says that there are no longer places, no longer categories, no longer differences in rights and privileges, codes and values.’ Men and women do not lose their biographical distinctions by becoming Christians, of course, but in the light of Galatians 3:28, ‘all social distinctions between men and women should (be) erased in the church’” (Litfin, pp. 259-260).

Apparently, no one told Paul! In Colossians 3:18, he is teaching that in Christ, submission is acceptable; yea, for wives, it is commanded.

Husbands Paul has a word for husbands: “Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them” (3:19). In the ancient world, for Paul to tell a wife to submit to her husband came as no surprise, but what he says to husbands was probably a shock. In ancient Greek society, wives were confined to their quarters and prohibited from eating their meals with the men (Barclay). The husband’s duty is love. The Greek word translated “love” means “to exhibit goodwill toward a person.” There is another Greek word not used in this verse, which connotes a spontaneous, natural affection. The word used here denotes the idea of reason and choice more (Trench). Paul is not commanding romantic affection but rather an attitude and actions that concern themselves with the wife’s well-being. He also warns the husband against being bitter. Lightfoot interprets this to mean that the husband should not behave harshly. Eadie says it means hard treatment in terms of look and word. Vaughan says the term suggests an irritable attitude, that is, the husband should not be cross with his wife.

Men can be sensitive when they blunder and sour when their wives make the same mistake. A husband lost his glasses but said, “I understood that. It cost me dearly to replace them, but I was understanding of myself. At about the same time, my wife lost our Christmas savings account book. Somehow, I wasn’t able to quite understand that. It irritated me, although replacing it didn’t cost us a dime.” Paul instructs the husband to exhibit goodwill and not explode with a bad temper.

In the relationship between a Christian wife and a Christian husband, there should be submission and sensitivity. “The home’s happiness rests chiefly on this, the maintenance of right relations between the Father and Mother” (Westcott).

Children and Parents

Children Paul says to children, “Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord” (3:20). The Greek word rendered “obey” means “to listen,” hence, “to obey.” It depicts a readiness to hear and a willingness to obey orders. Children are to obey their parents “in all things.” The principle is that children are not to judge what they should and should not obey (Eadie). Paul is dealing with the Christian home and does not contemplate unchristian attitudes on the part of the parents (Vaughan). The reason that children are to obey their parents

is that it is well-pleasing to the Lord. Obedience does not depend on the character of the parents. Children are to please their parents because that pleases the Lord.

Let me illustrate. Imagine a teenage fellow who is in love with a teenage girl, and she wants him to go to a gathering of her relatives. He would want to do that like he would want to take a final exam in chemistry, but she flashes her long eyelashes, puts on her sweet, seductive smile and says, “Will you do it for me?” “Well,” he responds, “Since you put it like that.” So, he goes to the gathering and, in the process, pleases the relatives, but he does it because it pleases his girl.

Father Next Paul says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (3:21). The fact that Paul addresses the fathers and not the mothers does not necessarily mean that mothers are eliminated (this Greek word is rendered “parents” in Heb. 11:23). It does mean that the father is being singled out because he is the head and ultimately responsible. Furthermore, he is more apt to be stern and exact. The Greek word translated “provoke” means “to stir up.” It can be used in the good sense of stimulation (2 Cor. 9:2) or here in the bad sense of irritation. Paul is admonishing fathers so that they do not arouse their children to resentment. Any number of things can do that: nagging, constant faultfinding, favoritism, frowns, perpetual censure, never allowing the child to please you, etc.

The purpose of not irritating children is so they will not become discouraged. The Greek word rendered “discouraged” means “to lose heart.” Erdman says, “Unjust and severe treatment and continual fault-finding will result in making the child lose heart and become sullen, listless, and depressed.” As Eadie says, “The twig is to be bent with caution, not broken.”

The amazing thing about this passage is the Roman law *Patria Potestas* gave the father absolute power over his children. The father could sell them into slavery and even condemn them to death and carry out the execution (Barclay). The father is the head of the house. The society of Paul’s day recognized that the Scriptures teach that, but the authority is not absolute. Everything “Christian” dictates and demands that fathers be gentle.

Slaves and Masters

Slaves More attention is given to the responsibilities of slaves than to the duties of wives, husbands, children, and parents combined! Perhaps this is because of the return of Onesimus, Philemon’s runaway slave, to Colosse or just the fact that many Christians were slaves, a class of people that constituted almost half of the population of the Roman Empire. People in that day became slaves by military conquest, financial loss, or by being born to slave parents. Paul gives two commands to Christian slaves.

First, he says, “Servants (Greek: slaves), obey in all things your masters, according to the flesh” (3:22a). Obey here is the same word that was used of children (3:20). As in the case of children, slaves are to obey their masters in all things. Paul is only telling them to do something, which they had to do anyway. Slaves were without rights, mere property existing for the comfort, convenience, and pleasure of their masters. They were not employees nor wage earners but chattel property to be bought and sold.

Mere external obedience, however, was not exactly what Paul was commanding. He adds, “Not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God” (3:22b). Eye service is service that the human eye can see. People who work with eye service only work when they are being watched and work only enough to satisfy the minimum standards of their master. It is work that is rendered only when under close inspection. Slaves usually work with the motive of not being punished. Consequently, they only worked to please the master when he was

watching; they would trifle in his absence. Don't be a "man-pleaser" or a "clock watcher" (Bruce).

Thus, Paul exhorts slaves to obey their masters "in sincerity of heart, fearing God" (3:22). The Greek word translated "sincerity" means "without a fold." The *King James Version* rendered this phrase "singleness of heart." Such service is done with a simple and single motive: standing in awe of God's authority. Instead of working with their eye on the human master, the Christian slave should work conscious of another eye. Paul develops this thought in the second command to slaves.

The second command to slaves is, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men" (3:23). This exhortation continues and clarifies the concept of fearing God mentioned in verse 22. All that a slave does, no job being left out, was to be done heartily, from the inside as unto the Lord and not unto men; he was to work with enthusiasm.

In ancient times, a sculptor was employed to construct a statue in a Greek temple. He meticulously and conscientiously made a beautiful and ornate statue, even the part that stood against the wall. When asked why he carved the back with the same care as the front, he replied, "That's how I always work. Men may never see it, but I believe the gods do." He, of course, was mistaken about the gods, but the Christian slave who works with the same attitude about God is not.

A slave is to perform this kind of work "knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (3:24a). In other words, God not only sees, but He also rewards the kind of work Paul is commanding. Slaves received no wages and had no legal right of inheritance. Paul is informing them that if they do what they were forced to do anyway, *as unto the Lord*, they will receive a just and full reward from Him. The ancients considered slaves chattel. God treats believing, obedient slaves as heirs (Carson).

The inheritance is usually explained as heaven (Eadie), but if the inheritance is heaven, heaven is gained by works! The inheritance is a reward (see "reward consisting of inheritance" in the NASB margin; "an inheritance from the Lord as a reward" in the NIV; "inheritance as your reward" in the ESV; compensation "consisting of the inheritance" in JFB; "just recompense consisting in the inheritance" in the *Expositors Greek NT*; and "inheritance... as a reward" in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary*; see also Constable).

Dillow says, "The inheritance is a reward which is received as 'wages' for work done. Nothing could be plainer. The context is speaking of the return a man should receive because of his work, as in an employer-employee relationship. The inheritance is received as a result of work; it does not come as a gift. The Greek *antapodosis* means repayment or reward. The verb *antapodidomi* never means to receive as a gift; it is always used in the New Testament of a repayment due to an obligation" (Dillow, p. 68). God will reimburse believers at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Paul explains, "For you serve the Lord Christ" (3:24b). The expression "the Lord Christ" only occurs here and in Romans 16:18. Thus, the Christian slave should work heartily for the Lord and not half-heartedly for people because God is the employer who will truly reimburse him. He will do that at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Salvation is "according to grace; judgment is according to works" (Bruce).

On the other hand, "He who does wrong will be repaid for the wrong which he has done; and there is no partiality" (3:25). Some say that this refers to masters (Eadie; Carson). Some claim it refers to slaves (Vaughan) and some say it refers to both (Lightfoot). The context favors slaves,

but there is an application beyond that (Eph. 6:8). In Ephesians, Paul only mentions rewarding the good behavior (Eph. 6:8). Here, only the bad is mentioned.

The Greek word rendered “wrong” means “to do wrong, act wickedly, or criminally.” Paul used this word to describe the crime of Onesimus (Phlm. 18). The recent departure of Onesimus makes the apostle doubly anxious to emphasize the duties of slaves toward masters lest his love for the offender should be seen to condone the offense.

The Greek word translated “repay” means “to receive back, recover” (*cf.* the English word “boomerang”). He shall be repaid for the wrong in the form of punishment, and the payment will be “in his own coin” (Eadie). Christian slaves should not presume upon their position before God, thinking that God will overlook their misdeeds because they are mistreated or because they are Christians. There may have been a tendency for slaves to assume that because the favoritism of men was on the side of the master that, there would be favoritism of God on the side of the slaves. That assumption is incorrect.

The question is, when does this punishment take place? It is possible that Paul is describing in this verse the law of sowing and reaping in this life. On the other hand, the Greek word translated “repay” is used of the Judgment Seat of Christ in 2 Corinthians 5:10. Bruce suggests that this implies that while the sowing is now, the reaping is at the Judgment Seat of Christ and says that it is difficult to understand how believers will be required for wrongdoing at the Judgment, but it is in accord with biblical teaching. He adds that this is by no means to be contemplated lightly.

Gromacki states, “If a slave actually serves Christ in his menial tasks, the Savior will reward him at the judgment seat in heaven (2 Cor. 5:10). At the judgment seat, the slave will not receive preferential treatment because he had a difficult time on earth. The judgment on that day will be of man’s faithfulness and spirituality, not of racial distinction or social deprivation. God will treat all believers alike: the slave and the master, the man and the woman, the Jew and the Gentile, the rich and the poor. A slave who does wrong will suffer the same judgment as the master who does wrong.” Whenever the reward and the punishment are meted out, the point is that slaves, who are in today’s society employees, are to obey their bosses and work as to the Lord.

When he was a boy, Harry worked for a shoemaker and had to prepare leather for the soles of shoes. The piece of cowhide was first cut to size. Then, it was soaked in water and finally pounded with a flat-head hammer until it was hard and dry. It was a wearisome task and a tedious process Harry wished could be avoided. One day he passed another shoe shop and paused to watch the shoe cobbler through the window. His boss’s competitor did not pound the soles but took them from the water and nailed them immediately to the shoe. He approached the cobbler and said, “I noticed that you put the soles on while they are wet. Are they just as good as if they are pounded?” With a twinkle in his eye, the man replied, “No, but they come back much quicker that way, my boy.”

Young Harry hurried back to his boss and suggested they were wasting time pounding and drying out the leather so carefully. His Christian employer read him Colossians 3:23 and explained that he did not cobble shoes just for the money, but he was doing it for the glory of God. He told Harry, “If I should have to view every shoe I ever repaired at the judgment seat of Christ, I would dread to have the Lord say, ‘Dan, that was a poor job; you didn’t do your best.’ Rather, I want to see His smile and hear His ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’” That young lad was Harry Ironside, who later became the pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago.

Masters Turning his attention to the owners, Paul says, “Masters, give your servants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven” (4:1). In the Roman world, slave owners had absolute rights over their slaves. Slaves were viewed as being only animated tools. The master could scourge and even kill his slaves. Slaves did not have the right to marry. If they did cohabit and there was a child, the child belonged to the master “as the lamb of the flock belongs to the shepherd” (Barclay).

Paul teaches, however, that duty not only existed for the slaves, but masters had obligations as well. Slave owners were to do what was just, that is, right, correct. If a master did not do this, he would be doing wrong. The Greek word translated “just” in Colossians 4:1 is the same root word in the negative form of the word translated “wrong” in Colossians 3:25. Because of the righteous character of God, treating people justly is morally right, even when it is not legally necessary. Furthermore, masters were to do what was fair. The idea is that they are to render evenhanded, impartial treatment. The master is still the master, but Christianity has regulated all their transactions with those under them.

The motivation for all of this is that human masters need to know that they have a divine master in heaven. Masters have a master who is no respecter of persons. So, they should not show respect of persons either. As slaves will give an account to the Lord, so will masters. In the final analysis, human masters are spiritual slaves to Christ.

Summary: In the three great pairs of relationships, wives are to submit and husbands love, children are to obey and fathers are not to provoke, slaves are to obey and masters are to be fair.

One truth runs through these verses, sometimes by statement and sometimes by implication. In every relationship, believers are to do everything *as unto the Lord*. It has been suggested that these admonitions are the practical application of Colossians 3:17: “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Wiersbe).

Wives submit as is fitting in the Lord (3:18).

Husbands love—by implication, because of the Lord (Eph 5:25).

Children obey; it is well-pleasing to the Lord (3:20).

Fathers do not provoke—by implication because of the Lord (Eph 6:4).

Slaves obey as unto the Lord (3:23).

Masters be fair knowing you have a Master in heaven (4:1).

The Lord is the key to dealing with people. Without Him, we are sinful, selfish creatures. Apart from Him, we bite and devour one another. The closer people get to each other, the worse. Publilius Syrus, who lived before Christ was born, said, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” Thus, home and work are the places of most personal conflicts.

With Christ, things are different. Christians are new creatures in Christ. Godly virtues can be developed. Believers can love one another and praise one another. The closer the two get to each other, the better. Familiarity can inspire an increased appreciation for one another. Home can be heaven and work can be wonderful, provided Christ is there. Disregarding God’s order leads to disorder.

The John E. Mitchell manufacturing company of Dallas, Texas, once had two employees, a shipping clerk named Matlock and a night janitor named Washam. One of Washam’s duties was to clean the brass spittoons. In those days, there was much tobacco chewing. Because of poor marksmanship, the spittoons were usually filthy. One of the spittoons belonged to Matlock, a

cocky chap who was quick to criticize. Matlock became dissatisfied with the job Washam was doing. So one night, he wrote a critical note attached to his spittoon. This led to exchanges and bitter feelings between the two men. The disagreement finally reached the point where they did not speak to each other.

The president of the company, John Mitchell himself, heard about the conflict. He remained at the plant late one night to talk to the janitor on the job. "Brother Washam," he said, "you and I belong to the same church. We both profess to be Christians. Surely, the Lord would not be pleased with this silly quarrel over a spittoon. I want you to make Matlock's spittoon the number one item on your program every night. I want you to clean it and polish it as no spittoon has been cleaned and polished before. I will stay here tonight long enough to help you with it myself. Let's remember that we're doing this job, not for Matlock, but for the Lord."

The janitor went to work immediately on Matlock's brass spittoon, and it was a shining thing of beauty in half an hour. In fact, when he looked at it the next morning, Matlock could see the reflection of his face. He was surprised, but he was especially surprised at how it happened. He was also embarrassed. Mitchell brought the two men together in his office. They confessed that they had been acting like spoiled children. They shook hands and began a friendship that endured for the rest of their lives.

Even after Mitchell, Matlock, and Washam had disappeared from the scene, the symbol of the shining brass spittoon lived on in the company for years. On the walls of the different departments in all the factory buildings and on all the desks in the company's offices was a framed motto with the words printed in gold letters: "And whatsoever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men."

ONLY THREE THINGS CAN BE DONE

Dozens of concerned Christians have asked me, “How can I win So-in-so to Christ?” They’re not asking, “How can I lead a convicted, willing sinner to Christ,” they are talking about a difficult case. There is always a complication in these situations. For example, people have told me, “My brother says he wants to think about it. He says he’ll do it someday, but not now.” Or, “My friend says he doesn’t believe there is a God. How can I convince him that there is? What can I do?” Or, “My friend says he belongs to a church and he goes to his church. In other words, he sees no need for Christ at all.”

My first response is to suggest that they sit down and present the gospel to these individuals and invite them to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior. If they tell me that they’ve done that, I suggest they determine the person’s specific need and try to meet them where they are. Many have said they have done all of that, and nothing works. What do I do now?” These believers are concerned, burdened, and perplexed. I’ve seen them cry. They press me for help. At that point, I usually say, “In any situation, only three things can be done to win someone to Christ.” Those three things are mentioned in Colossians 4:2-6.

In a sense, Colossians 4:2-6 consists of three general exhortations. A careful analysis of these verses, however, indicates that these three exhortations, one way or another, touch on the believer’s relationship to the unsaved world, and beyond that, all three injunctions concern evangelism. Therefore, these verses tell believers three things to do regarding winning someone to Christ.

Pray with Thanksgiving

Pray Paul says, “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving” (4:2). The Greek word translated “continue” means “to attend constantly, continue steadfastly, adhere to, wait on.” Here, persistence and fervor are implied (Vaughan). It is more than maintaining a habit; it is diligence and persistence (Carson).

It is easy to forget to pray. Believers get so busy that they have so much on their minds that they just don’t remember to pray. I was once speaking in a Christian college for a week. One morning, I got up thinking about my message, which happened to be about prayer. I went to the restaurant in the motel to eat breakfast, studying my sermon in the process. Halfway through the meal, I thought to myself, “Oh no! I didn’t pray to thank the Lord for this meal,” or at least I couldn’t remember if I had or not. Imagine! Preparing a message on prayer and forgetting to pray, but isn’t that the experience of us all?

The *King James Version* renders Colossians 4:2, “Continue in prayer, and watch.” The *New King James Version*, however, renders that verse, “Continue earnestly in prayer.” The Greek word translated “earnestly” means “to be awake.” It was used figuratively to be alive, alert. Many Christians have had the experience of deciding to spend time with the Lord reading His Word and praying, and falling asleep or having their mind wander as they did. D. L. Moody said, “The devil will do anything to disturb your prayer time, even if it is to get up and adjust the window shade.” Paul is saying, “Wakeup. Watch out. Be alert. Concentrate.”

This prayer is to be “with thanksgiving.” When believers start praying, they usually start asking. They need to thank God for what He has done before they ask for more. After exhorting them to pray in general, Paul entreats them to pray specifically for him. He asks for two things (see the two “thats,” one in verse 3 and the other in verse 4).

For Opportunities First, he desires that they would pray that he would have an opportunity for witness. He says, “Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains” (4:3). The word “us” indicates that Paul was requesting prayer for himself, Timothy, and Epaphras. The phrase “open to us a door” means “to give us an opportunity.” Prayer does not open doors, but a God who answers prayer does. Paul desired an opportunity to speak the Word. That includes preaching the gospel (Lightfoot), but it is more. The “Word” is further defined as “the mystery of Christ,” which has been revealed about Christ. Earlier in the book, Paul spoke of the mystery God wanted him to make known, and he described it as “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (1:27). In the book of Ephesians, which elaborates on this mystery even further, Paul defines it as Jews and Gentiles being members of the same body. Gromacki puts it together like this: “The truth that both Jew and Gentile become one in Christ through saving faith form the content of his message. Christ was the mystery: who He was, what He did on the cross, and what He was doing through His body, the church.” Paul explains that the preaching of this very message had caused him to be imprisoned. He had refused to preach a Judaistic gospel with its circumcision and legalism. The Jews in Jerusalem had him arrested and he had been transported to Rome.

For Boldness Paul’s second prayer request was “that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (4:4). Opportunity was his immediate purpose; boldness was his ultimate purpose. It is one thing for God to open a door; it is another thing for believers to enter it.

These verses teach several lessons. The place to begin evangelism is to pray for an opportunity and for the openness and boldness to seize it. Also, this is not an example of a person praying to himself. It is the request of one individual for a group to pray for him. Why not get someone else or several people to pray for you in the area of evangelism?

Walk in Wisdom

Walk in Wisdom Paul commands, “Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time” (4:5). The term “outside,” derived from the Jewish concept, refers to non-Christians. They are outside of Christ. Therefore, believers are to conduct themselves in such a wise way that their lives will attract the non-Christians around them. The story is told of an overzealous Christian who approached a Jewish rabbi and asked, “Sir, when are Jews going to become Christians?” The rabbi replied, “The Jews will become Christians when the Christians become Christians.”

Take Every Opportunity Part of walking in wisdom before non-Christians is “redeeming the time.” How does one buy time? How much is it, and who do you pay? The Greek word translated “time” refers to “a point of time, a time for some given action, significant time, an opportunity.” In other words, this is saying, “Buy up opportunities. Let no opportunity slip past you without saying and doing what may further the cause of Christ.” Purchase and seize every opportunity. Take every opportunity to live in such a way as to attract the unsaved.

During a murder trial in New England, a witness testified that the accused had only been out of his sight for two or three minutes. Therefore, he could not possibly have committed the murder. Commenting on the testimony of that witness, the prosecutor turned to the jury and said,

“Gentlemen, here is my watch. We shall all pause, not for three minutes, but for two minutes, and you may judge what the defendant could have done during that time.” The wait seemed interminable as the jury sat until 120 seconds ticked off. They returned a verdict of guilty. It is possible to take a life or save a life in two minutes. Therefore, believers should grab every opportunity.

Speak with Grace

Speak with Grace Paul’s third command is, “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt” (4:6a). A wise walk must be followed by a witness of the spoken word (Carson). The phrase “with grace” can refer to the giver, that is, he is to be gracious, kind, expressing goodwill, or it can describe that which causes favorable regard, acceptableness, pleasingness, charming pleasantness, attractiveness, winsomeness. Eadie says, “It is that gracious spirit which rules the tongue and prompts it both to select a fitting theme and to clothe them in the most agreeable and impressive forms.” Gromacki says, “In the face of open hostility, the believer must address the unsaved in a way which the latter does not deserve; the Christian must manifest a winsomeness.”

This gracious and winsome speech must be seasoned with salt. Salt does two things: 1) It preserves from corruption and renders wholesome. 2) It gives flavor to the taste. The latter meaning seems to be the idea here, as the word “seasoned” indicates. The concept is more of winsomeness than wholesomeness. Food without salt is not very appealing or appetizing. It tastes flat and flavorless. When a doctor took an elderly lady off salt, she responded, “I’d rather go home and be with the Lord than eat food without salt.”

In their zeal for evangelism, some are curt, caustic, and sarcastic. They need to talk with tenderness, not toughness, in their voice. Believers can be bold and harsh, tactless, and even rude. Or, they can be bold and, at the same time, skillful, smooth, tasteful, and tactful. If we are to win some, we must be winsome.

In announcing an upcoming potluck, I put in the bulletin, “bring food. Stay for lunch.” My wife read it and thought that the speech needed some seasoning. She changed it to “Please plan to stay for lunch and bring your favorite dish to share.”

To Know how to Answer Paul adds, “That you may know how you ought to answer each one” (4:6b). This is the purpose of speaking with grace seasoned with salt. Paul specifically applies it to speaking to unbelievers. If believers practiced “grace of speech,” it would not “desert them” when they found themselves suddenly confronted by the necessity of defending their beliefs (Bruce). Believers need to know how to reply to each individual. The same answer will not do in every case. Their conversation must be appropriate for and exactly adapted to the individual. Chrysostom said, “A prince must be answered one way, and a subject another; a rich man one way, and a poor man another.”

While that is true, this verse emphasizes not *what* is to be said but *how*. A godly walk will provoke questions (1 Pet. 3:15). What believers say in response is important, but how they say it is equally important. Here, Paul is talking about speaking graciously, being winsome. In 2 Timothy 2:24, he says, in essence, “Be gentle, be warm.” Psychologist Albert Mehrabian claims that only 7% of a speaker’s message comes through the impact of his words. 38% springs from his voice, while 55% comes from his facial expressions (Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*).

Believers should not offend or be offensive, but the reality is that no matter how tasteful and tactful they are, the gospel offends some people. The Scripture teaches there is an offense of the cross.

Summary: Believers should pray for an opportunity to witness, walk with wisdom, and speak with grace.

There is a sense in which these are general closing instructions, especially in verse 2, but there is another sense in which Paul has our relationship to the unsaved world in mind. Verse 3 talks about preaching the gospel. Verse 5 speaks of walking toward those that are without. Verse 6 refers to knowing how to answer every unsaved man. Thus, Paul is saying that in your relationship with non-Christians, you need to pray, live a wise, godly life, and speak to them. Watch your walk and temper your talk. Your walk should be characterized by wisdom and your talk by grace.

There are only three things any Christian can do to touch a non-Christian for Christ, which are mentioned in this passage: pray, live a godly life before him, and speak to him. More could be said about what to pray for, or what to say, or about how to live a godly life, but when all is said and done, all believers can do is pray, live, and speak. You can look to improve on those items, but you cannot go beyond them, for the goal of evangelism is not to win the person; only God the Holy Spirit can do that. Our goal is to work and witness.

That's all that believers can do. The problem is believers do not do all that they can. The people who ask the questions that I posed at the beginning have the right attitude, but most people's problem is that it is not their attitude!

General Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, had the right attitude concerning evangelism. He and Rudyard Kipling were once booked to sail on the same ship. Before the ship sailed, as they stood on the deck of the ship talking to each other, General Booth saw a group of Salvation Army officers conducting a street service nearby. He excused himself, went ashore to the group, and joined the service. He spoke to the crowd about Christ and came back to join Mr. Kipling aboard the ship. "General Booth," said Kipling, "You made a ludicrous sight down there, playing the trombone with your cape blowing in the wind." Booth replied, "Mr. Kipling if I can keep people out of hell by standing on my head and playing the trombone with my toes, I will learn to do it."

Dr. Will H. Houghton pastored the Calvary Baptist Church in New York City and later became the president of Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. At one point in his life, he became the pastor of the Baptist Tabernacle in Atlanta, Georgia. A man in that city hired a detective to report on Houghton. After a few weeks, the detective reported that Houghton's practices matched his preaching. As a result, the man became a Christian. If a detective were to follow you, would there be enough evidence in walk and talk to convert somebody?

A PERSONAL TOUCH

We live in an impersonal society. Three factors have contributed to the disease.

The first is the disintegration of the family. Once, the family lived together and worked together. During World War II, of necessity, women went to work. After World War II, men returned home, but women didn't. With both parents working, children only saw them at meals and possibly in the evening. Then TV took over the evenings, which left only mealtime for personal contact. The older the children get, the more activities they are involved in, and the fewer meals the family has together.

The second factor is migration to the cities. Once, most Americans lived on a farm or in a small town. In such a setting, people knew not only their neighbors but everyone in town. Slowly, America has left the farm and moved to the big city. It is not unusual to have never met your neighbors in the cities, much less know them.

A third factor is increased automation. Once, there were no computers. People had names. Now that there are computers, they have numbers. A number is an impersonal thing, but it can become personal. If I were number 2648, I could get used to that. My friends might get used to that and call me by that number, but in this impersonal society, I'm not just a number but a number of numbers. I have a Social Security number, a bank number, a credit card number, a driver's license number, etc.

In the midst of all this plastic, people are hungry for a personal touch. God wants us to have that personal touch. In what specific and practical ways can we reach out and touch someone?

There are many indications of how to do that in the Bible. Colossians 4:7-17 illustrates several of those. The letter we call Colossians was no mere theological essay or moral homily. It was a personal letter from a person to a group of people. So, appropriately, Paul ends his letter with several references to individuals. It is his close, personal touch. In no other letter, with the possible exception of the last chapter of Romans, does Paul give a more fascinating list of his companions. This paragraph falls into three parts: commendations (4:7-9), greetings (4:10-14), and instructions (4:15-17).

Commend People

Paul commends two men to the Colossians: Tychicus and Onesimus. These were the mailmen; they delivered this letter to Colosse.

Tychicus Paul says, "Tychicus, who is my beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts" (4:7-8). Paul is not just diplomatic. He mentions some about whom he says nothing (4:14). Some of Paul's companions and fellow workers, namely Silas, Timothy, and maybe Titus, are well known. Tychicus was one of Paul's colleagues who, for some reason, had not received a lot of press. He accompanied Paul from Ephesus as he returned to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4) and was with Paul in Rome. Here Paul commends him, mentioning three things about him.

First, Tychicus was a beloved brother. Some brothers are hard to love. Paul and others loved this one. He was also a faithful minister. Some men are not faithful in their ministry. Tychicus

was trustworthy, steadfast, and loyal. The greatest ability is dependability. He was a fellow servant to Paul. Tychicus was Paul's companion, comrade, and colleague. Tychicus was to do three things. First, he was to inform them about Paul. This refers to Paul's personal experience since he had left Asia, including the story of his arrest and imprisonment, his testimony for Christ in the Imperial City, the opposition of the enemies, the aid of his friends, and his impending trial with the possible issue of acquittal or death.

Second, he was to learn of their estate. Earlier in the letter, Paul expressed his concern and conflict concerning them (2:1-3). He wants to know how much damage has been done since the departure of Epaphras.

Third, Tychicus was to comfort their hearts. The Greek word translated "comfort" means "to exhort, encourage, or comfort." Here it probably has more the idea of encouraging than comforting (Lightfoot). They did not need to be relieved of anxiety; they needed the courage to stand against the false philosophy and to oppose the proud teachers of heresy.

Onesimus The second man delivering the letter, whom Paul commends to them, is Onesimus. Concerning him, he says, "With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here" (4:9). Onesimus was one of them. He was originally from Colosse. He was a slave, the personal property of Philemon, a wealthy member of the Colossian church. He had evidently robbed his master and escaped the city, ultimately drifting to Rome. Paul led Onesimus to Christ so that he could now describe him as a faithful and beloved brother. The worthless runaway is no longer a slave but a brother; no more dishonest and faithless but trustworthy; no more the object of contempt but of love (Lightfoot).

Both Tychicus and Onesimus were to inform the church at Colosse concerning Paul's situation in Rome. Paul was sending Onesimus back to his master, Philemon, but he would also minister and at least report to the church. Onesimus is not designated as a minister or fellow servant. Yet, he evidently possessed personal information concerning Paul and the Christian movement in Rome, which could supplement the message of Tychicus.

Paul commends these two men. One of the ways we can add a personal touch is by commending others. Paul commends a man who had been a faithful servant and a man who had been an unfaithful servant. One had known the Lord a long time. The other had known the Lord only a short time. Both are called faithful. We commend them at their funeral no matter what people are like or what they have done. Why not do that while they are living?

There is another personal touch here. Paul commends these two so that they might seek and send information and so they might minister to the Colossians. He is reaching out to them by exchanging information. This is an example to us. To express personal care and concern, seek information about how someone else is doing.

When I graduated from seminary, one of my professors invited me to speak at a Canadian camp. He was on the board and was trying to resurrect a dying, historic Christian conference ground. There were hard decisions that had to be made. I recall one board meeting that literally lasted all day. That particular day, I spent a great deal of time in a ski boat. While on the water, my wife called me long distance. During a brief board meeting break, the professor heard that my wife was trying to contact me. In the meantime, I returned and called my wife. At dinner that evening, when the board meeting was finally over, a very tired and exhausted professor came strolling out. When he entered the dining room, he immediately came to my table and asked, "Is everything okay at home?" His seeking information about my family's welfare demonstrated his personal care and concern.

Greet People

Next, six people who were with Paul in Rome sent their greetings to the Christians of Colosse. The first three were Jewish; the second three were Gentiles.

Aristarchus Paul writes, “Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you” (4:10). Aristarchus was a native of Thessalonica who was arrested in a riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:29), accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4), and from Caesarea to Rome (Acts 27:2). Here he is called a fellow prisoner, which means either that his relationship with Paul caused suspicion and he was temporarily confined in Rome, or he voluntarily shared Paul’s captivity. Since the term is applied to Epaphras and Philemon, some say Paul’s friends took turns voluntarily sharing his imprisonment. At any rate, Aristarchus, Paul’s fellow prisoner, sends his greetings to the saints at Colosse.

Mark Verse 10 also records, “With Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)” (4:10b). Paul identifies Mark in terms of his relationship with Barnabas, which suggests that Barnabas was known to the Colossians, at least by name (Bruce). John Mark, Barnabas’ cousin, left Paul and Barnabas on the first missionary journey (Acts 12:25). As a result, Paul and Barnabas separated over him just before the second missionary journey (Acts 15:39). This is the first mention of him since that separation twelve years earlier.

Here, Paul indicates that the church of Colosse had received some instructions concerning John Mark. Except for this statement, nothing else is known concerning those instructions. Some surmise that Paul had communicated with the Colossians before and that communication included some instructions concerning John Mark. It is equally possible that Tychicus transmitted some old directives concerning him to the church.

From this reference to Mark, it is apparent that Paul harbored no resentment toward him. Even though he had deserted and disappointed Paul, Paul forgave his failure and gave him an opportunity to make good in the Lord’s work. He instructs the church at Colosse that if Mark should come to them, they are to welcome him, meaning they are to give him a hospitable reception. Later, Mark wrote the gospel, which bears his name. Tradition says that he went to Egypt as a missionary and founded the church at Alexandria (Barclay). He is an encouragement to anyone who has failed in the Lord’s service.

Justus Paul continues, “And Jesus who is called Justus” (4:11a). All that is known of this man is found in this verse. He is not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament. Gromacki speculates that since the name Jesus was revered by Christians as distinctively His, this Jew changed his name to Justus after his conversion. Justus was a common name. At any rate, he, along with the others, sends his greetings to the believers at Colosse.

Concerning these three, Paul says, “These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me” (4:11b). These Jewish converts became co-workers who comforted Paul. The Greek word translated “comfort,” which only occurs here in the New Testament, was a medical term used for alleviating pain. It has been transliterated into English as “paregoric,” a medicine that relieves pain. Comfort is the predominant idea in the word. Their love for Paul and their labor with him were a source of comfort to him. They perhaps supported him financially and expressed a willingness to stand with him in his trial at Rome.

Epaphras Three Gentile Christians also greeted the Colossians. The first was Epaphras, of whom Paul says, “who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently

for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis” (4:12-13). Epaphras was a native, or at least an inhabitant of the city of Colosse, for Paul calls him “one of you.” He was the founder of their church (1:7) and had traveled to Rome to see Paul, who calls him a “slave of Christ.” Earlier, Paul referred to Epaphras as a “dear fellow servant” (1:7). Paul uses the term “slave” of himself often, but only rarely of others. In fact, he only conferred that distinction on one other person and on him only once. That other person was Timothy (Phil. 1:1). The term probably refers to exceptional service.

Epaphras was a prayer warrior. Paul says that he was always laboring fervently for the Colossians in prayer. The phrase translated “laboring fervently” is one word in Greek that means 1) to contend for a prize, 2) to fight, struggle, strive. Westcott translates it “wrestling.” Agonizing is the idea. It stresses the expenditure of physical energy. It involves the struggle of mind and emotions (1:29; 2:1). It was used to describe athletes who gave themselves fully.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, “Prayer pulls the rope down below, and the great bell rings above in the ears of God. Some scarcely stir the bell, for they pray so languidly; others only give an occasional jig at the rope. But he who communicates with heaven is the man who grabs the rope boldly and pulls continuously with all his might.”

The purpose of Epaphras’ prayers for the Colossians was that they might be “perfect and complete in all the will of God” (4:12). Epaphras wanted them to stand, not to submit to the deceitful influences of the false teachers. As they stood against false doctrine, Epaphras desired that they stand mature and complete in the will of God.

The word “complete” means “to make full.” In the Greek text, the word “will” is in the plural, that is, Paul wanted them mature and full in everything willed by God. The aim of Paul’s prayer in chapter 1 was they might be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding (1:9), and the aim of his preaching was that he might present every man mature in Christ (1:28); the purpose of Epaphras’ prayer life was that that same goal might be accomplished in their lives. This was the purpose of Paul’s and Epaphras’ prayers for them and the purpose of this epistle. Furthermore, he wanted them to achieve that goal while here on earth. Paul told the Christians at Colosse that they were complete in Christ. Epaphras prayed that that might be their practical experience, that is, that they might be complete in all the will of God. Chrysostom said, “It is not enough simply to do his will. He that is filled, suffers not any other will to be within him, for if so, he is not wholly filled” (Chrysostom, cited by Carson).

The zeal of Epaphras extended beyond Colosse to Laodicea and Hierapolis. In other words, he had great, compassionate concern for the spiritual welfare of believers in his native region. He prayed for believers in three cities. The three cities of Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were clustered together geographically. What affected one influenced the others. One of the seven letters the Lord sent to the churches of Asia Minor is addressed to the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:14-22). This is the only mention of Hierapolis in the New Testament.

Luke Paul continues, “Luke the beloved physician” (4:14a). Luke was a Gentile doctor and companion of Paul. He was with him on at least portions of his second and third missionary journeys and on his perilous voyage to Rome. As the Colossian letter is being written, he is sharing the imprisonment with Paul and sends greetings to the Christians at Colosse. He wrote the New Testament books of Luke and Acts.

Demas Paul adds, “And Demas greet you” (4:14b). Paul does not say anything about Demas. The Apostle did not commend others “indiscriminately” (Carson). Not much is known of Demas. He is mentioned several times as being with Paul. He is closely associated with Luke in

Philemon 24, but in 2 Timothy 4:10-11, their character is in contrast. Paul says, “Demas has forsaken me.... Only Luke is with me.” Perhaps there is a foreshadowing of that here. While Luke is described with special tenderness, Demas is dismissed with a bare mention and without any epitaph of commendation. Is there a progression in the references to him? Demas my fellow laborer (Phlm. 24), Demas (Col. 4:14), Demas has forsaken me (2 Tim. 4:10).

Six saints, Jews, and Gentiles, sent their greetings to the Christians at Colosse. Some were greeting friends; others were greeting strangers, but all were sending greetings. They were all reaching out personally to those at Colosse.

A young lady went to a Christmas Eve service. After the service, she stood in the foyer in the midst of a crowd of people. Not one person greeted her. She left devastated. For years, she did not attend church. When she finally got saved, she made it a practice to personally greet people who came to her church.

Several people who visited my church on Sunday brought me greetings from a pastor thousands of miles away. I had only met him once and didn't know him well, but he, like these believers, was sending greetings to me through others.

Encourage People

Greet the Brethren Finally, Paul issues some instructions to the Colossians. He tells them to “Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house” (4:15). They were to greet the believers in Laodicea, which was only twelve miles from Colosse. The church met in a house, as did New Testament churches. Separate buildings, set apart for Christian worship, did not appear in history until the third century (Barclay).

Exchange Letters Secondly, Paul instructs, “Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea” (4:16). They were to exchange letters with the Laodiceans. The question is, “What is the epistle from Laodicea?” Many believe Ephesians because they do not think the phrase “in Ephesus” in Ephesians 1:1 is genuine (Lightfoot). In my opinion, those words are authentic; therefore, this cannot be a reference to the letter to the Ephesians. The other possible explanation is that this is a lost epistle (Eadie; Vaughan). Other such writings are not extant today (perhaps Col. 4:10 and definitely 1 Cor. 5:9).

Exhort Archippus Finally, Paul commands them, “And say to Archippus, ‘Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it’” (4:17). In other words, Paul tells the church to tell Archippus to take heed to his ministry. The nature of his ministry is not mentioned, but the “solemnity of the charge” suggests that it was not merely serving tables. It was probably some position of pastoral oversight. Notice the indirect address. Either Archippus was not there at the time, or Paul felt that the warning would be stronger coming from them. Again, this is a personal touch. Paul wanted it done personally, not in print. Evidently, this servant was slacking off. Paul wanted the church to tell him to take heed that he fulfilled the ministry God had given him. It may be accidental, but the angel of Laodicea denounced lukewarmness in the book of Revelation. If the angel in Revelation is a reference to the pastor, and if Archippus, as is probable, was still living when John wrote, the coincidence would be still more striking. Paul is getting believers to minister to their pastor. If you want to touch someone, minister to him, encourage him, exhort him. Don't ignore him.

Benjamin West loved to paint as a youngster. One day, his mother left. He pulled out the oils and tried to paint. The result was a mess. He intended to get it all cleaned up before his mother

came back, but he didn't, and she discovered the mess. What she did next completely surprised West. She picked up his painting and said, "My, what a beautiful painting of your sister." She kissed him on the cheek and walked away. With that kiss, West says, he became a painter. When people make a mess, we say, "What a mess!" What people need is a kiss of encouragement.

David Livingstone wanted to be a great preacher. He also wanted to go to the mission field. He prepared long and hard for a sermon he was to preach in a little church in Scotland, but when he got up to preach, he forgot his sermon. He apologized and left in shame. Robert Moffat, the famous missionary, was there. After the service, Moffat said, "You can be a great and wonderful servant of God. Why don't you go to medical school?" Livingstone not only became a missionary, but he also opened central Africa to missions.

Summary: As Paul closes the letter to the Colossians, he commends two brothers and sends greetings from six others. He also instructs the church fold to minister to one person. The lesson here is that personal care and concern are expressed by commending others, seeking (exchanging) information, greeting, and ministering to each other. In short, show you care; reach out and touch someone.

We want others to touch us, greet us, be concerned, and minister to us. Paul did, too. The last thing he says in this book is, "This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen" (4:18). Paul wanted them to remember his imprisonment, but first, he reached out to them. Then he requested that they remember him, essentially a request for prayer (Bruce). Believers today get it backward. They want others to remember them before they reach out to others. If we reach out first, others will reach back. If we don't, we just may die alone.

Napoleon is reported to have said, "I love nobody, not even my own brothers." It is not strange, therefore, that at the end of his life on his rock prison in the South Atlantic, he said, "I wonder if there is anyone in the world who really loves me?"

In the last years of his career, Babe Ruth was traded by the New York Yankees to the Boston Braves. In a game between the Braves and the Cincinnati Reds, the great Babe didn't do very well, being past forty years of age. He fumbled the ball twice, made a couple of bad throws, and let in five runs for the Cincinnati Reds. As the game ended, the great baseball legend hung his head and started walking toward the dugout. The fans who once cheered him were now booing and jeering. A small boy jumped over the rail onto the playing field. With tears streaming down his face, he threw his arms about the knees of his hero. The great Babe picked up the boy, gave him a hug and sat him down, tussling his head. Hand in hand, the two started walking off the field. The jeering ceased and there was a deep silence. Those fans were witnessing the love of a great man for a little boy and a little boy's love for a great man. All cruel thoughtlessness faded away. Like that little boy, reach out and touch someone.

BEWARE OF BEING SIDETRACKED

To get to its predetermined destination, a train must be on track and moving. If it is to arrive at the station, it must not be derailed, sidetracked, or stopped. The same thing is true spiritually. God has predetermined a destination for believers. Romans 8:29 says He predetermined that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. Ephesians 4:13-15 says He wants each believer to grow to “a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him.” The goal is that we may grow up in Him in all things.

The devil does not want believers to arrive at their predetermined destination. He will do anything to sidetrack them. That is the issue in the book of Colossians. Evidently, Paul had not been to Colosse. Epaphras was the founder and pastor of the church. The Christians at Colosse were saved and growing, but a problem was developing, a problem that threatened to sidetrack these believers. In the meantime, Paul had been arrested and transported to Rome. Epaphras, undoubtedly concerned about Paul but concerned about the believers at Colosse, journeyed to Rome to see Paul. As a result of what he told him, Paul wrote the book of Colossians.

The book of Colossians is a letter. As such, it follows the format of an ancient letter, which consisted of a salutation, a thanksgiving, a prayer, contents, personal greetings, and a benediction. The salutation, thanksgiving, prayer, personal greetings, and benediction in Colossians are what one would expect in an ancient letter. Paul, of course, Christianized it, but it is the basic format of an ancient letter. In the thanksgiving, he thanked God for their faith, love, and hope. In the prayer, he prays that they will be filled with the knowledge of His will so that they will walk worthy and pleasing to the Lord. Although these parts relate to the theme to one degree or another, the book’s contents fully develop the subject. The body of the book falls into three parts: doctrinal (1:15-2:7), defense (2:8-3:4), and duty (3:5-4:6).

Doctrinal: The Sufficiency of Christ Declared

Christ Suffered In the first paragraph of the body of the letter (1:15-23), Paul is saying that Christ is the supreme Sovereign of the universe. He demonstrated that by showing Christ’s relationship to the Creator, He is the image of the invisible God, to the creation, He is the source, agent, aim, and preserver of creation, and to the church, He is the head, who reconciled the church to God. The supreme Sovereign of the universe suffered so that believers might be reconciled to God and presented mature before Christ at the Judgment Seat. Christ is sufficient to accomplish that task.

Isaac Watts expressed this in a song when he said,

Alas, and did my Savior bleed? And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?

Was it for crimes that I have done He groaned upon the tree?

Amazing pity, grace unknown, and love beyond degree.

Well might the sun and darkness hide, and shut His glories in,
When Christ the mighty Maker died, for man the creature's sin.

Minister's Suffer Christ not only suffered to bring believers to maturity, so did Paul! In Colossians 1:24-29, Paul discusses his ministry, saying he suffered to bring believers to spiritual maturity.

Ministers today suffer in their ministry. Sometimes, the suffering is major, and sometimes it is minor.

There are times when he feels he just can't win.

If the pastor is young, they say he lacks experience;
If his hair is gray, he's too old for young people.
If he has five or six children, he has too many;
If he has none, he's setting a bad example.
If he preaches from notes, he has canned sermons and is dry;
If his messages are extemporaneous, he isn't deep enough.
If he caters to the poor of the church, he's playing to the grandstand;
If he pays attention to the wealthy, he's trying to be an aristocrat.
If he uses too many of his own illustrations, he's neglecting the Bible;
If he doesn't include stories, he isn't clear.
If he condemns wrong, he's cranky;
If he doesn't preach against sin, they claim he's a compromiser.
If he preaches the truth, he's too offensive;
If he doesn't present "the full counsel of God," he's a hypocrite.
If he fails to please everybody, he's hurting the church and should leave;
If he doesn't make them all happy, he has no convictions.
If he drives an old car, he shames the congregation;
If he buys a new one, he's setting his affections on earthly things.
If he preaches all the time, the congregation gets tired hearing just one man;
If he invites guest ministers, he's shirking his responsibility as a pastor.
If he receives a large salary, he's mercenary;
If he gets a small one, well, then that, they say, proves he isn't worth much anyway.

Seriously, service means sacrifice and suffering. For example, ministry takes time. The minister often finds himself sacrificing his personal time to minister to others. Sloan Wilson, the author of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, says, "A man who wants time to read and write must let the grass grow long." So must a man who ministers.

Oddly enough, service can even mean loneliness. There is perhaps nowhere loneliness is felt more than in the ministry. The nature of the task brings with it lonely hours. The minister meditates alone to prepare messages. He agonizes alone when the truth proclaimed does not bear fruit. He listens alone to the secrets of hurting hearts and dares not to share them with others, not

even his wife. He suffers alone when he fails. He endures the silence alone when he is buffeted and perplexed by the providence of God.

So Keep Growing In the next paragraph, Paul encourages the Colossians to keep on growing (2:1-7). In his hymn, Isaac Watts not only captured the revelation of Christ but also our response:

Alas, and did my Savior bleed? And did my sovereign die?
Would he devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?
The drops of grief can ne'er repay the debt of love I owe;
Dear Lord, I give myself away, 'tis all that I can do.

Defense: The Sufficiency of Jesus Christ Defended

In the second major movement of the book (2:8-3:4), Paul defends the doctrine of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ against the attack by false teachers at Colosse. He warns the Colossians not to get sidetracked. He tells them to beware (2:8), to let no one judge them (2:16), to let no one defraud them (2:18), and not to subject themselves to regulations (2:20). This defense is an offense and a defense, that is, it has a positive side (2:8-15) and a negative side (2:16-3:4).

Stated Positively In Colossians 2:8-15, Paul argues that Christ is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and that Christians are complete in Him. They are circumcised and raised; thus, they are free from sin, the Law, and Satanic power.

Dr. Muntz has eloquently said, “We are complete because we are in Him. Our hand is whole because His was pierced, our brow is free because He wore the crown of thorns, our soul escapes because He for us went through the horrors of hell. He was humbled that we might be exalted, He became poor that we might be rich, He was clothed with our dust in order that we might wear His royal robes, He entered into our grave in order that we might sit on His throne, He emptied Himself of the glory which he had before the world was in order that we might be filled with all the fullness of God, He bore the punishment we deserve in order that we might receive the reward He deserved, He was wounded that we might be healed, He drank the cup of wrath in order that we might drink the waters of salvation, He who was the Son of God became the Son of man in order that we who were the sons of men might become the sons of God” (Muntz, *Prophetic Messages for Our Times*, p. 209).

Stated Negatively In Colossians 2:16-3:4, Paul gets specific concerning the false teaching threatening the Colossians. The exact nature of their teaching is not known. From what is said in the book of Colossians, they apparently were claiming some kind of superior knowledge, a full knowledge, a wisdom that not everyone had. Their error seemed to be a mixture of Jewish legalism, Greek philosophical speculation (mysticism), and Gentile asceticism. Lightfoot called it “Gnostic Judaism.” Whatever its name or nature, several things are clear: 1) It was “after the traditions of men” (2:8, 22). 2) It would sidetrack believers from spiritual growth (2:19). 3) It didn’t work in curtailing the desires of the flesh (2:23).

It didn’t work in restricting the flesh! What a damaging and damning charge against their teaching. That alone should have alerted them to the fact that it was not the truth. Jerome, the scholar who translated the Bible into Latin in the fourth century, tells how he lived a sinful lifestyle in his youth. After becoming a Christian, he fled all contact from the world in which he once sought to gratify every fleshly desire. He lived in a cave in Palestine near Bethlehem and sought to subdue his carnal nature by fasting almost to starvation. He tells of how disappointed

he was when exhausted and weary, he fell asleep and dreamed he was still riding with his companions in his godless days. The flesh cannot be starved into subjection or improved by subjecting it to ordinances, whether human or divine.

Duty: The Sufficiency of Christ Displayed

Christ, the Sovereign of the universe, is supreme in the church, and in all things, He might have the preeminence (1:18). Nothing should sidetrack believers from that. Having established and defended that point against the threat of false teaching, Paul now makes it practical. In Colossians 3:5-4:6, he delineates the duty of those who are complete in Christ. Christ is to have the preeminence in believers' personal life (3:5-14), their church life (3:15-17), their home life (3:18-21), their business life (3:22-4:1), and in their social life (4:2-6).

Personal Life In Colossians 3:5-14, Paul discusses believers' personal life. The argument in this section, as viewed from the point of view of the whole book, is that since Christ is all and in all, and believers are complete in Him, they should put off vices (3:8) and put on virtues (3:12).

Church Life There is a sense in which Colossians 3:15-17 is an extension of the believer's personal life, yet there is in this section a sense in which the church is in view. Colossians 3:15 says believers are called to be part of one body. Verse 16 talks about teaching and admonishing one another, which is clearly a church context. Thus, Christ is to have preeminence in the believer's church life. His peace, His Word, and His name are to control what believers say and do.

Home Life Christ is to have preeminence in the believer's home life (3:18-21). Wives are to submit to their husbands because it is fit in the Lord. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. Children are to obey their parents because it is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers are to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

Business Life Christ is also to have preeminence in the believer's business life (3:22-4:1). Slaves (employees) should obey those over them as unto the Lord. Masters (employers) must remember that they are not only a boss but that they have a heavenly boss. In World War II, a nun was seen on her knees patiently scrubbing the gangrene leg of a soldier. Repulsed by the scene, a war correspondent said to her, "I wouldn't do that for a million dollars." The nun paused momentarily and said, "Neither would I."

Social Life Finally, Christ is to have preeminence in believers' social lives, that is, in their relationships with those who do not know Jesus Christ (4:2- 6). Believers should pray, walk in wisdom, and season their speech with salt to make Christ known.

Summary: Since Christ is the supreme Sovereign and sufficient Savior, believers should not be sidetracked but stay on the main track of seeing to it that Christ has the preeminence in everything.

Doctrine: Christ the supreme Sovereign suffered to bring us to spiritual maturity.

Defense: Beware of being sidetracked.

Duty: Christ should have preeminence in everything.

The main thing is to see to it that the main thing is the main thing. Unfortunately, believers get sidetracked. A man who heard me speak on the radio once wrote me to say that we should

never call Jesus “Jesus;” we must always call Him *Lord* Jesus and we must never observe December 25 as the birthday of Jesus because Jesus wasn’t born on December 25. I wrote back to say that if the Bible doesn’t use “Lord” in front of the name Jesus one time, so can I. Granted, Jesus wasn’t born on December 25, but we don’t know which day he was born, so December 25 is as good a day as any. Besides, I told him not to major on minors; major on majors. Would you believe it? He wrote to me again to argue about minor, insignificant details. Following the example of Nehemiah, I refused to discuss those kinds of details with him. (His last letter told me that I wouldn’t go up in the rapture because of my attitude!)

The tragedy with getting sidetracked is that we leave out the main thing—Jesus Christ.

She measured out the butter with a very solemn air;
The milk and the sugar also, and she took the greatest of care
To count the eggs correctly and add a little bit
Of baking powder, of which, you know beginners often omit.
Then she stirred it all together and baked it for an hour;
But she never quite forgave herself for leaving out the flour!
Don’t leave out the main ingredient of life, namely, Jesus Christ.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbott-Smith, G., *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960 (reprint of the 1937 edition).
- Alford, Henry. *The Greek New Testament*. Revised by Everett F. Harrison. Chicago: Moody Press, 1958.
- Arndt, William and Gingrich, F. Wilbur, translated by Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Barclay, William. *The Letter to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1958.
- Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *Systematic Theology*. Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1948.
- Barnes, Albert. *Barnes' Notes*. www.e-sword.net.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968.
- Cairns, Earle E. *Christianity Through the Centuries*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.
- Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries*. Bible Analyzer 4 Software, 2012.
- Carson, Herbert M. *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries series. Reprint ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978.
- Constable, Thomas. *Dr. Constable's Notes*. www.soniclight.com.
- Dana, H. E. and Julius, R. Mantey. *A Manual of the Greek New Testament*. London: MacMillan and Co., 1957.
- Dillow, Joseph C. *The Reign of the Servant Kings*. Miami Springs, Fla.: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992.
- Eadie, John. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957.
- Ellicott, Charles J. *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon*. Andover, Mass.: Warren F. Draper, 1876.
- Erdman, Charles Rosenbury. *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon an Exposition*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1933.
- Expositors Greek New Testament*. Bible Analyzer 4 Software, 2012.
- Geisler, "Colossians," *Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, edited by John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. Wheaton: Scripture Press Publications, Victor Books, 1983.
- Gill, John. *Exposition of the Whole Bible*. www.e-sword.net
- Gingrich, F. Wilbur and Frederick W. Danker, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2nd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Gromacki, Robert G. *Stand Perfect in Wisdom*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984.
- Jamieson, Robert, A. R. Fausset, David Brown. *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. www.e-sword.net
- Kent, Homer A., Jr. *Treasures of Wisdom*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978.

- Lightfoot, J. B. *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961.
- Litfin, A. Duane. "Evangelical Feminism: Why Traditionalists Reject It," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, No. 543, July-September 1979.
- Robertson, A. T. *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931.
- Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.
- Robinson, J. Armitage. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1903.
- Songer, Harold S. *Colossians: Christ Above All*. Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1973.
- Thomas, Major Ian. *The Saving Life of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1961.
- Trench, Richard Chenevix, *Synonyms of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1963 (reprint of the 1880 edition).
- Unknown Christian. *How to Live the Victorious Christian Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966.
- Vaughan, Curtis. *Colossians: A Study Guide Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1973.
- Westcott, Frederick Brooke. *Colossians: A Letter to Asia*. London: MacMillan and Co., 1914, reprint Klock and Klock Christina Publishers, 1981.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Complete*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1981.
- Wilkin, Bob. "Is Continuing in the Faith a Condition of Eternal Life?" *Grace Evangelical Society News* 6:3 (March 1991).