

When Faith Confronts Culture

**An Inductive Study of
Colossians and Philemon**

By

O. William Cooper

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THE INTRODUCTION

Colossians and Philemon are being considered together because the conditions Paul dealt with in these epistles affect each other. Philemon was one of the leaders, if not the sole leader of the church in Colosse. The epistle of Philemon dealt with the issue of slavery which was a crucial point of witness in this particular church. The spiritual needs of the church in Colosse and the surrounding area heavily impacted the situation to which Paul wrote in Philemon

The city of Colosse was located in Phrygia on the busy Lycus River. The topography of the area was a very flat plain reaching out to Mt. Cadmus. At Colosse, there is a delta where two rivers merge. It is not surprising that Colosse was a hub of commercial boat traffic on these two important rivers. The city was also located on the highway going from Ephesus to the Tigris Euphrates valley. This was one of the most lucrative markets of that day. Because of these thriving markets, Colosse also contained a strong mixture of cultures, nationalities and religions. This also meant that these people came with all their skills as well as all their sinful habits.



Though Colosse was smaller than some other centers of wealth, it still could boast of wealth that equaled and in some cases surpassed that which was found in much larger cities. On the above map, you can see that Colosse was located about 13 miles from Hieropolis, 12 miles from Laodicea and about 100 miles from Ephesus.

The city of Colosse was well known for a certain kind of wool that was produced there. This wool was unique in that it had a purple cast to it. We are not certain if this hue was natural or if it had been dyed that way. Though we cannot be certain, it appears that this was the natural color of the wool. This particular wool was available nowhere else. Though Colosse had earlier been a strong commercial hub, changes in the business climate changed this forever. When commercial transfer was no longer the key industry in Colosse, it gradually became a great industrial center. It changed from the transfer of goods to the production of them. This would be very labor intensive and would account for the fact that in the first century more than 50% of the population were slaves. Today we would think of Colosse as a "blue collar community." Both the cultural and educational levels of the city were quite low. The native Colossian citizens were Phrygian barbarians whose ancestors were emotional and mystical idolaters. This presented an intense challenge for the church.

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In the fifth century B.C., Colossea was a large and very important city. It experienced a very gradual decline until the first century when both Laodicea and Hieropolis were more important than Colossea. In fact, Colossea faded to near extinction. This came about because of changes in the trade routes and also because of changes in the way commerce was conducted.

The city was destroyed and rebuilt during the ninth year of the reign of Nero. Finally in the twelfth century A.D., the city was destroyed by the Turks and never rebuilt. As happens so often, a wealthy city also is known for its extreme forms of evil. Sooner or later, the wealth will leave or die out, but the people are left with their decadent sinful culture. This eventually spells the permanent demise of what was once a wonderful place to live.

Like Corinth and Ephesus, Colossea was a gathering place for all sorts of religious ideas and philosophies. In earlier centuries, it had been a center for pagan idolatry. Remnants of this background were still in evidence when Paul wrote to this church. Colossea was a stronghold of oriental mysticism. This evil form of worship caused no end of trouble for the early church there.

As a commercial center, Colossea attracted a large group of Jewish businessmen. Their mixture of philosophy and gnosticism became a serious threat of heresy for the church in this city. This Jewish gnosticism contended that Jesus was a lesser god, not the Son of God. They viewed the death of Jesus as evidence of His inferiority.

A goodly number of Colossian citizens believed that the angel Michael protected the city at the time of a great flood in the area. Because of this, they believed that Michael was the protecting saint of the city. Many people there considered angels to be the total mediators between God and man. Angels were considered to be the agents of law. Thus, the keeping of the law paid tribute to them. In some cases, this was the major motivation behind law observance. They thought that if a person broke the law, this would incur the wrath of the angels.

Again, another large segment of the Colossian population was deeply involved in astrology. One might even say it was like the American scene today. All of these forces together led to an ascetic posture and a renunciation of the material world. This condition inevitably leads to great spiritual bondage. All of the forces we have described were at their peak impact upon the city when the church came into being there.

The Colossian church was probably founded by Timothy and Epaphras. Though Paul did not found this church, still he was deeply concerned about it. He was very familiar with the people of the congregation and wrote this epistle for their instruction. Paul wrote these two epistles, from his imprisonment in Rome, in 60 – 62 A.D., about midway in the rule of Nero, and shortly before Paul's death. Paul dealt with this unusual mixture of religious affiliations in the Colossian church by his strong emphasis on the greatness of Christ. Paul described Jesus as the one and only Mediator between Man and God.

The Church in Colossea

Epaphras and Timothy, not Paul, should be credited with forming the Colossian church. Epaphras was probably a convert of Paul's ministry in Ephesus. If so, he would be well suited to deal with the religious subculture in Colossea. The church was largely made up of Gentiles, but it also contained a strong Jewish element.

There were several doctrinal problems draining the life from the Colossian church. Paul dealt forcefully with this in chapter two. This church struggled with angel worshiping, much as the recipients of Hebrews did.

Gnosticism was a major problem. The Gnostics believed Jesus had to have at least some evil in His life. They held that the spirit is good, but the flesh is evil. Therefore, to hold that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, came in the flesh would be considered a contradiction in terms. They believed that if Jesus took a human body, then He could not possibly be absolutely holy. They believed that he had to have at least some evil in His being. Paul wrote this book to deal with the false teachers who were trying to outdo each other in appealing to the new Christians in Colossea.

INTRODUCTION

Jews in the fellowship held out for a strong ritualism while the believers in mysticism held out for a very strong place for its tradition in the church.

There was also a strong Stoic presence in this area. They pressed for abstinence from certain foods and drink. At the same time, the Jewish population in the church had strong legalistic leanings that confronted their new freedom in Christ.

The Colossian Epistle

We cannot be certain, but it appears that this epistle was written in 61 A. D. If you look carefully, you will find at least 53 pieces of information about the recipients. The general topics covered in this information are as follows:

1. He described their former life.
2. He strongly affirmed that they were Christians.
3. These people have new, different attitudes.

There are 58 exhortations in this epistle. As you can see from the following table, these exhortations are found in three of the four chapters of the epistle.

CH. 1	CH. 2	CH.3	CH. 4
0	12	40	6

The way this epistle is laid out gives us an indication of the thinking of the author as he wrote. For instance, if you look at the epistles where Paul deals with the most trouble, like I Corinthians, there are as many exhortations in the first part of the epistle as there are in the last part. This grows out of the fact that Paul was very concerned and having mentioned the issue proceeded to give the exhortation he wished the people to follow in order to correct the problem. To a lesser degree, that is what Paul did in Colossians. His style, in Colossians, indicates that he has some real concerns, but feels that these can only be addressed if the people will take his instructions seriously.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 1
PAUL EXALTED JESUS; DEFENDED HIS MINISTRY
COLOSSIANS 1:1-29

1. There are five paragraphs in the first chapter of Colossians. On the following table, write a summary of seven words or less for each paragraph.

1:1, 2	
1:3-8	
1:9-20	
1:21-23	
1:24-29	

2. In Colossians 1:1, 2, Paul greeted the recipients of the epistle.
- In 1:1, there are four basic pieces of information. What are these pieces of information?
 - In 1:2, Paul identified the recipients of the epistle.
 - What did he request from God for them?
 - There is a single sentence in 1:3-87. In these verses, Paul gave thanks for their faith.
3. There is a single sentence in 1:3-8. In these verses, Paul gave thanks for their faith.
- In 1:3, Paul identified the Son of God as "the Lord Jesus Christ." Why wasn't any one of these three names sufficient?
 - In 1:4, Paul gave thanks for two things in the lives of these Christians. For what did Paul give thanks?
 - Paul, in 1:5, said, "because of the hope..."
 - According to his statements in 1:4,5, what did this hope produce?
 - How did Paul describe this hope?
 - What is the significance of these two facts?
 - In 1:6, Paul made descriptive statements about the gospel.
 - What did he say?
 - What difference does this make?
 - In 1:7, Paul made three descriptive statements about Epaphras.
 - What are these statements?
 - Paul spoke of Epaphras as a "bondservant" and as a "servant." What, if anything, is the difference between a "servant" and a "bondservant"?
 - In 1:8, Paul said Epaphras told them about the Colossian Christians "love in the Spirit." How would you describe the meaning of this to a new believer?
4. There are two sentences in 1:9-20 – 1:9-17; 1:18-20. In these sentences, Paul gave extensive descriptive information about Jesus.
- In 1:9, Paul spoke of "the knowledge of His will."
 - To whom does Paul refer by the use of the word "His"?
 - How would you explain "the knowledge of His will" to a new believer?
 - What is the difference between "spiritual wisdom" and "spiritual understanding"?
 - In 1:10, 11, Paul described five scenarios of how these people should live.
 - What are these five scenarios? What do they mean?
 - In 1:11, Paul identified the purposes of these five qualities. What are they?
 - In 1:12, Paul spoke of an act of God on their behalf.

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1. What was it?
 2. What does it mean?
 - e. In 1:13, Paul identified a two-fold action of God.
 1. Identify the actions.
 2. What is the difference between them?
 - f. In 1:14, Paul used the words, "in whom." To whom does this refer?
 - g. In 1:14, Paul spoke of "redemption" and "the forgiveness of sins." What, if any, is the difference between the two statements?
 - h. In 1:15, Paul used two phrases to give a description of Jesus. Explain each phrase.
 - i. In 1:16, Paul gave two additional descriptive phrases about Jesus.
 1. What are they?
 2. What do they say about Jesus?
 - j. Again, in 1:17, Paul used two more phrases to tell us something about Jesus.
 1. What are they?
 2. What do they mean?
 - k. In 1:18, Paul gave three more descriptive phrases about Jesus.
 1. What are they?
 2. What do they mean?
 3. How did Paul identify the purpose achieved by these qualities?
 - l. How would you explain Paul's statement in 1:19?
 - m. In 1:20, Paul listed two accomplishments of Jesus.
 1. What does each mean?
 2. What, if any, is the difference between them?
5. In 1:21-23, Paul described the transformation of the lives of these Colossian Christians.
- a. In 1:21, Paul gave three descriptive statements about their former way of life.
 1. What are they?
 2. How do they differ from each other?
 - b. In 1:22, Paul contrasted their former situation with their present one.
 1. How did he describe their present situation?
 2. What purpose did Paul identify for this action of Jesus?
 3. What is the difference between "holy," "blameless," and "beyond reproach"?
 - c. In 1:23, Paul made a conditional statement.
 1. What is that statement?
 2. What is the significance of the conditional word, "if"?
6. In 1:24-29, Paul changed the direction of his discourse to talk about his ministry.
- a. In 1:24, Paul said, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings".
 1. How would you explain this difficult statement?
 2. What was his announced purpose for this suffering?
 3. There is a second difficult statement in this verse – "I do my share on behalf of His body the church in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions." What did Paul mean?
 - b. In 1:25, Paul stated that he was "made a minister."
 1. What does "minister" mean?
 2. What was his stated purpose for this claim?
 3. What two purposes does Paul list for being "made a minister"?
 - c. In 1:26, 27, Paul spoke of a "mystery".
 1. What is this "mystery"?
 2. To whom does Paul refer by the word "whom" in verse 27?

3. How would you describe Paul's meaning in the statement, "Christ in you"?
4. What does Paul mean by "the hope of glory"?
- d. In 1:28, Paul, again, made a descriptive statement about his ministry.
 1. What is this descriptive statement?
 2. What is the difference between "admonishing" and "teaching"?
 3. What does Paul mean by "present every man complete in Christ"?
7. Look back over your study of this beautiful chapter. How have you changed your view of yourself in the presence of God as a result of this study? How will this new understanding change your actions on behalf of God and His church?

LESSON 1: COLOSSIANS 1:1-29

PAUL EXALTED JESUS; DEFENDED HIS MINISTRY

There are five paragraphs in Colossians chapter one. They are as follows:

1:1,2	Paul's Greeting
1:3-8	Paul Gave Thanks for Their Faith
1:9-20	Paul Exalted Jesus - for Redemption
1:21-23	Paul Described the Transformation of Their Lives
1:24-29	Paul's Ministry of the Gospel

Colossians 1:1-2 – Paul's Greeting

Paul begins this epistle in characteristic style.

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

This verse gives four basic pieces of information:

- The letter comes from both Paul and Timothy.** Of Paul's 13 confirmed epistles, seven were written by Paul, six by Paul and Timothy and in two of these, I and II Thessalonians, they were joined by Silvanus. This can probably be credited to one of two reasons: Paul's condition at the writing and the severity of the problems dealt with in these epistles.
- Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ.** This was challenged from two sides: Some challenged that Paul was not an apostle. The leaders of other religious groups challenged the deity of Jesus. This was the crux of Paul's credentials to be heard.
- Paul's apostleship came by the will of God.** It did not come by the decision of men. This would infuriate Paul's enemies of which there were many violent ones among the Jews. See Acts 14.
- Timothy is a Christian brother.** Timothy served as the elder in the church at nearby Ephesus. His joining Paul in writing added local emphasis to the message. There were times when the opposition to Timothy was strong. Paul supported Timothy by including his name in the greeting.

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: grace to you and peace from God our Father. Colossians 1:2

In this verse, Paul established three things:

- He identified the recipients in a beautiful way:
 - They are saints.** The word translated "saints" is "hagios" (ἅγιος). This word comes from a root word that means "to venerate," "to hold in awe." It identifies the people who are dedicated to, separated to God. They are sometimes called "sanctified ones." This is not an achievement. They are sometimes called "the sanctified ones." This is not an achievement. It is a growing relationship with Christ in which believers are cleansed from sin, renounce their former evil way of life and live a purged life. They are not flawlessly perfect, just growing in Godliness.
 - They are faithful brethren in Christ.** This is high praise coming from the venerable apostle. The word translated "faithful" is "pistos" (πιστός). It means "to be reliable", "to be faithful." It is akin to the Latin words "sine cera," which means "without wax," "to be what one appears to be." It identifies a "brother," "a near kinsman." In the church it means a fellow Christian. In our culture it literally means two people who have the same parents. It meant much more than that to them. It meant being a part of the family. A "brother" had responsibility to everyone to whom he was related. He was required to be obedient to the one

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called "father." He had a responsibility to any brother who got into financial trouble. He had a responsibility to any "brother" who was in danger. The case of Abraham taking his men to get Lot back is a case in point. It represented responsibility for each other in case of trouble or disaster. It was someone for whom you would give your life. When Peter talked about these people being "faithful brethren" he had all of this in mind. Remember, these are Jewish people who have become Christians.

b. Paul pronounced a blessing upon these saints:

He blessed them with the grace of God. The word translated "grace" is "charis" (χάρις). This word is usually defined as "unmerited favor." It is that, but there is more. Grace can be ascribed to both the giver and the receiver. For the giver, it is a loving disposition that produces deeds, words and relationships that result in benefit and good will. For the receiver, it is to receive favor without earning or deserving it. In the case of the believer as the recipient, it must always and only be unmerited favor. If we received what we deserve, we would be in dire trouble.

He blessed them with the peace of God. The word translated "peace" is "eirene" (εἰρήνη). Often it is used to describe the absence of war. There is a point at which this is true. You can, however, have the absence of battle without having peace. By the same token, early Christians, threatened by martyrdom, learned to have peace in the midst of ultimate struggle. This word, that appears in every New Testament book except I John, is akin to the Hebrew word "shalom." This Hebrew word speaks of wholeness, completeness. It was used to describe the condition of the saved. It also identifies the harmony that exists between groups or within a person or group. Peace has more to do with what and whose we are rather than the conditions in which we live.

We wonder why he chose "grace" and "peace." There are dozens of other possibilities. He could have requested that God bestow upon them His omnipotence in order to deal with their spiritual conflict. Because they were not perfect, they needed the favor of God to shower upon them His forgiveness, compassion and guidance as they struggled to be faithful in the battle.

They needed peace because they lived in the midst of severe spiritual warfare. Paul really wished them peace in total disregard of circumstances rather than peace in pleasant circumstances. This, of course, is far more scriptural than seeking calm and good will.

"From God our Father"

Textus Receptus, the Greek text used in the translation of the King James version, adds the words, "And the Lord Jesus Christ." There is one important manuscript that contains these words, but the others do not. It is preferable to omit these words for our consideration.

On five occasions in this epistle, Paul referred to God as "Father." In four of the five references, Paul used "God and Father." (1:2, 1:3; 2:2; 3:17) The importance of this has to do with their view of "father." As we will see shortly, Father has not so much to do with paternity as it does with their other understandings of this concept – protector, teacher, guide, authority, and provider. Paul added these understandings to the idea of "God" which stresses the adulation of deity and the idea of eternal omnipotence and omniscience. Paul affirmed that these saints were children of God. (God our Father)

Colossians 1:3-8 – Paul Gave Thanks for Their Faith

"We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you. Colossians 1:3"

This is a single sentence. The sentence focuses around the giving of thanks

"We give thanks"

The word translated "we give thanks" is "eucharisto" (εὐχαριστέω). It usually has to do with prayer to God. It is a compound word.

- a. The Greek word "eu" means "well."

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b. The word "Charizomai" (χαρίζομαι) means "to give freely."

This is the source of our English word "eucharist." It expresses the idea of intense gratitude and thankfulness. The form of the word is present indicative active. It means this:

a. **Present tense** – this is ongoing action that begins and does not stop. It describes a lifestyle rather than a single action.

b. **Indicative mood** – This is a simple statement of the action. It did take place.

c. **Active voice** – the action is initiated by the subject of the sentence, which in this case is "we."

It would be appropriate to translate this word "we continually give thanks."

"To God"

The addition of these two words points to the source. It is Paul's way of saying that divine action is responsible for the conditions that cause him to continually give thanks.

"The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"

The Greek text begins with the word "and." Thus the English translation would read, "We give thanks to the God and Father..." In this statement, Paul identifies how Jesus viewed the Father. He saw him as both God and Father.

To see the Father as "God" indicates that He is the one true God, all-powerful and eternal.

This is a difficult concept for those of us who think and speak in English. The word "Father" for us has to do with physical conception. For the Greeks and Hebrews, it was this and more. He was the progenitor, but He was also the one who nourished, provided, protected, upheld and taught. It also suggests, on a spiritual level, that God the Father is ultimately responsible for our spiritual life in much the same way our human fathers are responsible for our physical life.

"Of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The text would just as clearly identify Jesus if any one of these three terms were used rather than all three. This almost always indicates that the author uses the additional words or names to add very strong emphasis. That is exactly what Paul has done in this passage.

a. **"Lord"** - This is one who has power or authority. It is the word a slave used to address his owner or master. Jesus spoke of Himself as "Lord."

b. **"Jesus"** – This is a transliteration of the word "Jeshua" or "Joshua." The name of the Old Testament character literally meant "Jehovah is salvation." The Greek word was used to identify a savior.

c. **"Christ"** – The New Testament word "Christos" (χριστός) comes from the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Old Testament. In the Hebrew, it means "anointed one." This meaning carries over into the Greek text. This was a way of identifying the one God has set apart as Messiah.

Thus, Paul used the three names to identify not only the person born in Bethlehem, but also the ministry of this person – Master, Savior, and Messiah.

"Praying always for you"

The word translated "praying" is "proseuchomai" (προσεύχομαι), which is a compound word.

a. "Pros" (πρός) means "before" or "toward."

b. "Euchomai" (εὐχομαι) means "to pray" or "to wish."

It is a strengthened and emphatic form of the word that was always used when speaking of prayer to God.

The form of this word is present participle. It tells us:

a. **Present tense** – This describes a lifestyle rather than a single act.

b. **Participle** – This identifies ongoing action. This is a favorite literary tool of Paul. Both the present tense and the participle form identify ongoing action. It is a way to express unmistakable emphasis. The use of the English word "always" is the way the translators gave expression to this

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form. It was Paul's way of saying his prayer for this congregation was so constant it had become a lifestyle rather than a single act of praying for them.

Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; Colossians 1:4

"Since we heard"

The word translated "since we heard" is "akouo" (ἀκούω) carries the idea of discerning the meaning or message rather than detecting a sound. The form of this word is first aorist participle.

- a. **First aorist tense** – This form basically identifies simple past time action.
- b. **The participle** – this form describes a singular action.

One might translate the word "having heard."

"Of your faith"

The word translated "faith" is "pistis" (πίστις). It often is used quite loosely in the church. Many people use this word to express a personal agreement that there was an historical figure named Jesus. This is not the New Testament use of the term "faith." In the New Testament, it is the conviction that Jesus is the Son of God, the redeemer of the repentant. For them, it would be a complete shock if Jesus did not do everything He said. It is to believe in God and His Son so completely that one risks everything in anticipation of His faithfulness.

"In Christ Jesus"

Again, Paul used more than one name to identify Jesus when either of them would have identified God's Son to the readers. It is a strong use of emphasis which is found in the meaning of the names.

- a. **"Christ"** – This word means "anointed one" and identifies the Messiah, anointed/set apart by God as the redeemer of mankind.
- b. **"Jesus"** – This word, as previously indicated, is a transliteration of the Hebrew name "Jeshua" or the English "Joshua" and means "Jehovah is salvation." It identifies the savior.

The placement of words in both Hebrew and Greek is very significant. Paul ordered the words "Christ Jesus" rather than Jesus Christ. In English we tend to use them interchangeably. In Greek, however, the placement of "Christ" first places greater emphasis upon its meaning. Paul used both "Christ" and "Jesus." His emphasis, however, was upon the fact that Christ is the anointed Messiah.

"And the love which you have"

The use of the word "and" indicates that Paul placed the "faith" and "love" on an equal footing. It is not just that they are equally important, but also that they are inseparable. Faith does not survive without love. One cannot have this form of love without being a person of faith.

The "love" of which Paul spoke is "agape" (ἀγάπη). This word represents a special kind of love. It has no requirements or conditions. It demands no level of conduct. It is to love or be loved just because you are. In almost every instance, it is the word used to describe the love of God for us.

The words "which you have" does not appear in the Greek text, but their implication is quite appropriate.

"For all the saints"

The use of the word "all" makes Paul's statement all-inclusive. It is NOT that these Christians have certain believers they like and others they like less. It is that they love all the Christians just because they are. It is the way God loves us.

Paul used the word "saints" in a way that can be confusing to some. Some Christian groups identify certain believers as living at a higher level of holiness than other believers. This has helped foster an understanding of the "saint" as a person who is flawless. Some think of this as one who lives at a second or third level of spotlessness which is unattainable by other Christians. This is not Paul's intent. The word translated "saint" is "hagios" (ἅγιος). The basic idea here is two fold:

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- a. One who is separated/dedicated to God for His exclusive purposes. The Old Testament priests were sanctified – set apart for divine service. They were available for no other vocation.
- b. One who had previously become unclean or tainted by sinful desires and actions, has been cleansed by the blood of Christ.

Paul highlighted the fact that these Christians, though they had several limitations, had learned to love all their Christian brothers and sisters as Christ loved them. This love was not perfect, but it was obvious and it was growing.

Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, Colossians 1:5

"Because of the hope"

The word translated "because of" is "dia" (διά) which is usually translated "through." The difference between the two English words is subtle, but significant. The word "because" identifies cause. On the other hand, the word "through" suggests a means of accomplishment. Again, the difference is not great, but my personal preference is "through." It indicates that our hope is the means of expressing this faith and love. It stimulates us to love all the Christian people around us.

"Hope" is a translation of the Greek word "elpis" (ἐλπίς). In some places in Scripture, as well as in the modern church, this word is used to identify our future expectation of spending eternity in Christ's presence. Hope is always future. It describes a favorable expectation of something good. It is also an expression of faith. It involves a high level of confidence that the expectation of the godly people will be realized, both now and in eternity.

"Laid up for you in heaven"

The word translated "laid up" is "apokeimai" (ἀπόκειμαι). It is one of 18 different words so translated in the English New Testament. It describes something placed in safe-keeping. They did not have banks, as we know them. To save money, they wrapped it up in a napkin and buried it knowing the time would probably come when they would really need it. Paul said, "in the same way, our hope is being preserved for us against the day of great need."

The form of this word is a present participle. We have encountered this form previously. The present tense describes action that begins and never stops. It is a picture of a lifestyle rather than a single act. The participle, on the other hand, describes ongoing action in progress. This is a deliberate attempt to place strong emphasis at this point. One might literally translate the word, "...hope always being laid" up for you.

Paul spoke of this hope being laid up "in heaven." There are blessings God provides for us here and now on a daily basis. There are other blessings and benefits that are eternal in nature. "Heaven" as described in the New Testament, is not synonymous with the sky. The scriptures clearly teach that both the heavens and the earth will pass away. Heaven, wherever or whatever that may be, is where Jesus is.

"Of which you previously heard"

The word translated "heard" is "proakouo" (προακούω) and it is a compound word:

- a. "Pro" (προ) means "before."
- b. "Akouo" (ἀκούω) means "to hear."

It literally means to hear before.

The form of this word is emphatic and the best choice Paul could possibly have made. It is first aorist indicative.

- a. **First aorist** - This is simple past action.
- b. **Indicative mood** – This is a simple declaration of action.

You will note that these two forms compliment each other adding emphasis to a strong statement. Paul emphasized that this was not new to them. They had heard it when first they heard the Gospel.

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"In the word of truth, the gospel"

In the Greek text, this statement reads, "In the word OF the truth OF the Gospel." This causes some difference in meaning, but nothing substantial. In either case, Paul focused attention on the Gospel, which is the truth. This is an important emphasis in a location where philosophy tended to claim the title "truth."

Which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; Colossians 1:6

"Which has come to you"

"Pareimi" (παρεῖμι) is the word translated "come." It is a compound word:

- a. "Para" means "near" or "beside."
- b. "Eimi" means "to be" or "I am."

The sense of Paul's use of this word is that he has spoken of "truth" as if it were a person coming into one's presence.

The form of this word is present participle. We have seen this form several times.

- a. **Present tense** – This describes ongoing action. It is a lifestyle, not just a single act.
- b. **Participle** – This form describes action in progress.

Again, Paul used two forms that have the same idea – ongoing action. This invariably was done for purposes of emphasis. Paul spoke about the Gospel in a specific way. They had heard the Gospel when they became Christians. The hearing of the Gospel became an everyday lifestyle, not something they heard just once.

"Just as in all the world also"

The Greek text, here, translates much like our translation indicates. Paul's idea here is very significant. There is a universality in God's dealings with people. The grace of God has come to every human being. The difference is not in terms of availability, but in our response to His grace.

"It is constantly bearing fruit and increasing"

The word "it" refers to God's grace expressed in the Gospel.

The word "constantly" does not appear in the Greek text, but the idea is there. "Bearing fruit" is a translation of the word "karpophoreo" (καρποφορέω) which means "to be fertile," "to be fruitful." The form of this word is present participle. As previously indicated, the force of this form is that the present tense speaks of a lifestyle, something one is always doing, whereas the participle describes action in progress. Paul used two forms both of which indicate something that happens and never stops. This is the reason our translation used the word "constantly."

In nature, fruit bearing is the attempt of the person, animal or plant to perpetuate itself. In Paul's statement, he drew a parallel. As a plant bears fruit, so the grace of God, in Christ, bears fruit and keeps on bearing fruit in the Colossian Christians.

The King James Version omits the words "and increasing." This is because the seventeenth century translators used the Textus Receptus Greek text which omits the words. In fact, there is not one single ancient manuscript of Colossians that omits the words. They belong.

The word translated "increases" is "auxano" (αὐξάνω) and means "to grow." This is another parallel to the growth process in nature. An oak tree begins as an acorn. It "increases" constantly until it becomes a huge, strong tree. This form in this word is, also, a present participle. The effect is the same. It is a very emphatic way to describe growth that never ceases.

"Even as it has been doing in you also"

The Greek text is a bit more direct. It reads, "Even also among you." Paul said these words in a forceful, dramatic way. Having described the growth process of God's grace, he made his point by saying that this is particularly true among the Colossian Christians.

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"Since the day you heard of it"

Paul spoke more directly, saying, "from which day you heard..." The word translated "heard" is "akouo" (ἀκούω). It means "to hear." It is more, however, than identifying a particular sound. It has to do with discerning the meaning of that sound. As we will see in the next phrase, Paul is being very deliberate and emphatic.

"And understood the grace of God in truth"

The word translated "understood" is "epiginosko" (ἐπίγνωσκω) and is a compound word.

- a. "Epi" (ἐπί) means "on" or "upon."
- b. "Ginosko" (γινώσκω) means "to continually increase in knowledge."

As indicated elsewhere, there are two New Testament words that are usually translated "to know."

- a. "Oida" means "to know fully."
- b. "Ginosko" means to be constantly increasing in knowledge."
- c. The latter was Paul's wise choice.

We never reach the place where we know everything there is to know about God's grace. On the other hand, we day by day increase in our understanding of how great the grace of God is for unworthy sinners like ourselves.

Go back to the previous phrase. Paul spoke of their having discerned the meaning of what they heard of the grace of God and constantly growing and increasing in their knowledge of that grace.

Paul spoke of grace. We often use the description, "unmerited favor" to say what "grace" means. Someone has said that grace is "that incomprehensible gift God gives us despite the depth of our guilt." That is exactly what Paul described for these Colossian Christians. They had lived in a culture wild with debauchery and perverse in evil understandings. Still, the grace of God was extended to them and their sins were forgiven.

Paul spoke of "the grace of God in truth." Paul would never speak of the grace of God in a way that was not truthful. The question then arises, why would he add the words "in truth"? These Christians were being exposed to a lot of teaching that was anything but truth. At this point, there is a play on words that the Colossian Christians would understand very well. They had been taught that Jesus is "the truth." To speak of the grace of God "in truth" would be like speaking of the grace of God "in Christ." Again, amid all the false ideas and doctrines to which they were being exposed, Paul spoke of the grace of God "in truth."

Just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, Colossians 1:7

"Just as you learned it from Epaphras"

Paul drew a parallel in this verse. The word "learned" is a translation of the word "manthano" (μανθάνω). The word means "to learn." It is related to the word for "disciple" – "a learner". It suggests both discovering information and applying that information to the problems and decisions of life.

They apparently learned of the grace of God from Epaphras. There is no dependable information about the origin of the Colossian Church. It is assumed that Epaphras, a native of Colosse, was converted while Paul was in Ephesus. Epaphras may well have gone back to his home-town to share the good news with the people there. We can be sure that Epaphras disciplined these people and taught them of the grace of God.

"Our beloved fellow bond-servant"

Paul had the ability to affirm those who served God along with him. You see this in the opening paragraphs of each epistle he wrote. In this statement, Paul makes at least three statements about Epaphras.

- a. **He was "beloved"** – This word is "agapetos" (ἀγαπητός). This is an interesting use of the root "agape" (ἀγάπη). The Scriptures command us to "love one another." (John 15:12) In view of

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this command, every believer should be "beloved." Paul is, obviously, thinking of something greater, deeper when he spoke so approvingly of Epaphras. In this statement, Paul has used the idea of "agape" in at least two ways:

1. Epaphras is "beloved" simply because he is a believer and we are obeying the command of Jesus to "love," to see as "beloved" all those whose sins are forgiven.
2. Paul described a two-sided obedience to the command of Christ. Epaphras gave "agape" love to everyone, especially those in the body of Christ. As recipients of the love of Epaphras, they saw him as "beloved" not as a response to his love (agape love must be an action, not a reaction) – but as an affirmation, a cooperation with his love for all. This creates a synergism of love; a situation in which the combination of his love and their love is greater than the sum of the two. This says something very special about Epaphras.

- b. **Epaphras was a bond-servant** – There is an important difference between a "servant" and a "bond-servant."

Paul's mention of Epaphras as a "bond-servant" indicates that Paul viewed him as a person who loved the Lord so much, as Paul did, that he chose to be a life-long servant.

- c. **He was a fellow bond-servant** – The word translated "fellow bond-servant" is "sundoulos" (σύνδουλος) which is a compound word:
1. "Sun" (σύν) means "with."
 2. "Doulos" (δουλός) means "servant."

It literally means "a servant with" "a servant alongside." This was a substantial affirmation. Paul drew a parallel between his servanthood to God and that of Epaphras.

"Who is a faithful servant of Christ"

Paul continued his words of affirmation. He spoke of Epaphras as being "faithful." The word is "pistos" (πιστός). In the same way that "faith" speaks of "strong persuasion," "of a deep conviction," so faithful speaks of the result of that conviction," a life thoroughly dependable," "an earned reputation for reliability." That is what Epaphras was.

Paul spoke, again, of Epaphras as a "servant." The word, however, is different from the previous phrase. This word is "diakonia" (διάκονια) which is better translated "minister." This is not necessarily a reference to a pastor, though it might well be. The diakonia is a band of believers bent on serving others. It may be in attending to the needs of others. Indeed, it may be in pastoring. The emphasis is on an intense level of providing service to others.

SERVANT	BOND-SERVANT
1. A servant is a slave	1. A bond-servant was a slave before becoming a bond-servant.
2. There were several ways to become a slave: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Through financial difficulty b. Through a judgment of the court. c. A captive as a spoil of war. d. Slaves could be bought. e. Sell self to gain citizenship. 	2. There were several ways to become a slave: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Through financial difficulty b. Through the judgment of a court. c. A captive as a spoil of war. d. Slaves could be bought. e. Sell self to gain citizenship
3. Slavery was always involuntary	3. Initial slavery was involuntary. The slave moved from the status of slave to bond-servant by choice.
4. Term of slavery: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Financial difficulty – long enough to repay the debt. b. Court judgment – Long enough to repay damages c. War captive – usually for life. d. Jewish slave – six years. e. Purchased slave – life 	4. Term of bond-servanthood. He chose to serve his master for life out of desire.
5. Relationship to master – in most cases adversarial	5. Relationship – always one of intimate friendship which is the reason slaves chose to be bond-servants (Ex. 21:2-6)

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Epaphras is a "servant of Christ." Christ is the master to whom this servant renders total, unquestioned obedience.

"On our behalf."

This is an important addition to the statement. Too often we get the impression that we are serving people. That is half true. Actually, we are serving our Lord as we minister to the needs of others, whoever they may be. Jesus touched on this when he said,

"And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.' Matthew 25:40

Paul could see that Epaphras was deeply concerned about the needs of people. He could see that this servant was determined to minister to those needs. Still, it was just as clear that he was a servant of the Lord by ministering to needy folks.

And he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. Colossians 1:8

"And he also informed us"

The word translated "informed" is "deloo" (δηλώω) and means "to make plain." It is more than sharing facts and information. It involves "making something clear," for the person who does not understand. This is a first aorist participle. Simply put, this places strong emphasis on a factual situation that is in progress.

"Of your love in the Spirit."

This is what Epaphras clarified for them. We need to ask the question, "What does Paul mean by 'love in the spirit'"? There are a couple of strong suggestions:

- a. It may be that Paul was saying that Epaphras demonstrated this love because of the Holy Spirit's presence both in his life and in the lives of the Colossian Christians as well.
- b. It may also be that Paul was saying that it was the guiding and molding influence of the Holy Spirit that fostered this agape love that has no boundaries and no requirements. It is to be loved just because you are.

My strong feeling is that it is probably all of the above.

Colossians 1:9-20 – Paul Exalted Jesus - For Redemption

Colossians. 1:9-17 form a single sentence. 1:18-20 form another sentence. It will be necessary for us to keep this in mind as we attempt to discover Paul's message in this paragraph. In situations like this, it is of utmost importance to keep in mind the subject and verb of the sentence. The subject is "we." The verb is "have not ceased to pray." The entire nine verses grow out of this subject and verb.

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, Colossians 1:9

"For this reason also"

The wording of the Greek text is a bit different, but the meaning is not. The Greek text could be translated, "Because of this also." The word "this" refers to the content of the previous paragraph – the glowing report of their faithfulness that Epaphras brought to Paul

"Since the day we heard of it"

The word "heard" is "akouo" (ἀκούω). We have encountered this word in the past. It describes not just hearing the words, but grasping the meaning of that message as well.

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"We have not ceased to pray for you"

The Greek wording in this part of the sentence is not problematic. The form of the word translated "pray" is significant. It is a present participle. As indicated earlier, the present tense identifies a lifestyle rather than a single action. Also, the participle highlights action in progress. These are two separate forms that emphasize the ongoing nature of this prayer. One might translate these words, "we do not cease to pray and never stop praying for you. Paul had just received a glowing report from Epaphras. He immediately started a marathon of prayer on their behalf. Too often, it is just the reverse for us. If the truth be known, we seldom pray for each other unless there is a tragedy or a pending crisis.

"And to ask that you be filled"

The word translated "ask" is "aiteo" (αἰτέω). It means "to ask." As we learned earlier, however, the emphasis is on the idea of supplication. It is the way a servant would make request of his master; the way a subject would petition his king; the way a defendant would make request of a judge.

Paul's word for "filled" is "pleroo" (πληρῶω). It means "to fill full." There are several words and their derivatives that come from the marketplace. They, too, sometimes had problems with false measures. They decided that a measure of wheat was "filled full" when it runs over on all sides. That is exactly what Paul desired in this phrase. He is asking God to fill them to running over.

"With the knowledge of His will"

The word translated "knowledge" is "epiginosko" (ἐπιγινώσκω) which is a compound word:

- a. "Epi" means "upon."
- b. "Ginosko" means "the growth of knowledge."

Together, these two words describe a fullness of knowledge. The word "ginosko" means "the growth of knowledge." That was not enough. By adding the word "epi," Paul intensified his request of God. It is like saying I want you to know all there is to know of God's will.

Paul could have requested full knowledge in many different fields. He knew, however, that their dire need, in such a confusing situation, was to know God and His will above everything else.

"In all spiritual wisdom and understanding"

Interestingly, the Greek text reverses the order of these words, saying, "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." We will use this order for our study.

"In all wisdom"

The word for "wisdom" is "sophia" (σοφία). We tend to think of wisdom as being "smart." Their idea had more insight. They thought of "wisdom" as "the ability to discern the true nature of things." There are a number of people who are misled because they are not aware of the whole picture of the dilemma they face. Paul wanted these believers to be filled with the total awareness of the issues confronting them until they couldn't possibly grasp another thought.

"And spiritual understanding"

"Sunesis" (σύνεσις) is the word translated "understanding." It means "to put together." When considering a problem, we often struggle because not all the pieces of the puzzle are available. When we have all the pieces of information, it is much easier to "put the pieces together," "to understand." To this extent, understanding is an application of wisdom.

Paul clarified his request a bit more by adding the word "spiritual." He wanted them to overflow with spiritual wisdom.

We need to ask what is the difference between "understanding" and "spiritual understanding." The word translated "spiritual" is "pneumatikos" (πνευματικός). This is an outgrowth of the word "pneuma" (πνεύμα) which is a reference to the Holy Spirit. It is significant that you never see the word "pneumatikos" prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts. Three things stand out in the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

- a. He is our guide for life.

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- b. He leads us in godly growth.
- c. He is the power for faithful living that God gives us.

Spiritual understanding adds a totally new dimension to understanding. Understanding is putting together the pieces of a confusing situation. Spiritual understanding is to put the pieces of a confusing situation together under the guidance and holy principles set forth by the Holy Spirit. The difference between the two is phenomenal.

So that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; Colossians 1:10

"So that you may walk"

In the Greek text, these words are a translation of one word that means "to walk." The Greek word "peripateo" (περιπατέω) means "to walk." It is used in both a literal and figurative sense. In this instance, it is used figuratively. In this sense, it classifies the way we deal with everything in life. It can be used to portray the Christian's way of life as well as the non-Christian's.

"In a manner worthy of the Lord"

"Worthy" is a translation of the word "axios" (ἄξιός). It means "appropriately," "as becoming," "after a godly sort." Thus, to live one's life "worthy of the Lord" would be to live in a way that follows His example. It is to live so as to obey His teachings. It is to demonstrate the character reflected in His life and exhorted to in the rest of Scripture. This is what Paul meant when he said, "Be imitators of God..." Ephesians 5:1a

"To please Him in all respects"

You may have observed that there are, in this paragraph, several differences between the Greek and English texts. In some instances, it makes no substantive difference. That is not the case in this instance.

The Greek text reads, "To all pleasing." This is a substantial difference. The word translated "pleasing" is "areskeia" (ἀρεσκεία) and means "to give pleasure." We need to attempt to give pleasure to those around us. We certainly must make a priority of giving pleasure to God. In the best sense of the word, this involves offering agape love to those around us as well as to God. The difference is, the English text deals with pleasing the Lord. The Greek text, however, deals with being pleasing to everyone. Experience tells us that we just cannot please all the people all the time. We can develop an attitude that "as far as in us lies," we attempt to be pleasing to all.

"Bearing fruit in every good work"

The Greek text states this phrase in reverse order, "in every good work bearing fruit." The word translated "good" is "agathos" (ἀγαθός). Many people describe "good" as "anything that pleases them." Conversely, they might describe it as "anything that does not displease others." That was not Paul's intent. Depending on the person or culture, that which is good in character may displease the person, the culture or both.

The word translated "works" is "ergon" (ἔργον). The word means "work," "doing a task," "The exertion of energy to accomplish a task or goal."

A "good work," then, would be the exertion of energy to achieve a goal which is good in character." This could take the form of doing a good deed for a person in dire circumstances. Again, it could assume the form of taking a righteous, but lonely stand against an expression of evil in the community.

The word translated "bearing fruit" is "karpophoreo" (καρποφορέω). This word means "to bear fruit, either in the literal or figurative sense." Fruit bearing can be discerned in at least two different ways:

- a. In a literal sense, it is the effort by a plant to reproduce itself. The dandelion is a case in point.
- b. In a figurative sense, fruit bearing is the positive result of attempting to live a holy life. In this instance, our witness shows a pagan world what the love and grace of God is like.

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"And increasing in the knowledge of God"

The word translated "increasing" is "auxano" (αὐξάνω) and literally means "to grow." It is what happens to a little baby day by day. It also is used in a figurative sense to describe a person's increasing likeness to Christ.

In this instance, the growth Paul desires is in "the knowledge of God." Paul's statement is intense. The word for "knowledge" is "epignosis" (ἐπίγνωσις) and means "to fully perceive," "to totally discern." It is to know God as completely and precisely as it is possible to know Him under the Spirit's direction.

Strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously Colossians 1:11

"Strengthened with all power"

Both the word "strengthened" and "power" are translations of the same word- "dunamis" (δύναμις). This is the origin of our word for dynamite. It is almost always used to describe the power of God. One might literally translate the phrase, "empowered with all power." It is not accidental that Paul, in the previous verse, spoke of "growing in the full knowledge of God" and then immediately mentioned being "strengthened with all power." It is a cause-effect relationship. People want to know how to grow strong in their relationship with God. Here is one of the keys.

"According to His glorious might"

The word "His" refers to God. Paul directed the accolades in this verse to God. The Greek text reads, "according to (against) the might of the glory of Him." The word translated "might" is "kratos" (κράτος). This word speaks of "force," but it also focuses on "dominion" or "the power to control and command."

The word "glorious" is a translation of "doxa" (δόξα). It means "to honor," "to hold in high esteem." The omnipotent power of God is without equal. This fosters a sense of "glory" "of being held in unique, high esteem and reverence" by those who love Him.

"For the attainment of all steadfastness"

The word translated "for" is really "eis" (εἰς), but it is usually translated "to" or "unto." The word "attainment" does not appear in the Greek text. In this instance, our translators have done a bit of interpreting rather than translating.

The word translated "steadfastness" is "hupomone" (ὑπομονή). This is a compound word:

- a. "Hupo" (ὑπὸ) means "under."
- b. "Mone" (μονή) means "to abide."

This was originally a military term. It portrays the way valiant soldiers stand under authority, even when doom seems imminent. This gives us a very different picture of "patience" or "steadfastness."

If you read the previous verses again, you will observe that there is a definite link between the glorious power of God and the patience that grows in the life and character of the believer. It is a cause effect relationship.

"And patience; joyously"

As you can see, Paul used two different words that are both translated "patience." The former word was "hupomone" (ὑπομονή) This word is "makrothumeo" (μακροθυμέω). This is a compound word:

- a. "Makros" (μάκρος) means "long."
- b. "Thumos" (θύμος) means "temper."

This word literally means "long tempered" and is usually translated "longsuffering." It is important to inquire about the difference in meaning between "hupomone" (ἡυπομονή) and "makrothumeo" (μακροθυμέω).

- a. "Hupomone" (ἡυπομονή) is sometimes used to describe "perseverance." It is more, however, than stubborn endurance. It is a staunchness of choice as well as action. It is knowing exactly

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what you believe and being totally unwilling to compromise that knowledge. It is a quiet steadfastness born of love, not stubbornness.

- b. "Makrothumeo" (μακροθυμέω) is more than the ability to restrain oneself rather than venting wrath. This long-tempered quality is a burning passion that is as controlled as it is intense. There is a purpose to this controlled passion. It is possible to hold all his emotions in check because the believer knows that Christ will soon come.

In what our translation refers to as "steadfastness" and "patience," we see a definite link with the glorious power of God that enables these qualities to exist in the life of the believer.

"Joyously"

The modern church has trouble with the idea of joy because we have confused it with "fun" and dealt with it as an emotion rather than a quality character. We think of it as a response to pleasant circumstances. This is not a biblical understanding. We must differentiate between joy and Christian joy. In Acts 5:41, Luke reported:

So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. Acts 5:41

The word "joyously" is the same word we are working with in this verse. This situation in Acts, is just the reverse of our too common use of the term. It is one thing to be enabled to grow in "patience and long suffering" in an atmosphere of joy. It is quite another thing to struggle to be patient and longsuffering in an abrasive atmosphere that is anything but joyous. We must keep in mind that Paul described a situation in which the empowerment came from God and not our stubborn resolve.

Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Colossians 1:12

"Giving thanks to the Father"

The word translated "giving thanks" is "eucharistia" (εὐχαριστία). It is the source of our word "eucharist." It means "to express deep gratitude." In form, this is a present participle. Both the present tense and the participle describe ongoing action. This is a way Paul used to add great emphasis to his statement. It is like saying, "give thanks and never stop giving thanks."

In the English text, "joyously" describes the atmosphere of thanksgiving commanded in verse 12. In the Greek text, however, the wording is "with joy" and identifies the atmosphere in which the growth in patience and longsuffering takes place.

This intense expression of gratitude is directed to the Father because it is His empowerment that enabled their progress in patience and long suffering as well as all the other qualities of spiritual growth Paul mentioned in this paragraph.

"Who has qualified us"

The word "qualified" is a translation of the word "hikanoo" (ἱκανόω) and means "to enable," "to declare competent or worthy." Paul describes the forgiving power of God. It is the Father who declares us worthy even though in ourselves there is nothing that would suggest that we are worthy. He has declared us "competent" to be a part of His family; to be recipients of His grace.

"To share in the inheritance of the saints"

"Share" is a translation of the word "meros" (μέρος) which means "to share," "to divide into allotments." It describes a protected portion.

The word "inheritance" is a translation of the word "kleros" (κλήρος). It is the origin of our word "clergy." It means, "to receive by lot," "the casting of lots to determine what is God's will," "a portion of an estate set apart for a particular person or entitlement." In this instance, Paul spoke of a future gift of God that we as believers share with each other – eternal life.

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Paul wanted to call Christians "saints." We are a bit uncomfortable with this because the word has taken on the idea of perfection; of flawlessness. The word for "saints" is "hagios" (ἅγιος) and is often translated "holy." The Greeks and Romans used the word to describe that which was dedicated, set apart for their gods. In the New Testament, it was used to identify those who were set apart from sin; consecrated to God. In this sense, they were holy, sacred. Bumper stickers can be misleading. Still, they sometimes carry a kernel of truth that is gripping. I think of one that announces, "I'm not perfect, just forgiven"

"In light"

The Greek word "phos" (φῶς) means "to give light." Our English word "phosphorus" meaning "to bear light" comes from this root. The Christians are thought of, in the New Testament, as "children of light." They are and they share with others the light of God's presence and transforming power.

In this particular statement, Paul had described our benefit and relationship with God. The addition of the words "in light," describes the response of our lives to the benefits and relationships we sustain with God.

For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, Colossians 1:13

"For He delivered us"

"Rhyomai" (ρύομαι) is the word translated "delivered." It means "to rescue," "to deliver." It carries the idea of "preserving someone from dire catastrophe." The form used here focuses the reader's attention on the fact of this deliverance rather than the time. It is a first aorist form. This form expresses simple past time.

"From the dominion of darkness"

The Greek word for "dominion" is "exousia" (ἐξουσία). The word literally means "the ability to exercise power," "the power to command without refusal." Each of the words so translated represent the ability to rule, or command, based upon the guarantee of power.

The word translated "darkness" is "skotos" (σκότος). This word was used to describe both physical and spiritual darkness. In almost every instance, this word appears in a bad connotation. Observe that Paul did not claim that they could remove themselves from this power and authority. This is an action of the Father.

If you look carefully at this verse, Paul described two contrasting conditions:

- a. "Delivered us from the dominion of darkness"
- b. "Transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son"

These conditions are as opposite as it is possible to be. Paul intended it to be that way. Notice, however, that he tied these contrasting conditions together by the use of the word "and." The use of this literary tool serves to place these two separate situations on an equal level. It would be like saying, "Both of these are important." It is as important to be "delivered from the dominion of darkness" as it is to "be transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son."

"And transferred us"

"Transferred" is a translation of the Greek word "methistemi" (μεθίστημι) which is a compound word:

- a. "Meta" (μετά) means "above."
- b. "Tithemi" (τίθημι) means "to put or to place."

It describes a change of location or condition. Both this word and that in the previous phrase are in the first aorist tense which stresses the action and not the time.

In the same way that the Father carried out the deliverance from "the dominion of darkness," He also "transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son." We are powerless to accomplish this. It is, however, well within the power of our God.

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"To the kingdom"

The word "kingdom" is "basileia" (βασιλεία) and identifies a sovereign dominion. It involves both a location and a measure of great power. The word describes the entity over which a king rules and exerts his power. It also can be used to describe the kingdom of God, that over which God rules.

Paul described the move from one kingdom, sphere of power, to another. Again, this is not something that we can accomplish. It is, however, what God can do because He is greater than the "dominion of darkness."

"Of His beloved Son"

On three occasions, in the Gospels, Christ was referred to as "My beloved Son."

- a. Matthew 3:17 – His baptism
- b. Matthew 12:18 – Quote from Isaiah 42:1
- c. Matthew 17:5 – The transfiguration

The use of the word "Son" is "huios" (ἕλιος) which describes the relationship between a parent and a child. This has caused substantial controversy in the church over the centuries. For some, to speak of Christ as "Son" and of God as "Father" places Christ in a subordinate role.

In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins Colossians 1:14

"In whom we have redemption"

In the King James Version, as in the Greek text from which it was translated – Textus Receptus – the phrase is added, "through His blood." This is certainly Paul's intent, but no ancient document contains these words. The sense of the additional words is certainly present, but the words are not. We will omit them from this study as well.

When Paul said, "In whom" he made a direct reference to Jesus. This is a way of emphasizing the unique work of Christ in our redemption.

The words "we have" is a translation of the Greek word "echo" (ἔχω), which means "to be," "or "to have." The form of this word is present indicative active. It describes ongoing action. It pictures a life-style rather than a single act. One might translate it, "we have and never stop having." Paul could have written this sentence without this word "echo" and the meaning would have still been very obvious. This almost always indicates that he has made a deliberate emphasis.

The word translated "redemption" is "apolutrosis" (ἀπολύτρωσις) which is a compound word:

- a. "Apo" (ἀπό) means "from."
- b. "Lutroo" (λυτρόω) means "to release." This word was used to describe the payment of a ransom. It was also used to describe the payment a family made for release of their relative who had gotten into financial difficulties he could not repay and therefore became a slave.

Paul has made a very deliberate attempt to place serious emphasis on the fact that their ongoing release from sin is in Jesus Christ alone.

"The forgiveness of sins"

The word translated "sins" is "hamartia" (ἁμαρτία) and means "to miss the mark." This is the broadest possible term to describe moral wrongdoing. It is an evil governing principle that informs every choice, action and word in our lives.

"Forgiveness" is a translation of the word "aphesis" (ἀφεσις). This means "to dismiss," "to release." In Christ, we are forgiven, released from that evil principle of life that causes us to miss the mark, to fail to do as God requires.

Those who are "in Christ," have heard about "forgiveness of sins" repeatedly; just enough that we do not think carefully about it. When we sin, we do violence to people or to God. If you kill a person, you cannot correct that wrong. They are dead. If you slander another person's character, you can apologize for it, but the damage has been done.

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Despite the fact that we have disobeyed and dishonored God, He does not demand that we restore the damage we have done. That is impossible. God releases us from the responsibility of that disobedience. It is as though we had never done anything wrong. What a marvelous gift!

And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation Colossians 1:15

In this verse, Paul describes Jesus in two different ways. Observe what he said,

"And He is the image of the invisible God"

This is a very emphatic statement. The word translated "image" is "eikon" (εἰκόν) from which we get our English word "ikon." This is the word they used to identify the image of a person stamped on a coin. In I Corinthians, Paul used the same word when he said,

For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. 1 Corinthians 11:7

The word, in our text, translated "invisible" is "aoratos" (ἀόρατος). This is a compound word:

- a. "A" means "not."
- b. "Horao" (ὁράω) means "to see."

This word describes a spiritual being you cannot see. Paul drew a contrast between Jesus and the Father.

- a. Jesus is the image you can see.
- b. The Father is the one, the Spirit you cannot see.

It is more, however. When you see Jesus, you know what the Father is like. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "...He who has seen Me has seen the Father..." John 14:9

"The first-born of all creation"

Whenever critics of the Gospel encounter any passage that speaks of Jesus as "first-born," they immediately challenge His deity. There is a very good reason that Paul spoke of Jesus as the first-born." This word is a translation of the Greek word "prototokos" (πρωτότοκος). This word, also, is compounded:

- a. "Protos" (πρώτος) means "first."
- b. "Tikio" [τίκτω) means "to beget."

The significance of this is at least two-fold:

- a. **Jesus predates creation** – In that culture, the older person must receive due respect and honor from all who are not as old as he is. Jesus is to be held in higher respect than all creation, not just the people.
- b. **Jesus is the heir** – In that culture, the first-born of the family was almost always the heir. There are a few notable exceptions mentioned in Scripture – Joseph, Jacob and Ephraim. When the father of the family died, the "first-born," the heir took complete charge of the family just as his father had before him. The entire family, including his mother, were required to obey his commands. Also, upon the death of the father, the heir would control the entire inheritance on behalf of the family. He would receive the "double-portion." If there were three sons, the inheritance would be divided into four parts. He received two parts and the other two brothers each received one part.

In this statement, Paul described something of the greatness of Christ. He will have much more to say about this throughout the epistle.

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him Colossians 1:16"

"For by Him all things were created"

The word translated "for" is "hoti" (ὅτι) and is usually translated "that." In either case, the use of this word indicates that Paul is about to explain his previous statement.

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Paul's explanation is a simple statement followed by a more penetrating, detailed explanation. Paul's initial statement is simply that Christ is the one who brought all creation into being. The creator is worthy of more honor than that which he/she created.

The English text says, "BY Him" whereas the Greek text says, "IN Him." There is a significant difference.

- a. "BY Him" – The use of the word "by" suggests that Jesus, alone, is the creator.
- b. "IN Him" – The use of the word "in," the more common translation of "en" (ἐν) suggests instrumentality. In other words, Jesus is the one through whom the Father created all things. This is what the author of Hebrews meant when he wrote:

In these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. Hebrews 1:2

"Both in the heavens and on earth"

This is another instance where Paul is groping for superlatives because human language is incapable of expressing completely just how great Jesus really is. This statement is more, however, than piling up superlatives. In 2:18, Paul mentioned the worship of angels. There were false teachers in Colossea who taught a false, exaggerated view of the place and power of angels. In this statement, Paul carefully portrays Jesus as the one who brought the angels into being according to the will of the Father. Thus, Jesus is greater than the angels. That, of course, is exactly what he wanted these Colossian Christians to see.

"Visible and invisible"

The Greek text is a little more emphatic. It reads "THE visible and THE invisible." Again, the addition of words serves to add strong emphasis to a statement. There is a play on words in the Greek as there is in the English.

The word translated "visible" is "horatos" (ὄρατός) and means "to see." On the other hand, the word translated "invisible" is "aoratos" (ἀόρατος). As we saw in 1:15, the addition of the letter "a," which means "not" changes the meaning from "visible" to "invisible." Paul had more in mind than a play on words. There were other false teachers in Colossea who worshipped the invisible spirits and taught that they were all powerful. In this simple statement, Paul affirmed that Christ is the agent through whom God created all we can see as well as those powers which are invisible to us. Paul is carefully establishing the omnipotence of Jesus.

"Whether thrones or dominions"

The word translated "thrones" is "thronos" (θρόνος). It means "the seat of authority." There were rulers, like Caesar, who were considered gods.

Again, the word translated "dominions" is "kuriotes" (κυριότης). This word is often translated "Lord." It describes one who has "supreme control," "mastery." Indeed, it is the way a slave addressed his owner.

In these words, Paul dealt with what false teachers were saying to new Christian converts. That culture worshipped kings as gods. They also worshipped idols thought to have total power over their subjects. Paul spoke carefully to point out that Jesus was the one who created the Caesars of this world. Jesus was the one who brought into being the materials out of which the idols were fashioned. Jesus, therefore, was due their respect and had power over them.

"Or rulers or authorities"

The word translated "rulers" is "archon" (ἄρχων). This is a local authority as compared to the ruler over a whole nation. There were several words that would identify a "ruler." This choice is interesting since it comes from the root word that describes "something of worth." From this they started to use a word that means "to be first or greatest in worth." Thus, they came to use it to describe their local leader.

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"Exousia" (ἐξουσία) is the word translated "authorities." This word literally means "to be lawful." It came to be used to identify "those who defend or carry out the law." In scripture, it is used to identify both cultural and spiritual authority.

"All things have been created by Him"

The word translated "by" is "dia" (δίᾳ). It is true that this word is occasionally translated "by." It is also true that the word is almost always translated "through." This tells us that the translator of our text did a bit of appropriate interpretation along with his translating. The consequence of this is simple. If you use the word "by," you emphasize the one who did the action. If you use the word "through" you emphasize that the one who did the action was the agent through whom the action was carried out. This author would prefer the word through to the word "by." Both, however, are acceptable.

It is clear that Paul's emphasis is on the word "all." There is nothing anywhere, anytime that is left out of this claim for Christ.

The words "have been created" is a translation of the word 'ktizo' (κτίζω). The Greeks used this word to identify the one who founded a particular place or area. They only used this word to describe the actions of a human being. They never used it concerning their gods. This was a Christian adaptation of the word.

The form of this word was chosen not to express the time of the action, but to emphasize the action itself.

Jesus is the divine agent through whom every thing that existed, now exists or ever will exist finds its origin and source. Again, the fact that He predates them and brought them into being indicates that He is worthy of greater honor than they are.

"And for Him"

This is a simple, but very important addition to the text. To say, "all things were created BY (or through) Him" deals with the origin of this magnificent creation. However, to say, "all things were created FOR Him" deals with the purpose of that creation. In these words, Paul stated that the purpose of the Father's creation of everything through the Son was for the benefit of Christ and Him alone. Again, Paul was celebrating the greatness of Christ.

This is especially important in view of the fact that the religious leaders of Colosseae took such a strong stand against the Lord and in favor of their idols and the angels.

And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together Colossians 1:17

"And He is before all things"

Again, Paul is groping for words and ideas to celebrate the great awe and reverence in which Christ is to be held. The word "and" ties this statement to the previous verse on an equal basis. It is also part of the same idea.

Paul is being very emphatic. As we have seen on numerous occasions, Paul adds strong emphasis by adding words to the statement. He wrote it this way: "And He is..." The Greek words for this statement are "kai autos esti" (καὶ αὐτός ἐστι). The word "autos" means He." The word "esti" means "He is." One would translate these words "He He is." It is Paul's way of letting the reader know he is being very emphatic in this statement.

The reason Paul was so emphatic is that he is talking about the greatness of Christ. Jesus is eternal. Before everything, including time, Jesus was. It is a great stretch for our understanding to grasp the idea of anything or anyone before time or creation. Nevertheless, Jesus was. He was timeless. Though He was in the form of spirit, still He was before there was matter. Indeed, He was the one through whom the Father brought matter into being. It is easy to see why Paul was groping for words to express the greatness of Jesus.

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"And in Him all things hold together"

Again, the word "and" is used to tie the coming statement to those just previously voiced. They are a part of each other.

The word translated "hold together" is "sunistemi" (συνίστημι). This is a compound word made up as follows:

- a. "Sun" (σύν) means "With" or "together." It carries the idea of union or completeness.
- b. "Histemi" (ἵστημι) means "to stand" or "to abide."

Notice that Paul did not say, "He holds all things together." The Greek text reads, "All (things) in Him stand complete." The difference between the two translations is significant.

- a. **"In Him all things hold together"** – This properly indicates that Jesus Christ is the cohesive force that enables all creation to hold together rather than chaotically blasting apart.
- b. **"All things in Him stand complete"** – This translation contains the idea found in "a," but there is more. It is a way of saying that none of these things in all creation are or can be united outside of Christ. All creation cannot be complete unless they are bonded together in Jesus Christ.

Again, that is what the author of Hebrews alluded to when he said,

And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; Hebrews 1:3

The word translated "upholding" is "Feron" (φέρων). It literally means "to carry," "to lift up." We tend to think of this as the sustaining, completing power of Christ.

He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything Colossians 1:18

"He is the head of the body, the church"

Both Jesus and Paul repeatedly used the imagery of the human body to explain how and why the work of the church was carried out. Though this was written many centuries ago, Paul had an uncanny understanding of how the human body functions.

When Paul wrote, "He is the head of the body, the church," he used extreme care. He could have said, "Christ is the head of the church." The difference between these two statements is significant:

- a. **"Head of the church"** – This image suggests that Jesus was the head of an organization called the church.
- b. **"Head of the body, the church"** – He has likened the church to a human body. Jesus is the controlling part of an organism. He is part of every other part. He is involved in what every part of the body does. He controls what every part of the body does. He gives direction to every minute part of that body. He controls the way the body protects itself from any threat. The body serves the goals established by the head. The response of the body to the head is always obedience; totally controlled. The head is always acting out His plan; His desires through every part of the body. No part is exempt. The coordination of every feature of the body is in the head.

This is exactly what Paul meant when he made this statement.

Paul spoke of the "church." The word "church" is a translation of the word "ekklesia" (ἐκκλησία), which is a compound word.

- a. "Ek" (ἐκ) means "out of."
- b. "Klesis" (κλήσις) means "a calling"

New Testament preachers and writers borrowed this word from the Greek political scene. It described an assembly of citizens who came together to discuss any of the affairs of mutual concern. Our political conventions and town meetings might represent the same idea.

Followers of Christ borrowed this term and invested it with new meaning. Jesus used this word, in Matthew 16:18, to describe all those who had accepted His forgiveness and redeeming grace. The apostle

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Paul used this word to identify both the entire body of all believers, as in this verse, as well as the believers in a given community **called out** of a life of sin into a life of holiness, living the life of Jesus after Him.

"And He is the beginning"

The word "and" does not appear in the Greek text. Paul tied two phrases together – "He is the beginning" and "the first-born from the dead." Writing it this way, Paul has made them each a part of the meaning of the other.

The word "beginning" is "arche" (ἀρχή). This word is properly translated "beginning," but the primary sense of the word identifies the worth or importance of something or someone. It is not surprising that this word was sometimes used to identify a ruler; someone who was first in importance. After this, it started to be used to identify the "origin" or "beginning" of something, as it is used here.

In a subtle way, Paul has made reference to the Jewish inheritance system. In most cases, the oldest son in the family was the heir to the father's position and control in the family.

Notice that Paul said "He **IS** the beginning." Stating the matter in this way, Paul made two assertions:

- a. **He is the oldest** – He was already on the scene when the first man was created. In fact, He brought the first man into being. In that culture, that means He receives greater respect than any other.
- b. **He is in control** – Holding the "eldest son" position entitles Him to control the father's entire inheritance.

"The first-born from the dead"

Jesus is not only the first in time; He is also the first born from the dead. Among those who are and will be resurrected, He is first in importance. It is important to keep in mind that He was not the first person to be resurrected. Lazarus was resurrected by Jesus prior to His own resurrection. Jesus raised the woman's son while they were on their way to the burial. These men were resurrected by Jesus before Jesus' resurrection. Jesus, however, held the position of power and control over all those who were and will be resurrected. He is the heir among resurrected people.

There is a subtle inference in this verse. One might express it this way. The originator, or creator equals ownership: ownership equals control. That is what Paul is getting to in this carefully drawn picture he has drawn about Jesus.

"So that"

This word, "hina" (ἵνα) indicates that Paul will now clarify the purpose or result; the reason for describing Jesus as "head of the body," "the beginning" and "first-born from the dead."

"He Himself might come to have first place"

As we saw earlier, the use of two words that both have the same meaning was a way to add great emphasis to a statement. That is exactly what Paul did in the words "He Himself."

This is the third image Paul has used to portray Jesus as the "heir," the one who is in control of all things. As we have just seen, the three images are:

- a. "The beginning"
- b. "The first-born from the dead"
- c. "First place" or "preeminence"

"In everything"

Again, Paul groped for words and ideas that would adequately describe the greatness and importance of Christ. The use of these two words is an attempt to indicate that there is absolutely no area of life or concern over which Christ is not preeminent; over which He does not exert ultimate control.

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The more deeply one understands the preeminence of Jesus in everything, the greater will be the grasp of spiritual realities which are directly related to one's spiritual growth. It determines the level of effect Christ is allowed to have in our lives and ministries.

Paul has pointed to something very important. To be the beginning, the first, entitles one to be preeminent, literally to be first or greatest. One must discover the preeminence of Jesus before other spiritual life features take place in his/her life. Our understanding of who Jesus is determines the level of effect He is allowed to have upon our life, actions and ministry.

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him, Colossians 1:19

"For it was the Father's good pleasure"

The use of the word "for" is almost always an indication that an explanation is forthcoming. That is the case here as well.

The Greek text translates a bit differently than our English text. One might translate this phrase "in Him was pleased." There is a need to identify the location of this pleasure. Is it that the Father was pleased as the English text suggests? Or, was it that the fullness was pleased? Obviously, it was the Father who was pleased. This is the reason that our translator took the liberty to add the word "Father" to the text.

The word translated "pleasure" is "eudokeo" (εὐδοκέω) and is a compound word:

- a. "Eu" (εὐ) means "well."
- b. "Dokeo" (δοκέω) means "to seem good" or "it pleased."

Together, these two words strongly emphasize the idea of being greatly pleased. Paul, further, placed emphasis on this word by the use of the first aorist active form. This form places emphasis on the action and not on the timing.

"For all the fullness to dwell in Him"

The word "fullness" is a translation of the word "pleroma" (πληρόμα). It is the marketplace idea of being filled to overflowing. It is to "fill full."

Again, the word "katoikew" (κατοικέω) is a compound word:

- a. "Kata" (κατὰ) means "well."
- b. "Okeido" (ὀκείδω) means "to dwell" or "inhabit."

This is an intensive form and means "to pitch your tent," "to take up residence." It identifies a permanent residence.

As you consider the meaning of these words, you begin to gain a deeper grasp of Paul's insight into who Jesus is. Everything involved in God being "God" was filled to the full and took up permanent residence in Jesus Christ. Conversely, there was no quality of God that did not eternally take a permanent residence in Jesus Christ.

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

"And through Him"

Paul's use of the word "and" indicates that verse is a continuation of the message of verse 19. The use of the word "through" usually indicates the means by which something takes place; the source of a particular action. The things Paul is about to mention are the actions of God through Jesus Christ.

"To reconcile all things to Himself"

"Reconcile" is a translation of the word "apokatallasso" (ἀποκαταλλάσσω) which is a compound word.

- a. "Apo" means "from."
- b. "Katallasso" means "to change."

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Combined, these words literally mean "to change from." It describes a complete reconciliation. Frankly, the word "katallasso" would convey the meaning. The addition of the word "apo" adds the necessary emphasis to that meaning. No matter what the issue, reconciliation always requires major change to move from alienation to harmony. It points to the complete change from one situation to a totally different one. It is to identify a change from total alienation to complete unity and peace.

You may have observed how often Paul used the word "all" in this chapter – 14 in all. It is appropriate to ask the question, "Why does the Father need to reconcile all things to Himself?" It is because as a result of human rebellion and disobedience, all creation was affected and alienated from Him. There is a picture of God's character here. The sin of humankind brought about this alienation from God. Humankind, therefore, should be the one required to bring about reconciliation. Still, God was the one who provided the change that restored peace between Himself and His creation.

"Having made peace"

The Greek text is a bit more direct. It reads, "making peace." "Eiraenopoiasas" (εἰρηνοποιήσας) is an interesting compound word.

- a. "Poieo" (ποιέω) means "to make." it is sometimes used, as in this instance, to describe the creative work of God.
- b. "Eirene" (εἰρήνη) means "peace."

Creation was brought into being in harmony and tranquility. By Satan's deception and human rebellion, that tranquility was shocked into chaos and discord. Through the reconciliation of Christ, the Father created a peace and harmony where none existed.

"Through the blood of His cross"

This is the second time in this verse that Paul has used the word "through." In each case, it described the means by which actions are accomplished. In this instance, as in the previous one, Paul pointed to the instrumentality of Jesus in accomplishing this reconciliation between Him and His creation.

It was not through a high profile program, but through the blood of His cross. Paul spoke with extreme care when he introduced the idea of "the blood of His cross." Among the Jews, it was the blood of the animal sacrifice carried into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled upon the altar that secured their atonement from their sin.

Paul could have said, "through the blood of Christ." But, to say "the blood of His cross" adds a completely different element to the statement. First, it was the blood of Christ that was the agent of our reconciliation. The additional element of the cross adds more information. The sacrificial animal died to bring about the atonement for human sin. The cross was the world's greatest symbol of shame and guilt. To add this element drew a stark parallel. In the same way that the death of the sinless animal brought the reconciliation of sinful people in ancient times, the sinless Son of God took the sin of all humanity upon Himself and secured reconciliation for all who would receive it.

"Through Him, I say"

The repetition of the words "through Him" is a very deliberate attempt to add the greatest possible emphasis to his statement. It was not enough for Paul to say God did it. It was ultimately important for him to say and emphasize that Christ was the instrument through whom God initiated and accomplished this reconciliation. This was necessary because the false teachers were saying that the angels were the servants through whom God accomplished His unique works of grace. This opened the door for them to insist that God's people should worship these angels.

"Whether things on earth or things in heaven"

Again, Paul was groping for words and ways to fully describe the indescribable works of God in Christ. You will remember that earlier in this verse Paul spoke twice of "all things." That is exactly the same intent as when he spoke of "things on earth and things in heaven." Incidentally, what other things are there other than things on earth and in heaven. Paul would have had to work hard to prepare a strong-

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er emphasis than he has in this sentence. Jesus is the unique agent through whom God reconciled ALL THINGS to himself.

Paul used visual illustrations to describe who Jesus is. He spoke of Jesus as "the head of the body." This was an image that most everyone would understand. The head of a human body coordinates the rest of the body completely. The response of the body to the head is always total obedience. The head is acting out His plan; His desires through every part of the body, the church. There is no part that is exempt.

Colossians 1:21-23 – Paul Described The Transformation of Their Lives

And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, Colossians 1:21

"And although you were formerly alienated"

Verses 21 through 23 form a single sentence. We must keep this in mind as we interpret the sentence. When we reach verse 23, we will attempt to show the progression of Paul's thinking.

Again, you will observe that Paul begins with the word "and." As in past instances, this indicates that he is continuing the thought presented in the previous sentence, 1:18-20

When Paul said, "you were formerly alienated," the use of the word "formerly" suggested that he has set the stage for a dramatic contrast. He will contrast what they once were with what they have become.

In the past, they were "alienated." The word so translated is "apallotrioo" (ἀπαλλοτριόω). This compound word is used in juxtaposition with the word "reconcile."

a. "Apo" (ἀπό) means "from."

b. "Allatrios" (ἄλλοτριός) came to mean "stranger," "foreigner," or "alien."

The use of this word was significant in the cultures of that day. A "stranger" was a person who was not a citizen of the country. As a "foreigner," he could not own property. You will remember that when Abraham wanted to buy a piece of land to bury Sarah, the owner offered to give him the land. This was because it was illegal for a citizen to sell a piece of property to a foreigner. In the story, the owner received the price of the land, but he could not sell it to Abraham because he was not a citizen of the land. An "alien" had no rights, but a citizen of the land had many rights and privileges. In this light, Paul spoke of these Colossian believers as formerly being aliens in the kingdom of God. They had no privileges or benefits whatsoever.

"And hostile in mind"

Again, the word "and" ties this phrase to the former one and establishes their mutual importance. In the former phrase, Paul described their condition – they were aliens. In this phrase, he will describe their attitude. The Greek text reads, "and enemies in the mind." The word translated "enemies" is "echthros" (ἐχθρός). It literally means "to hate," "to be an adversary." It was not that they just did not like God. They actively worked against Him to defeat His cause. They actively thought out ways to oppose the plan of God and the actions of His people.

"Engaged in evil deeds"

The Greek text is more direct. One might translate it, "'by (or in) your evil works". The word translated "evil, is "poneros" (πονηρός). This is evil that brings about pain and sorrow. This is festering evil, that which grows into more elaborate forms of evil situations and conditions.

The word translated "deeds" is "ergon" (ἔργον). It is the root word for employment. it is that which we do on behalf of Christ or conversely, that which we do in the service of the enemy against Christ. In this instance, it is that which we do that satisfies our enemies' goals.

As you read this phrase, it becomes increasingly clear that our failures, our evil deeds, are really taking a definite stand against God, but also against His people.

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Yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— Colossians 1:22

"Yet He has now reconciled you"

The Greek text reads, "but now He reconciled..." The use of the words "but now" is quite informative.

- a. "But" – This indicates the coming of a strong contrast. This context will contrast their former evil lifestyle with their current relationship with God.
- b. "Now" – This word compliments the use of the word "but," indicating a change in the direction of the author's thought.

Paul said, "He reconciled." The word translated "reconciled" is "apokatalasso" (ἀποκατάλλασσω). We encountered this word in verse 20. It means "to change from one condition to another, preferably opposite and better." Paul wanted a strong word to describe their transformation from being an enemy of God to being a friend of God. The form of this word focuses attention upon this glorious event rather than the timing of it.

The word "you" does not appear in the Greek text. Its presence, however, does no violence to the meaning of the text.

"In His fleshly body"

Paul could have conveyed most of his message by simply saying, "He reconciled." The addition of the words "in His fleshly body," or as the Greek text reads, "in the body of His flesh," expresses the meaning by which Christ reconciled us. The payment of reconciliation in money can be magnanimous, but physically painless. Paul subtly included a hint of how physically costly it was for Jesus to reconcile us to the Father by indicating that it was a physical payment.

"Through death"

The dying was the means whereby the restoration was accomplished. It clearly indicates the totality of the price He paid on our behalf. The inclusion of this phrase also ties the idea of reconciliation to the Old Testament sacrifices that were made for sin. As the Old Testament animal died to cover the sins of the people, so Jesus died to cover our sins once for all.

"In order to present you before Him"

In this phrase, Paul resorted to another of the images that the people of Colosse would completely understand. It was a picture of the throne room. Paul likened God to the king and Jesus as the second most powerful person in the realm through whom the people could gain an audience with their king. No one would just walk into the king's presence. One must be properly presented to a king. This task was usually controlled and carried out under the direction of the person at the king's right hand. The word translated "present" is "paristemi" (παρίστημι). This is a compound word and is made up as follows:

- a. "Para" (παρά) means "before" or "beside."
- b. "Histemi" (ἵστημι) means "to stand" or "stand firm."
- c. It literally means "to place beside."

Through His death on the cross, Christ, who sits at the Father's right hand or power, presents us before the Father of glory. This word "present" was also used in the temple sacrifice. When a person wanted to bring a sacrifice to Jehovah, he would bring it to the temple, "present it" or place it beside the altar and the priest would then offer the sacrifice.

"Holy and blameless"

"Hagios" (ἅγιος) is the word translated "holy." This word originates in the idea of venerating. It grows out of the Old Testament idea of "sanctifying." The sacrificial animal was to receive preferential care and treatment. This animal was also "separated" unto God. Other lambs could be used for food or for sale, but this animal was available only to God.

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Paul talked about those believers being "holy." They had been purified from sin and were "sanctified," set apart for divine service. The service of God, through the Holy Spirit, was the first priority of their lives. Being "holy" was not their personal accomplishment. It was, rather, what Jesus accomplished buy the Spirit in their lives.

The word translated "blameless" is "amomos" (ἄμωμος.) The word "momos" means shame or moral disgrace. It is a picture of lewdness. Adding the letter "a" to the beginning of the Greek word means "not." Therefore, the word "amamos" means "not shamed," "not morally disgraced in lewdness."

Paul was saying that Jesus would present the redeemed before the Father as being "blameless," "guilty of no shame or moral disgrace." This had to be astounding to many of them, It was common knowledge that such a vile lifestyle was prevalent in that culture and at least some of them had been so involved. Nevertheless, Jesus would present them before the Father as being "blameless,"

"And beyond reproach"

The word so translated is "anekketos" (ἀνεγκλητος) Paul used the same procedure as in the previous verse. In this compound word, the basic word is "egkaleo" (ἐγκαλέω). It Is "to make NO accusation or Incriminating statement." When you add the negative form to the beginning of the word, the meaning is reversed. It now means "to NOT charge" "to NOT call to account." It is to make NO accusation or incriminating statement." It literally means to be carefully investigated and the result was that there was nothing evil to report. One must ask why Paul would use two words that mean essentially the same thing. In most cases, this was done to give strong emphasis to the topic under discussion. This tells us just how much Paul wanted to stress the fact that Jesus, in His dying, presented us before the Father and there was nothing that anyone could point the finger at and say we are guilty. What a statement!

Observe, this does not say that these people were always guiltless. That would be desperately false. It says that though they had been very guilty, still they stand before the Father without accusation, as though they had never sinned.

Think of it! With all our sins and failures of the past, in His death on the cross, Jesus, the chief prosecutor, presents us before the Father as "blameless," as though we had never sinned.

If indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister. Colossians 1:23

"If indeed"

The word translated "if indeed" is "eige" (εἴγε) and means "seeing that," "if indeed," "if so be." In the English translation, the word "if" indicates that this is a conditional statement. The word "indeed" is used to add strong emphasis to the conditional element introduced by the word "if." It is clear that a strong conditional statement is coming.

"You continue in the faith"

The word translated "continue" is a compound word "epimeno" (ἐπιμένω). It is constituted as follows:

- a. "Epi" (ἐπὶ) means "upon."
- b. "Meno" (μένω) means "to abide."

It is an emphatic way of saying that you take up residence. We use this form to describe a person who has fully come to grips with the conditions of life and is absolutely determined to face them without retreat. The form of this word is Present Indicative Active. It might be best expressed in English, "If you abide and never stop abiding."

The focus of their abiding is "in the faith." This is a way of saying that no amount of deception or oppression can cause us not to hold fast our faith in Christ.

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"Firmly established"

The word so translated is (themelios" (θεμελιόω) and was used to describe the foundation of a building, a substructure. The remainder of the building will be strong if the foundation is strong and secure. In the same way, our faith will not waver if it is firmly grounded in Christ.

"And steadfast"

The word translated "steadfast" is "hedraios" (ἑδραῖος) . The word literally means "seated". It was used to describe a person who could not be moved from their firm moral position. It is easy to note that the meaning of this word is close to that of the previous one. We will comment on this momentarily.

"And not moved away"

The word so translated is "metakineo" (μετακινέω). The compound word is made up as follows:

- a. "Meta" (μέτα) means "with" or "amid."
- b. "Kineo" (κινέω) means "to stir," or "remove."

It was a way of talking about placing something elsewhere or to move away from something.

"From the hope of the Gospel"

The "hope of the Gospel" is a beautiful truth. In this instance, the Gospel is not a series of books, but rather the good news of God's mercy available to all mankind in Jesus Christ. It involves the present joy of knowing that I cannot, by myself, gain forgiveness for my sins. Nevertheless, God, in His infinite mercy, has forgiven my sins and removed my guilt. This hope also is expressed in the fellowship we share in our daily walk with God. It also involves a fervent hope that destroys human fear of death and looks forward to eternity in God's presence. Observe that Paul speaks of "not being moved away from the hope of the Gospel." This statement is only meaningful if it is possible for such a thing to happen to a believer.

"That you have heard."

This is a way of telling these new believers that Paul was not speaking of a new idea. This is, rather, the good news that brought them to faith in Christ in the first place.

"Which was proclaimed"

The word translated "proclaimed" is "kerusso" (κηρύσσω). The word is more often translated "preached." It is a description of announcing good news like a town crier. It is important to understand exactly what Paul said here, because the next phrase will arouse many questions and some controversy. Paul is, here, describing the process that led these new believers to faith in Jesus Christ.

"In all creation under heaven"

The Greek text is a bit more deliberate. One might translate it, "in all THE creation under THE heavens." The use of the intensive "the" added great emphasis to the statement. This is another means Paul used to give a very strong emphasis to his message.

I mentioned earlier that some question and controversy exist over this phrase. Some would contend that the Gospel has not yet been preached "in all creation under heaven," much less that it had occurred in the middle of the first century. A couple of pieces of information must be considered when trying to understand Paul's intent here.

- a. We have a different view of 'all creation under heaven" than people had in the first century. They did not know about North and South America or Australia. They knew very little about Europe. Their world was much smaller than ours. This definitely had an impact on what Paul said here.
- b. In Romans, Paul spoke of another proclamation. He said,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident

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within them; for God made it evident to them.²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse Romans 1:18-20

This was Paul's way of saying that even creation is a witness to the good news of the Gospel. Paul's statement in this verse must be understood in that light.

"And of which I, Paul, was made a minister"

Again, you can observe how deliberately Paul spoke. He was unusually deliberate when identifying himself. The Colossian Christians would have understood quite well if he had said, "of which I was made a minister." The addition of his name adds about as strong an emphasis as it is possible to make. As happened so often, Paul had to defend his ministry. He is doing just that in this verse. The word "and" does not appear in the Greek text, but its meaning is there. The word "and" ties two ideas together as equals. His intent is clear – his ministry of the Gospel is as valid and effective as the witness of creation as well as that of other witnesses.

Colossians 1:24-29 – Paul's Picture of His Ministry

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Colossians 1:24

"Now I rejoice"

The use of the word "now" indicates a change in the direction of Paul's message. Paul has been describing the greatness of Christ. At this point, he turned his attention to a description of his own ministry.

Paul began, "I rejoice." The word "rejoice" is a translation of the word "chairō" (χαίρω). It means "rejoice" or "joy." It is the opposite of sorrow. Paul's use of this word, in the epistles, makes it clear that he has something quite specific in mind. Then, as now, people tended to equate joy with a response to pleasant and desirable circumstances. Here and elsewhere Paul used the word "rejoice" in a description of painful, adverse circumstances. For Paul, "rejoice" described an attitude, a quality of life that was positive and joyful, but independent of circumstances. Paul rejoiced when things went well. He rejoiced just as much when he was enduring physical pain on behalf of Christ.

The form of this word is present tense. It describes action that begins and does not end. This is a lifestyle, not a single action. A literal translation would be, "Now I rejoice and never stop rejoicing." It is not that he enjoys suffering. It is that "rejoicing is the attitude with which he faced life. Pleasant and unpleasant circumstances have nothing to do with it.

"In my sufferings for your sake."

Literally, the word "my" does not appear in our best Greek texts. One could translate our best Greek text, "now I rejoice in the sufferings upon you." The word does not appear in the old Textus Receptus text. It is a moot point, however, because the context clearly indicates that Paul was talking about his sufferings on their behalf.

The word translated "suffering" is "pathema" (πάθημα). It is a word that both Paul and Peter used frequently in their epistles. It means "to be afflicted," "to experience suffering at the hands of another." Paul rejoiced in his sufferings. This is one of the texts I referred to in the study of the previous phrase. Paul was not rejoicing that he could now experience pain. He rejoiced that he was able to suffer on their behalf. In Philemon, we learn that it was Paul who led Philemon to Christ. Indeed, it could well be that the reason Paul was now in prison was because of his evangelistic efforts leading these people to Christ.

"And in my flesh"

Again, Paul spoke very deliberately. One can suffer in several different ways – physical, mental, emotional, etc. Paul may have experienced more than one kind of suffering, but his focus, here, is on physi-

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cal, bodily pain. He also wanted to stress the fact that his pain was not due to a wrong he had done. It was, rather, on their behalf.

"I do my share in filling up"

You will observe that we have changed the word order of this verse. We are following the word order of the Greek text.

Previously Paul said, "I rejoice." Here he is saying, "I... fill up." There is a definite relationship between the rejoicing and the filling up. There is what is called a compound verb. There is a definite relationship between "I rejoice," and "I fill up." The word translated "filling up" is "antanapleroo" (ἀνταναπληρώω). This word is made up as follows:

- a. "Anti" (ἀντί) means "against" or "corresponding to."
- b. "Ana" (ἀνά) means "up."
- c. "Pleroo" (πληρῶω) means "to fill completely."

Paul has put three words together to give us a very highly emphasized word. He is saying that he and others are involved in bringing to completeness the sufferings of Christ. It is totally participating in the sufferings of Jesus. This is a theme you will find in several of Paul's epistles. He did not suggest that he could be a sacrifice for sin. No one, but Jesus, could spotlessly suffer so sacrificially. Paul drew a parallel. As Jesus suffered to redeem us from sin, so Paul, and others, were suffering to present that message of grace to people bound in a life of sin. In effect, Paul was following the command of Jesus, when He said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Matthew 16:24

"The things lacking of the afflictions of Christ"

Again the statement has elicited intense discussion and in some cases, heated debate. In many places, Paul and other New Testament writers affirm that the sufferings of Jesus were efficacious for the forgiveness of sins. Whatever else it may suggest, this statement may not mean that Christ's sufferings were in any way ineffective in securing the forgiveness of our sins.

There is an area of ineffectiveness in suffering. There is a limitation in my (and your) quest to be like Jesus, to be imitators of Him. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that as we become more like Him; increasingly a reflection of His life and character; there is the distinct probability that we will be increasingly open to share not only His character, but also His sufferings. Paul spoke not in the lack of Jesus' sufferings, but of his and ours.

"On behalf of His body the church"

There are volumes that can and have been written about the image of the church as the body of Christ. The use of this image is quite characteristic of Paul. Like Jesus, he used things they understood extremely well to illustrate things they did not understand at all. In the use of this image, the truths he stressed seem to be two:

- a. It stressed the governance of Christ over the church as the mind controls everything that happens in the body.
- b. This teaching tends to stress the interdependence of each part of the body upon every other part of the body. Paul's message was simply this; he suffered on behalf of the body of Christ, the church. Paul did not say he suffered on behalf of the Christian community in Colossea, but on behalf of the body of Christ. Thankfully, it also includes us. If Paul had not suffered, the Colossian epistle would not have been written. We would have been denied a wonderful guide for living a holy life.

whereof this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God," Colossians 1:25

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"I was made a minister"

This is a very forceful statement. The Greek words translated "I was made" "egenomen ego" (ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ). Observe the meaning of these words:

- a. "Ego" (ἐγὼ) means "I"
- b. "Egenomen" (ἐγενόμην) means "I become"

A literal translation of these words would be "I-I become." The apostle did not stutter. This was a way to add substantial emphasis to his statement. The form of this word is second aorist indicative. This was a way to identify strong emphasis on the action while saying nothing about the timing.

This is one more evidence of the apostle defending his apostleship against Jerusalem Jews who came to oppose and discredit his credentials. The word translated "minister" is "diakonos" (διάκονος). The word literally means 'a servant,' "one who attends the needs of others." This would come under their heading of "clergy." This is the source of our word "deacon" which in our time is thought of as a lay position of responsibility in the church. Paul claimed that God had placed this responsibility upon him. This is in contrast to the designation that any human being or organization might place upon him. He claimed a higher source of accreditation. He was not about to agree that he lacked authority when God had placed this call upon his life. Also, he had demonstrated, by his sacrificial life, that he was fully committed to doing the task to which God had called him.

"According to the stewardship from God"

The word translated "according to" is "kata" (κατὰ). It literally means "down," "against," "about." It is sometimes translated "in relation to." That is the idea in this instance. This is an interesting and graphic word. It is compounded in this way:

- a. "Oikos" (οἶκος) means "house."
- b. "Nomos" (νόμος) means "law."

It describes a person, usually a slave, who is manager of a household that belongs to his master. This was the situation for Joseph in the home of Potiphar. Paul used this graphic picture to describe his responsibility in the household of God. He saw himself as a bond-servant who was given a responsibility to exert authority over the household of God. The questioning of his authority by others was inconsequential as far as he was concerned. His only concern was that God had entrusted the household to him and he was going to carry it out no matter what others might think.

The emphasis in this verse is on the fact that God was the one who placed this stewardship upon Paul to exercise on His behalf.

"Bestowed on me for your benefit"

The word "bestowed" is a translation of the word "didomi" (δίδομι). The word has a variety of meanings depending on the context. It is more often used to express "giving," "to yield," "to bestow" as used in this verse.

The word "benefit," however, does not appear in the Greek text, but its meaning is clearly implied. Paul's intent is very clear. He wants his readers to see that his position as manager of the church on behalf of God was not intended to somehow be an emotional boost or power grasp for him. God bestowed the responsibility upon him to bring benefit to the church and not to himself.

"That I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God"

The word "preaching" does not appear in the Greek text. Paul's intent is more than just preaching. The phrase is the translation of a single word, "pleroo" (πληροῶ) and means "to cram full," "to complete," "to finish," or "to accomplish." Paul attempted to describe what God had in mind for him. It is a forceful way of saying I intend to do every single thing God has given me to do and leave no detail unaccomplished. God had given him a task to perform and he could not rest until he had accomplished every last detail of his Lord's desire.

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That is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has not been manifested to His saints." Colossians 1:26

"That is, the mystery which has been hidden"

This phrase is intended to clarify a previous remark. The word translated "mystery" is "mysterion" (μυστήριον). This word does not describe that which is hard to understand. It rather describes knowledge that can be known and easily grasped by the "initiated", by those who belong. It is that knowledge which lies outside that which one can discern without assistance. Only God can reveal this truth, by His Spirit. It does not so much represent information that is intended to allow certain ones to receive, but those who do not belong are impeded. It does represent knowledge that is intended for God's people to receive at the appropriate time with the help of the Spirit. God revealed this information when His followers were best able to receive it.

"From the past ages and generations"

In this statement, Paul accomplished two things:

- a. He alluded to the divine design to reveal the truth of redemption. The full message of the saving grace was not clearly spelled out in the Old Testament. The message was there, but not spelled out in detail as in the Gospels and the epistles. The Old Testament message was sufficient, however, for those people to have a personal relationship with God. God was not prohibiting the people of the Exodus from redemption. He merely revealed all that they were able to grasp, given their limited knowledge of His mercy and grace. In the books of Kings and the prophets, more information was revealed and clarified, as His people were able to grasp it. Finally, in Christ, God revealed the mystery of His grace at a level of clarity never before discernable because they had previously not been able to comprehend it.
- b. In this statement, Paul was able to share, with these struggling Christians, the great blessing that was theirs in hearing the full disclosure of the mystery of redemption.

"But has now been manifested"

The words "but now" give us an indication of what Paul is going to do.

- a. The word "but" indicates that a strong contrast is in progress.
- b. The word "now" adds emphasis to the contrast by showing a dramatic change in direction. He has been talking about a partial revelation in past generations and centuries. He then described a full revelation God has made of the mystery of redemption in Jesus Christ.

The word translated "manifested" is "phaneroo" (φανηρόω) and means "to make visible," "to uncover," "to lay bare." The form of the word is first aorist, which stresses the action rather than the timing.

With the use of this statement, Paul conveyed the idea that though this message was only partially revealed in past history, God has, in their own experience, fully disclosed the good news of redemption. As you read this sentence carefully, it is clear that Paul has made this as emphatic as he possibly could.

"To His saints"

Again the emphasis is obvious. This statement, in the Greek text, is presented in a very forceful way. It reads, "to the saints of Him."

We are most uncomfortable with the word "saints." It has to do with our understanding of the word. We tend to think of it as an individual who is flawlessly holy and never makes a mistake. That is not what Paul understood.

The word translated "saints" is "hagios" (ἅγιος) and means "holy ones." As we indicated earlier, "holy" does not mean "flawless," but rather purified from their sinful past and set apart for God. This, of course, is what it means to be a Christian. All of us who have been forgiven of our sins can meet this criteria.

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To whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Colossians 1:27

"To whom God willed to make known"

The words "to whom" refer to "His saints" as mentioned in verse 26. The word translated "willed" is "thelo" (θέλω). It means "to wish intensely," "to actively purpose to do something" "to be determined to accomplish something." God with great desire and intention, purposed to "make known."

The word translated "make known" is "gnorizo" (γνωρίζω) and means "to come to know." As we have seen previously, this word means a gradual discovery rather than a full disclosure of all the information.

God does not want His people, whatever their place in time, to be in the dark. Our humanity and fallenness make it impossible for us to fully grasp eternal truth at any one time. Nevertheless, God is intent on disclosing this mystery up to the fullest of our ability to grasp eternal truth. As we grow in grace, the revelation will become yet clearer.

"What is the riches of the glory"

The word translated "riches" is "ploutos" (πλοῦτος) and refers to "riches." These riches may be evilly gained and/or motivated. On the other hand, the word also was used to describe spiritual and moral riches. The choice of words in the context will clarify the intent. Paul's wording here gives us a hint of just how great this mystery of redemption was in his thinking.

"Glory" is a translation of the word 'doxa" (δόξα). It literally means "an opinion," "an estimate." It describes the honor that results from the enormously high opinion God's people have of His greatness and bounty. It is our response to the whole variety of ways and means by which God reveals Himself.

"Of the mystery"

Again, the use of the word "mystery" does not mean something God does not want people to find out. It does identify information that those who have been forgiven by God have the ability to comprehend. Here again, you can see the wonder of what Paul was attempting to describe for these young Christians.

"Among the Gentiles"

The word translated "Gentiles" is "ethnos" (ἔθνος) from which we get our word "ethnic." It originally meant "a multitude." The Hebrew word "goy" (גוֹי) is much clearer and closer to Paul's intention. "Goy" literally means "heathen," "anyone who is not a Jew." Paul was not thinking of national boundaries. He alluded to people who do not know Christ; those who do not know their sins are forgiven.

"Which is Christ in you"

The word translated "which" is "hos" (ὅς) which really means "who." The "mystery" is a person not an idea. Paul used the words "Christ in you" or "in Christ," at least eight times in Colossians. He also used the phrase in every epistle he wrote except Titus. "Christ in you" describes a relationship of harmony more than a physical location. It is a report of what Jesus talked about in John chapters 14-17 – "I in you and you in Me."

We have no righteousness in ourselves, but we stand before God in the righteousness of Christ. We have no ability, in ourselves, to purge away sin. "Christ in us," enables us to turn away the appeals of the enemy.

"The hope of glory"

"Hope" is the translation of the word "elpis" (ἐλπίς). This is a "confident expectation" of something future. This word was used to describe a variety of future events and situations. In this verse, the word was used to identify the results of "Christ in you" as our lives are transformed here and now in anticipation of sharing His eternal presence in heaven.

The word translated "glory" is "doxa" (δόξα). As we observed in verse 27, this word describes an "opinion." God's children are so impressed with His greatness, majesty, power and mercy that we stand

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in awed silence in His presence. Here, as in some other places, the word was used to describe the greatness of our eternal future, which is beyond description.

And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. Colossians 1:28

"And we proclaim Him"

The Greek text might be translated, "Whom we announce." The word translated "proclaim" or "announce," is "anangelo" (ἀναγγέλλω). This compound word was formed in this manner:

- a. "Ana" means "up."
- b. "Angello" means "to report."

From this combination, we get the idea of "reporting a heavenly message." It is "to declare" or "to proclaim on behalf of God."

The form of this word is present indicative. One would express this in English by saying, "we declare/proclaim and never stop declaring."

The message of this declaration is Jesus. We, as Paul, are not commissioned to preach a system of doctrine. We declare Christ to a spiritually needy world.

"Admonishing every man"

The word translated "admonishing" is "noutheteo" (νουθετέω). Some translations use the word "warning." It literally means "to put in mind." This is a compound word that is formed in this way:

- a. "nous" (νοῦς) means "mind."
- b. "Tithemi" (τίθημι) means "to put."

It describes a form of admonition that has an intense urgency that borders on strong warning. The words "every man" are not a reference to male individuals, but rather identifies the desire to give warning to every human being.

"And teaching every man"

The word "and" suggests that the teaching is as important as the admonishing and must be viewed in that light. The word translated "teaching" is "didaskalos" (διδάσκαλος). It means "to teach" or "to instruct." Notice how Paul repeats the use of the word "every man," as a way of emphasizing that this instruction is intended to reach every human being.

"With all wisdom"

- a. "With all wisdom" – This describes wisdom as a tool, the means God used to admonish and teach every man.
- b. "In all wisdom" – Put this way, Paul portrays wisdom as the criteria, the atmosphere in which admonishing and teaching take place.

The word translated "wisdom" is "sophos" (σοφός). This word was used to describe both spiritual and secular wisdom. In this case, Paul speaks of wisdom which is spiritual in nature. What is spiritual wisdom? It is that insight inspired by the Holy Spirit providing a godly understanding of life and our choices that form a reflection of the divine nature in every facet of our lives.

The word "that" indicates the author is about to suggest his purpose in this statement. That is, indeed, what Paul did. The word translated "present" is a translation of the word "paristemi" (παρίστημι). It is a compound word.

- a. "para" (παρὰ) means "by" or "with."
- b. "Histemi" (ἵστημι) means "to set."

This is the same word we encountered in verse 22. This concept comes from the Jewish Temple sacrifice. When a person wanted to "present" a sacrifice to God, he would bring the sacrifice to the Temple. He would place it beside the altar. It was no longer his possession, but God's. It was now in the care of the attending priest.

PAUL EXALTED JESUS; DEFENDED HIS MINISTRY

Paul cast himself in the place of the one presenting the gift to God. By presenting "every man" Paul did not claim them as his converts, but brought them as his gift to God. It was like a servant presenting his work to his master as his work for the day.

The form of this word is first aorist subjunctive. This describes action that may take place. Paul described what he wanted to see happen. This accounts for the translator's use of the word "may." It is more, however, than a future possibility. It is something that Paul confidently expects to see happen.

"Complete in Christ."

The word "complete" is a translation of the word "telos" (τέλος) which literally means "an end." It was used to describe a person who was "mature," "of full age." Paul has, of course, used this in a spiritual rather than a physical sense. It is what he refers to elsewhere as "mature."

In Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, Paul used the words "in Christ" to describe a relationship with Jesus Christ rather than a special location. This relationship highlights the means by which one becomes spiritually mature. It is the work of God in our lives rather than the result of extensive super-human effort.

In this phrase, Paul described the way he viewed his ministry. His task was to point people to Christ. Having done this, however, his task was only half done. He was called to disciple these converts in such a way that they become spiritually mature in Christ.

In this mature faith, Paul placed them before God as no longer his, but a sweet smelling sacrifice of joy to God.

And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. Colossians 1:29

"And for this purpose also I labor"

Again, both Nestles text and Textus Receptus text read a bit differently. One might translate them, "for which also I labor," or "for this also I labor." In either case, the words "which" or "this" refers to Paul's commission to present these new disciples as 'mature in Christ.'

The word translated "I work" is "kopos" (κόπος) and means "to labor to the point of exhaustion." Add to this graphic picture the form of the word – Present indicative. It describes a lifestyle not just a single action. One might translate it, "I work to the point of exhaustion and make it a way of life to keep on working to the point of exhaustion." Think of what that would really be like.

"Striving according to His power"

The word translated "striving" is "agonizomai" (ἀγωνίζομαι)." This is the source of our word "agony." It means "to struggle amid intense anxiety" "to labor to the point of intense pain." It is another of Paul's pictures taken from the Olympic games. In the foot races, when the end is near, the runner exposes himself to intense pain to exert more of his failing supply of energy than any other runner. To intensify this painfully graphic picture, Paul presented it in the present participial form. Both the present tense and the participial form describe action that is ongoing, an intense lifestyle of struggle.

The word translated "power" is "energeia" (ἐνέργεια) and describes "working" or "power." It is the word used to describe "the power of God." It describes the expending of divine work or energy in order to achieve chosen goals.

Interestingly, Paul spoke of his working according to God's power. It was clear to Paul and now his Colossian readers, that it was God's power at work in His servant's life and ministry. Paul was making no claim to personal efforts. What a beautiful picture of the humility of Paul in the midst of a very successful, if painful victory in the battle against evil!

"Which mightily works within me"

This phrase is intended to clarify the meaning of "His power." Paul described the power of God as he said, "the one working in me in power."

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The word translated "works" is the same word that we saw in the previous phrase, "energeian" (*ἐνεργεῖαν*). Only the form is different. It, again, describes the intense expenditure of energy to accomplish God's will. The form is present participle. Paul carefully chose these two forms. Both the present tense and the participial form describe intense, ongoing action. It is one of our strongest means to emphasize undaunted, ongoing effort. Again, you might translate this, "the one who exhaustingly works and never stops His energy depleting efforts."

In two successive phrases, Paul has pointed out, with extreme care, that his exhaustive efforts are the result of God working through him and not his own achievement.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 2
THE DEFENSE OF PAUL'S MINISTRY AND DOCTRINE
COLOSSIANS 2:1-23

1. There are four paragraphs in the second chapter of Colossians. In seven words or less, write a brief summary of each paragraph on the following table.

2:1-5	
2:6-15	
2:16-19	
2:20-23	

2. In Colossians 2:1-5, Paul attempted to defend his apostleship.
 - a. Why would he have to convince the Colossians of his great care for them and his burning desire to visit them?
 - b. Why was it so important for Paul to defend his apostleship, both here and in seven other epistles?
 - c. In 2:3, Paul mentioned "wisdom" and "knowledge". What is the difference between the two?

3. In Colossians 2:6-15, Paul warned the Colossian Christians about false teachers creeping into the church.
 - a. As Paul taught, in his epistles, he referred to the Son of God as "Jesus Christ," "Christ Jesus," "The Lord Jesus Christ," "Christ Jesus the Lord" and several other terms as well. What difference, if any, would the use of these identifying terms make?
 - b. In this paragraph, 2:6-15, Paul drew a contrast between Christ and the mystical religions and angel worship that the enemies were trying to get these people to follow. What points did Paul make in this contrast?
 - c. In this paragraph, Paul speaks of two kinds of circumcision.
 1. What are they?
 2. What is the difference between them?
 3. What message is Paul trying to convey in this manner?
 - d. In 2:12, Paul spoke of being "buried with Him in baptism." What was Paul trying to say?
 - e. In this verse Paul contrasted "being buried with Christ" and "being raised with Him." What message was Paul trying to convey by this contrast?
 - f. Read 2:14 several times.
 1. What is he saying in this verse?
 2. When speaking of the "certificate of debt", Paul said, "he has taken it out of the way" and then added, "having nailed it to the cross." What does the second quotation add to the first?
 - g. In 2:15, Paul said, " When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities."
 1. Who are these rulers and authorities?
 2. How did He disarm them and make a public display of them?

4. In 2:16-19, Paul gives some careful instructions against angel worship.
 - a. Paul warns them about people judging the Christians concerning food, drink and festivals and new moons and Sabbaths.
 1. What would the problem be with this?
 2. What solution did Paul offer?
 - b. In 2:17, Paul presents a contrast.
 1. What things are being contrasted?

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2. What did Paul say about these things?
- c. In 2:18, Paul mentioned a prize of which these Christians could be defrauded .
 1. What is that prize?
 2. How could they be defrauded of it?
- d. Read 2:18, 19 several times.
 1. What image does Paul use to describe the Christians?
 2. What does Paul say about this?
5. In 2:20-23, Paul gave the Colossians Christians some careful instructions to follow. In these four verses, Paul described the appeal of mystical religions and angel worship.
 1. What did he say about them?
 2. What warning does he give the Colossian Christians?
6. Reflect on chapter two.
 - a. What parallels, if any, do you see in relation to the church today?
 - b. What warnings do you see that are personally helpful?

LESSON 2: COLOSSIANS 2:1-23
DEFENSE OF PAUL'S MINISTRY AND DOCTRINE

2:1-5	Paul Defended His Desire to Visit Them
2:6-15	Warning Against False Teachers
2:16-19	Warning Against Angel Worship
2:20-23	Encouragement to Follow God, Not Men

Colossians 2:1-5 – Paul Defended His Desire to Visit Them

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, Colossians 2:1

"For I want you to know"

The word translated "want" is "thelo" (θέλω). It means "to will." It describes an intense desire. It is "to be inclined or disposed." The form of this word is present indicative active. One might translate it, "I will and will never stop willing." It is to make a lifestyle of willing a certain thing.

The word translated "know" is "oida" (οἶδα). There are two basic words that are translated "know" in the Greek:

1. **Ginosko** – (γινώσκω) It means to know some information, but not all. It is to daily increase in knowledge. It is a frame of mind in which discovery is an obsession.
2. **Oida** – (οἶδα) This is total, complete knowledge. It is to know all there is to know. It is the word usually used to describe God's knowledge. In this passage the word "oida" is used.
3. **The form of the word "oida."** – This form is perfect active infinitive. It is to leave absolutely no doubt. Both the word and the form carry the same message. It is to know all there is to know and have no doubts whatsoever.

It is to leave absolutely no doubt. Both the word and the form carry the same message. It is to know all there is to know and have absolutely no doubts whatsoever.

"How great a struggle I have"

The word translated "great" is "helikon" (ἡλίκον). The word literally means "how great." It is a very intensive word to say the least.

Again, the word translated "struggle" is "agona" (ἀγώνα). This word means "a contest" or "races." This is another of Paul's references to the Olympics. It describes an intense struggle. It identifies how the contestants worked so hard to win. Paul was saying, "the way the athletes agonize to win is the way I agonize over you."

The basis of this kind of statement is that the Judaisers were spreading false rumors about Paul. They said that he did not care for the Christians in Colossea. After all, they had never seen him. If he really cared, he would have come to see them. Still Paul writes to tell them how to live. He was trying to combat such lies.

"On your behalf"

Literally, Paul said, "Upon you." His enemies said that he did not care about these people. Paul was saying that he has almost impossible struggles on behalf of them. He was not fighting for his reputation. He was fighting for his authority as an apostle. If his apostleship and concern were denied, then he would have no ministry in their midst.

"And for those who are at Laodicea"

This letter is written primarily to the church in Colossea. All letters, however, were circulated among neighboring churches. You can see on the map that Laodicea is only about 10 miles away.

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They had very little in way of documents. They were always to share these letters. It could be help to other churches as well. Even rather personal letters were shared with other churches. They all wanted to grow in faith. They were all new to faith. They needed all the help they could get.

"And for all those who have not personally seen my face"

Paul had been to some of these places, but he had not been to all of them. There were people in these churches that he had never met. This fact was well known. The enemies were using this information against him to say he did not care about them. Their assumption was that if he did care, he would have come to see them before now. They ignored the fact that he was in prison when he wrote to them.

That their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, Colossians 2:2

"That their hearts may be encouraged"

The word translated "encouraged" is "parakaleo" (παρακαλέω). The word literally means "to stand beside." It is the word that identifies an attorney. There are places in Jerusalem today where as you walk down the street you will see the sign outside an attorney's office advertising "paraclete." It speaks of one who persuades, comforts and consoles. In the New Testament it is the word that is most often used to identify the Holy Spirit. By his presence with them, Paul wanted to be a source of comfort and encouragement. He did not mean that this was to be a pep talk. He saw it as encouraging because he could help them and teach them the truth of Scripture.

"Having been knit together in love"

The word translated "knit together" is "symbibazo" (συμβιβάζω). It does mean "knit together." It is "to unite," "to cause to come together." The use of the words "in love" indicates that love is the agent through whom this binding together takes place among the believers.

The form of this word is aorist passive participle. This is not something that the person does. The passive form indicates that it is something done to or for the subject. The participial form indicates that this is ongoing action without a particular emphasis on time.

DEFENSE OF PAUL'S MINISTRY AND DOCTRINE

"And attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding"

The use of the word "and" indicates that the author is going to continue his line of thought from the previous phrase. In so doing, Paul has drawn a direct connection between the binding of the Christians together in love and the attainment of the "full assurance of understanding." We need to understand the meaning of "wealth."

The word translated "wealth" is "ploutos" (πλοῦτος). It means "rich." It also describes benefits or blessings. The word "attaining" does not appear in the Greek text, though it is not a perversion of the text. The word translated "full assurance" is "plerofoia" (πληροφορία). It means "full conviction". It is a firm persuasion, a total assurance.

The word translated "understanding" is "sunesios" (συνέσιως). It is a compound word composed as follows:

- a. "Sun"(συν) means "with" or "together"
- b. "haemi" (ἕμι) means "to send"

It is the word that was used to describe the coming together of streams. In this respect it is used here to describe the coming together of ideas; a description of wisdom. This word eventually came to describe discernment. It is a "coming together of mental pieces until the whole idea becomes completely clear.

"Resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery"

1. The Greek text reads, "unto great knowledge of the mystery of the God – Christ."
2. The word translated "true knowledge" is "epignosis" (ἐπίγνωσις)
 - a. This is a compound word
 1. Epi" (ἐπι) means "upon" or "above"
 2. "Ginosko" (γινωσκω) means "to know in an incomplete sense."

It means "accurate, superior knowledge." It means "the whole story, but not absolute knowledge." Absolute knowledge would be the word "oida" which is the word we use to describe the knowledge of God.

The word translated "mystery" is "mysterion" (μυστήριον). Unlike its English counterpart, it does not mean mysterious. It rather means that which the initiated understand full well. This is the mystery of God. As indicated, this does not mean that God is mysterious. It does indicate that there is something about our faith that those outside of Christ can never understand. Yet, this mystery is quite clear to those in Christ, even though they may not have brilliant minds.

"That is Christ himself"

In the Greek text, this phrase consists of just one word – "Christ." The unregenerate will never be able to understand how Jesus lay aside His majesty to take on Himself human flesh and experience. The unregenerate will never be able to understand why Jesus would go to the cross and die for people who are unwilling to heed His warnings or to do as He commands. They will never understand the love that causes God to seek rebellious mankind. Those of us who are "in Christ" understand that the love of God goes far beyond human logic to reach out to draw even rebellious mankind unto Himself.

In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge Colossians 2:3

"In whom are hidden"

The Greek text read a bit differently. It reads, "In whom are stored up." The meaning is different. The word "hidden" gives the impression of preventing access or understanding. The words "stored up," however, give the impression of protecting, maintaining access. This appears to be the more accurate reading of this text. One must admit that the word "apokrufoi" (ἀπόκρυφοί) is sometimes translated "hidden away" or "concealed." Still, the use of it here favors the idea of being "stored up."

"All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

The word translated "treasures" is "thesouroi" (θησαυροί). This word means "a storehouse," a "precious deposit." Paul identified these treasures as "wisdom and knowledge." The word translated "wis-

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dom" is "sophias" (σοφίας). This word means "general knowledge." This is wisdom in general. Christians, however, introduced additional meaning into this word. They used it to describe divine wisdom rather than human philosophy. They used it to describe the way God would have us think, rather than what the fallen human mind can discern. It is to this that Paul refers in this instance.

The word translated "knowledge" is "gnoseos" (γνώσεως). In Greek there are two basic words that are translated "knowledge". The word "oida" (ὶδῶ) which is absolute knowledge. It is the word that is used to describe the knowledge of God – omniscience. It is to know everything there is to know. That is not the word used here.

The word is "ginosko" (γινώσκω). This is knowledge that the limited human being is able to grasp. It is knowledge that is constantly growing. It is becoming increasingly complete. It is the way the believer knows God. This is the word Paul used here. He is not talking about wisdom that only God can discern. He is rather talking about that which God discloses to the believer who seeks His face. It is not intentionally hidden in order to deprive us of that knowledge. It is rather stored up for disclosure to those who are prepared to receive it and can use it.

We need to discern the difference between wisdom and knowledge. The word translated "wisdom" is "sophia" (σοφία). It is the insight into the nature of things. It tends to be theoretical rather than practical. It is the word usually chosen to describe the wisdom of God.

The word translated "knowledge" is "ginosko" (γινώσκω). This is incomplete knowledge that is constantly growing and increasing. Very often, in the New Testament, ginosko describes a relationship between the person who knows and the person or object that is known. It is more than information about the circumstances of life. It contains agape without which it could be neither sophia nor ginosko. Ginoko, unlike sophia, tends to be very practical. In effect, this understanding describes a situation which is quite common to Christians, but unknown to non-believers.

In this verse, Paul has presented information designed to help the recipients appreciate how great Christ really is. He was not just a skilled tradesman from Nazareth. He was, indeed, the epitome of wisdom and knowledge so vast and great that the unregenerate could not possibly grasp it. Indeed, His store of wisdom and knowledge contained a quality, agape, which was totally foreign to the unforgiven.

I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument. Colossians 2:4

"I say this in order that no one may delude you"

Paul is giving them an explanation of his reason for going into this detail. He knew that there were those in the Colossian church who had less than admirable motives. It is not that they just disagreed with Christian theology. They were actively trying to confuse the issues so that they could cause consternation in the fellowship. This is an enemy attempt to destroy the faith of the church. Paul wanted to warn them because this was happening in a number of areas in this church. The word translated "delude" is "paralogizetai" (παρολογίζηται). This is a compound word.

- a. "Para" (παρὰ) means "from" or "away from."
- b. "Logizomai" (λογίζομαι) means "to prepare an accounting."

It was the way they described a false or misleading accounting of financial figures. It was used to describe what one would do to impose a false understanding of truth in the life of the church. This is exactly what more than one group was trying to do in the Colossian church. People posed as Christians in order to create havoc inside the church. It is an attack from within.

"With persuasive arguments."

The word translated "persuasive arguments" is "pithanologia" (πιθανολογία). This too is a compound word. Observe that when the issues become critical, Paul almost always turns to compound words to explain his concerns.

- a. "peitho" (πέιθω) means "persuasive" or "influence."
- b. "Logos" (λόγος) means "word."

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Sometimes error seems more realistic than truth. Deceivers will say anything to convince someone of their position. Paul was trying to warn them against this.

For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. Colossians 2:5

"For even though I am absent in body"

Paul had a problem that the enemies of the church tried to exploit. He was in prison and could not come to talk with them personally. The enemies of the Gospel used this to say that if he really cared about them he would come and teach them. His absence should convince them that Paul really did not care about them. It was their way to try to discredit Paul.

"Nevertheless I am with you in spirit"

Paul was trying to shift the spotlight back where it belonged. The issue was that these people were trying to convince the Colossians of heresy. Paul wanted them to know that he was doing everything possible to help them. He may not be physically present, but he was doing what he could to minister to them. The fact was, however, that he was teaching the truth and his enemies were not.

"Rejoicing to see your good discipline"

The Greek text is a bit more forceful than our translation. It reads, "I am rejoicing and keep on rejoicing to see your good order or discipline." He is really excited about what he sees in their lives. He rejoiced in their discipline. The word translated "discipline" is "taxin" (τάξιν). It is usually defined as "discipline." It means "well-regulated conduct." It is orderliness in the way they think and live. It is fashioning the way they practice their faith and live what they believe. It is maintaining what they believe even though it is costly.

"And the stability of your faith in Christ."

The word translated "stability" is "steroma" (στυρέωμα,) ζto be steadfast." It describes a firmness in what one believes. It describes a constancy in their faith despite serious opposition and humiliation. Paul was excited over the fact that no matter what false teachers said, they were going to hold fast their total faith in Christ.

There is a trace of Paul's need to defend his apostleship and the fact that he had not come to see them, this despite the fact that he was imprisoned. He is dealing quite directly with the type of opposition that these people faced. It was a situation of false teaching parading as real truth. This is often difficult to handle especially for new converts.

Colossians 2:6-15 – Warning Against False Teachers

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, Colossians 2:6

"As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord"

The presence of the word "therefore" suggests a conclusion. The conclusion is based on their excellent conduct in the face of great pressure. The presence of the word "as" indicates that a comparison is in progress. It is like Paul was saying, "as you took possession of the message of Christ Jesus the Lord." One might ask why Paul resorted to use the three words to identify the Lord. The word "Jesus" means "savior." The word "Christ" means "messiah" or "anointed one." "The word "Lord" means "master." This is what every slave called his owner. In most instances, when a New Testament author uses all three names, it is a means to add very strong emphasis to his message.

Paul does not too often identify the Son of God as "Christ Jesus the Lord" though he did it a few times. It was usually when it was important to identify Him in just that way. That is exactly what he is doing in this instance. The enemies would not flinch if they said Jesus was a good teacher. The Colossian Christians said much more than this. They firmly held that Jesus was not only savior but also Messiah.

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They also contended that He was to be master of their lives. This was a bit more than the Jewish opposition could handle at this point.

"So walk in Him"

The presence of the word "so" indicates the completion of the comparison. The word translated "walk" is "peripateite" (περιπατεῖτε). This is a compound word

- a. "Peri" (περὶ) means "around."
- b. "Pateo" (πατέω) means "to walk."

It was usually used to describe the treading of the wine press. It then became a way to describe the way a person lived their life every day.

The form of this word is also important. It is present active imperative. This is a command. It means "to walk and never stop walking." You know what you believe, live it and never stop doing so.

Having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude. Colossians 2:7

"Having been firmly rooted"

The word translated "firmly rooted" is "erridzomenoi" (ἐρριζομένοι). It means to throw down or to scatter. It is a way to describe planting seed by scattering it on top of the ground. The form of the word is perfect passive participle. The planting is something that was done for us on an ongoing basis.

"And now being built up in Him"

The word translated "being built up" is "epoikodomoumenoi" (ἐποικοδομούμενοι). It means "to be built up," "to be part of a spiritual structure." The form of the word is present passive participle. Again, this is something done for us in an ongoing basis. These are things that are done for us in Christ.

"Established in faith"

The word translated "established" is "bebaioumenoi" (βεβαιουμένοι). It means "to be confirmed," "to ratify as true," "to establish." The form of the word is present passive participle. This is an ongoing process, not a single action.

"In the manner you were taught"

We should not get the idea that faith is taught. Having received the gift of faith from God, we then can be taught. It is in this teaching that we are increasingly established in the faith we have received.

"Overflowing with gratitude"

The product of all of this is that we can be overflowing in thanksgiving. The text does not say, but it certainly does not mean that this is because circumstances are all wonderful. No matter what the circumstances, we can be overflowing in thanksgiving for what God has done for us.

In this verse, Paul carefully describes the spiritual history of his readers. In order to illustrate this situation, Paul used the image of a growing tree. The picture he painted was one of great strength. That is exactly what he was striving for. Having painted this picture of great strength, he was now in a position to urge them not to throw it away.

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. Colossians 2:8

"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy"

The Greek text is much more dramatic, though not seriously different in meaning. The Greek text reads, "You watch and keep on watching so that no one carries you off through philosophy or false deception..."

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The words "take you captive" are a translation of the word "sulagogen" (σουλαγωγῶν). It means "to carry one away." It is also used to describe one making a victim of another. The form of this word is a present active participle. Paul used two different forms together that carry the same idea – present ongoing action. This was for the purpose of strong emphasis. These forceful terms indicate just how serious Paul considered the threat that was attacking the church in Colosse. In that time, people tended to intermix philosophy and their religion. It sounded erudite if not reasonable. Paul is warning them that this mixture of faith and philosophy would lead to destruction of their faith. Paul was recommending that they not make this mistake that so many others had made. As the church today, we need to be aware of Paul's message and refuse to do what the world around is busy doing.

"And empty deception"

Paul would have conceded that some of those who supported the mixture of faith and philosophy were serious and sincere. That is more than he would say for some others. These people were simply looking for a way to use falsehood to deceive the Christians and lead them astray. It was a way to create havoc in the church.

"According to the tradition of men"

Paul indicates that they use the traditions that have been handed down from one generation to another to substantiate their claims. What they were not telling people was that it was error when first mentioned generations ago and had not improved with age. These were ideas that were thought up by finite minds like themselves. They included nothing that could change the person; forgive their sin.

"According to the elementary principles of the world"

This is in reference to those who were mystics and those who worshipped angels. The word translated "elementary principles" is "stoicheta" (στοιχεῖτα). The word means the rudiments or basic principles of their religious system. For those who worshipped angels, one of their principles was that angels were greater than man. That part is true, but it does not go the next step to indicate that Jesus is greater than the angels. The mystics would contend that there were powers in the universe that had an influence on the way we live and the things we can and can't do. They contended that we have to deal with these forces and worship was the way this was accomplished. This too fails to recognize that Jesus is the one who was the agent in creation and controls it day by day. Like so many erroneous ideas, it is just close enough to the truth to prove deceptive.

"Rather than according to Christ."

These pagan concepts were proposed by people who did not know Christ. If they had known Christ, they would have changed what they said. Paul wants the Colossian people to realize what was missing in the logical argument the pagan people and the Jewish pretenders were sharing with them. They needed to keep in mind just how great Christ is.

For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, Colossians 2:9

"For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells"

The use of the word "for" suggests a coming explanation. The word translated "dwells" is "pleraoma" (πλήρομα). The word means "full measure." It means that which fills a deficiency. It is "the fullness." Paul is dealing with the charge that Jesus was simply a man. The Christian response to that is that Jesus was a man, but much more than a man. This is the part the pagans did not comprehend. They probably did not understand what it meant. In Jesus, everything that was divine resided in Him. He possessed every quality unique to deity. He had no qualities that would detract from deity. Everything that would identify deity was found in Jesus.

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"In bodily form"

Paul, of course, would not deny Jesus' humanity. He would make a double claim instead. Jesus was in bodily form that one could see. He still possessed all the qualities of deity. These were claims that the other religious advocates could not claim for their deities.

And in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; Colossians 2:10

"And in Him you have been made complete"

Paul has described who Jesus is. Now he will describe what Jesus does. The word translated "you have been made complete" is "peplaeromenoi" (πεπληρομένοι). It means "to bring to completeness." It is "to perfect," but it does not mean flawless. It is "to fill to the top." This is the same word we encountered in the previous verse. It means to set forth fully. It is to do all that God intended to accomplish in our lives to make them increasingly more like Himself. The form of this word is important. It is a perfect passive participle. The passive voice describes something that happens to us, not something we do ourselves. The participle, on the other hand, is action that goes on and on. A more precise way of stating this phrase. "you are being made complete." It is a process that begins and never stops.

"And He is the head over all rule and authority"

The word translated "head" is not a reference to a skull. It rather identifies a person of authority. In this phrase, Paul used two words that identify different kinds of authority. The word translated "rule" is "archaia" (ἀρχαίς). It means "authority," "principality" or "ruler." It focuses on the personage of the authority. The word translated "authority" is "exousias" (ἐξουσίας). This word means "jurisdiction" or "place of power." It focuses on the place of authority rather than the person in whom that power is vested. Christ is the one in control over both the person and the place of power. Of course, no one else could make that claim for their deity.

And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; Colossians 2:11

"And in Him you were also circumcised"

The use of the word "and" indicates a continuation of the thought from the previous verse. Paul is describing the conditions of a special relationship we share – "being in Christ." The word "we" in this verse is a collective term. It stands for all those who are "in Christ" whether Jew or Gentile. When the Jews spoke of circumcision, they spoke of the covenant. When Paul spoke of circumcision, he spoke of the sign or symbol of a covenant in which both Jews and Gentiles could participate. Because he is speaking of both kinds of circumcision, he must define his terms. He does that in this verse. Paul described the circumcision for those who are "in Christ." The "in Christ" circumcision is not physical. It is the symbol of a covenant, not a covenant in itself. It is a decision of the person, not something done to the person.

"With a circumcision made without hands"

This is an action between the individual and God. It is not an action carried out by the priest. It is a covenant relationship not reserved for Jews to the exclusion of Gentiles. It is rather a covenant relationship to which all people – Jew and Gentile are partner.

"In the removal of the body of the flesh"

Paul frequently refers to "the body of the flesh". He is usually talking about the life that is "in Christ" but not living to the fullness that God intended. It is that part of our lives that keeps us from enjoying the fullness of God's blessing. It is that which hinders God from possessing all of our lives. It is a spiritual action, not a physical one.

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"By the circumcision of Christ"

For the believer, circumcision identifies a covenant relationship, not a physical action. In the process, the division between Jew and Greek is erased. They stand before God as one group, not divided into two. Paul did not just decide that Gentiles could be saved. In this verse Paul is giving his understanding about how this came about. As the Jew became partner in the covenant by circumcision, the Gentile also became partner to the covenant, but through baptism.

The issue of covenant, as understood by both Jew and Gentile, is difficult to resolve. Both groups thought they had biblical backing for what they believed. To an extent, that is true. The Old Testament carefully identifies Israel as the covenant people by circumcision. The New Testament, however, clearly teaches that the circumcision of the heart, in Jew and Gentile alike, is the new sign of covenant with God. In the New Testament picture, circumcision is something Christ accomplished on behalf of all those who are "in Him." It is not something they do or have done. That is Paul's intent in this verse.

Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. Colossians 2:12

"Having been buried with Him in baptism"

The word translated "buried" is "suntafentes" (συνταφέντες). This is a compound word.

a. "Sun" (σύν) means "with."

b. "Thapto" (θάπτω) means "to bury a body." The form of this word is also important. The form of this word is aorist passive participle. The aorist tense focuses on completed action. The participle focuses attention on action that is ongoing. The use of the two forms together strongly emphasizes both ingredients.

"In which you were also raised up with Him"

1. The word translated "you were raised up" is "sunaegertgaete" (συνηγέρθητε). This is a compound word.

a. "Sun" [συν) means "with."

b. "Egeiro" (ἐγείρω) means "to raise."

This is clearly talking about the resurrection. The form of the word is equally important. The form is aorist passive indicative. The aorist stresses something already accomplished. The passive voice means that it is something that happens to us, not something that we have done. We do not raise ourselves. It is God who raises us to resurrection life.

Paul's message is clear. Our resurrection is absolutely certain. We were raised with Christ. That means that when Christ was raised, our resurrection was an accomplished fact from that time on. When God raises our dead bodies from the grave, our resurrection will be no more real than it was on the day Jesus was brought forth from the tomb. We were raised with Him by the Father.

"Through faith in the working of God"

This is not the product of any outstanding works that we might do or be able to do. It is more than just faith in God. It is faith in what God is doing and will do as well. It is a certainty that God will raise us from the dead just as certainly as He has forgiven us our sin through Jesus Christ.

"Who raised Him from the dead"

Paul shows with great precision that the things that happen in the life of Jesus are a foretaste of what we can expect in our own lives. It was the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. In the same way, it will be the Father who will raise us from our graves to sit with Christ in the heavens.

The issue of covenant is inescapably tied to baptism. In the good news of salvation, the covenant is established, for Jew and Gentile, by our obedience in baptism.

And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, Colossians 2:13

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"And when you were dead in your transgressions"

The word translated "dead" is "nekros" (νεκρός). It is the word that identifies what happens when the human heart stops beating permanently. Paul used this as a picture of our spiritual condition. It is as though we are spiritually as dead as a body in the morgue. He cites the factor involved as our transgressions. A transgression is an offense against God. It is to stumble aside from the way in which God intended us to live. It is to fail to be and do what God called us to do and illustrated in the life and work of Jesus. The word "and" indicates that this idea will continue. Paul used another illustration of our spiritual deadness.

"And the uncircumcision of your flesh"

It may seem strange that Paul used this image, but it really is not. It is clear that Paul is not an advocate of circumcision. He does, however, use the symbolism of it to help these people understand what he is talking about. Throughout his epistles, Paul uses circumcision as a symbol of the covenant we have with God. Uncircumcision is here mentioned in parallel with transgressions. It is not failure to have the religious rite performed. It rather stands for the failure to be a part of the covenant God wishes to enter into with His people.

"He made you alive together with Him"

The word translated "He made alive" is " (συνεζωπόινσεν). In this phrase, Paul has made some very strong doctrinal statements. He is talking about our resurrection. It will be together with Christ. This is emphasized by two statements.

- a. The word translated "made alive" is a compound word. The word "sun" (σύν) means "with." The word "zopoieo" (ζοποιέω) means "to quicken" or "to make alive."
- b. He then added the words "with Him". This is a shared experience with the risen Christ.

"Having forgiven us all our transgressions"

The word translated "forgiven" is "karasimenos" (χαρασίμενος). The word means "a great deliverance." It is "to bestow kindness." The form of the word is an aorist participle. The aorist tense places emphasis upon the fact that this is action that has been totally accomplished. The participle, on the other hand, describes action that proceeds. This is the reason that the translator here said, "having forgiven" The word translated "transgressions" is "paraptōvmata" (παραπτώματα). It means "a false step," "a stumbling aside." It is "an offence," "a trespass."

Here, Paul continues his description of the content and meaning of this covenant. He does this by the use of a contrast. He contrasted our former spiritual deadness with our resurrection life made possible in Christ.

Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Colossians 2:14

"Having canceled out the certificate of debt"

The word translated "having canceled out" is "exaliepsas" (ἐξάλειψας). The word is interesting because it is so graphic. It means "to smear over," "to wipe off guilt." It is "to expunge." It is one of the strongest words to describe a clean slate. The form of the word also is interesting. It is an aorist participle.

It describes a progressive kind of action that was thoroughly completed in the past.

The word translated "certificate of debt" is "keirographon" (χειρόγραφον). The word means "hand-writing." The translators have pictured this as an experience in debtors' court. This is how they identified the list of charges offered by the prosecution. The list was either smeared so as to be illegible or wiped clean. The list of charges has been removed and made clean before the court.

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"Consisting of decrees against us"

The words translated "consisting of decrees" is "tois dogmasin" (τοῖς δόγμασιν). It literally means "the ordinances." These are regulations which govern one before the court. They identify what is acceptable behavior and decorum. This list of violations was against us and we could not deny them.

"And which was hostile to us"

The word translated "hostile" is "hopenantion" (ὀπεναντίον). This word means "an adversary," "one who stands against us." It is the picture of a prosecuting attorney. It is like a contrary wind. It is that which is hostile. Everything on the prosecutor's list of charges is against us.

Observe that in this sentence, Paul described the same thing in two different ways. First he said the decrees were against us. He then said that they were hostile to us. Both of these accusations are true. To state them in this manner is to place great emphasis on them.

"And He has taken it out of the way"

This statement is put in a very strong form. The word translated "taken it" is "aeken" (ἤκεν). This word means "to take away" or "to destroy." The form of this word is perfect active. The perfect tense stresses the fact that this has been completely transacted. It is a graphic way to say that the long list of our offenses has been removed; it no longer exists.

"Having nailed it to the cross"

Paul used an image that they would all understand very well. The punishment by crucifixion was basically a Roman idea, though it was also used by others. When a person was crucified, a list of their crimes was nailed to the cross. You will remember that there was an argument between the Jewish leaders and Pilate over the charges leveled against Jesus. Pilate wrote – "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews." The Jewish leaders wanted it to read – "He said he was king of the Jews." Pilate refused to change the charge. Paul seized on this picture and used it to emphasize that the charges against us were nailed to the cross of Jesus. Once a punishment was carried out, the person could never again be punished for those specific charges.

Again, Paul has continued his description of what is involved in this New Testament covenant. He did this by using a court scene to present his message. Though guilty of many crimes against His divine will, nevertheless, because of the cross, it is as though there were no charges against us in the first place.

When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. Colossians 2:15

"When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities"

Paul spoke boldly in this statement. The word translated "disarmed" is "apekdusamenos" (ἀπεκδυσάμενος). It is a very strong form of the word and means "to despoil," "to denounce." It is a way of saying that God through Christ, despoiled magistrates and authorities leaving them powerless.

"He made a public display of them"

The translation is generous. The word translated "display" is "edeigmatisen" (ἐδειγματίσεν). This is more than a public display. It means "to make a public spectacle of them." He humiliated those who usually humiliated others. It is a picture of making a laughing stock of those who are usually in control of every situation.

"Having triumphed over them through Him"

This translation differs somewhat from the Greek text. We need to look into both the words and the situations these words represent. The Greek text reads, "Having made a public spectacle of them in boldness of speech, in celebration of triumph over them in Him (Christ.)" The Greek word translated "celebration in triumph" is "thriambeusas" (θριαμβεύσας). This celebration of triumph is really a feast to Bacchus. We need to point out the background of this feast. Bacchus was the god of wine and the feast

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was in his honor. His worship extended through the entire Greek and Roman cultures centuries before Christ. This feast was really an orgy of drunkenness and indescribable immorality and was probably related to the eastern worship of Baal. When Antiochus Epiphanes attacked Jerusalem, he determined to wipe out the worship of Jehovah and replace it with the Greek religions. He forbade all Jewish rites – Sabbath worship, circumcision and all worship of Jehovah. Heathen worship was set up all over Judea. He set up an altar of burnt offering to Jupiter (some say this is the abomination of desolation) and sacrificed a pig there. The immoral practices of the heathen worship were set up inside the temple. When the Feast of Bacchus came around, the Jews were compelled to go in procession wearing the emblem of Bacchus – the ivy. Later, Nicanor, the general of Demetrius I, conducted a war against Judas Maccabbaeus. He threatened priests that unless they delivered Judas as prisoner, he would raze the temple to the ground and build a temple to Bacchus in its place. This gives you an idea of what was behind the words that Paul used. (isbe vol I) Paul was looking for a word that would adequately describe the triumph God made over the enemy who stands against us and our Lord. It is like he said, "In the way that the feast of Bacchus celebrates the tremendous victory over their foes with an outlandish feast, so God has celebrated an even greater victory over the forces that would destroy us," but God did this in a way marked by holiness, not immorality.

Colossians 2:16-19 – Warning Against Angel Worship

Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day— Colossians 2:16

"Therefore let no one act as your judge"

The word translated "therefore" is "oun" (οὖν). It means "therefore," but is a very strong connecting word. This word always suggests a forthcoming conclusion based on previously stated information. That is exactly what we have here. The conclusion comes in the form of warning and exhortations. One might translate the Greek text in these words, "Therefore do not allow anyone to exercise censorial power over you." "You are able to make your own judgment." You are under no constraint to accept the judgment of others in these matters."

"In regard to food or drink"

There follows five examples of what Paul has just said in principle. Paul is trying to warn them about almost inevitable confusion. There are some who will say you cannot eat certain food. There are others who will say that you must eat those same foods. What is a person to do in that case? There are some who say you must not drink certain drinks – in most cases this would be with alcohol content. On the other side there are those who would say you must drink some alcohol for the benefits it offers. Again, what is a person to do? Paul counsels them to let no one place them in bondage over this.

"Or in respect to a festival"

Another issue of contention is what is called a "festival". It appears that Paul may be talking about the observance of Passover. There are some who are certain that one must celebrate the Passover because it was instituted by God and Jesus even celebrated it. The other side of this is that there are those who would feel that we are not Jews, but Christians. We should abandon the things that gave Israel trouble and cling to the things that were specifically commanded in the New Testament. Either way, some Christians are going to be in bondage over these preferences.

The other side of this concern is that Paul may be talking about a pagan festival and whether or not these Christians should be taking part in it or not. Again the advice is the same. You do not need to have someone telling you what you should and should not do. You know what you should do and only you will be responsible for it.

"OR A NEW MOON OR A SABBATH DAY."

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The celebration of the new moon was a festival that all of the people in this area had celebrated for centuries. The problem was that this was associated with the worship of the goddess of fertility and had both idolatrous and immoral side issues involved. There were some who say that this is just a national holiday and it has nothing essentially to do with idolatry or adultery. They would say you can observe this national holiday without sinning. There were others who would say you must refrain from this and any other form of idolatry. There is a clear teaching of Scripture, but the thing Paul wanted to emphasize was that first, they must take responsibility for their own actions. They must not do anything simply because someone said they had to do it. There also was controversy over the celebration of Sabbath. The early church changed the day of worship from the seventh day of the week to the first. There was purpose to this change. Celebration of Sabbath on the seventh day of the week was a celebration of God's completion of creation as His greatest work. The early church, however, changed the day of worship from the seventh day to the first day of the week. This was to celebrate an even greater act of God – the resurrection of Christ. Both sides of this issue would demand that others follow their lead on this issue. Indeed, this issue is still being debated today as to whether we should go back to what God commanded in the first place. Paul was exhorting these Colossian Christians to make sure that they did not allow anyone to make these decisions for them.

The Colossian church lived in the midst of vile, pagan culture. It was important to pagan worship that everyone in the community take part in their outlandish rituals lest the gods be angered by this non-participation of the Christians. Because of this, great pressure was brought to bear to force the Christians to participate in these vile rituals. There were some Christians who felt it would be better to participate than to reap the wrath of the pagans. Paul is encouraging them to know their own faith and take the stand their own conscience dictates.

Things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Colossians 2:17

"Things which are a mere shadow of what is to come"

This is a clear reference to the previous part of this sentence in the previous verse – food, drink, Passover, new moon and Sabbath. These things are real. They are, however, only a shadow of the thing that is really important. Paul was not saying pay no attention to these things. He was saying that they should remember what is primary in importance. From the previous verse, one gets the impression that we are dealing with pagan rituals. On the other hand, in this verse, it could well be that he is talking about the Christian way of life or both.

"But the substance belongs to Christ."

In this verse, Paul used the word "but." It always indicates that a contrast is in process. Paul draws a contrast between what he called the "shadow" and what he called the "body." The essential that he called the "substance" is a reference to that which is obedient to the teachings of Christ and follows the example of His way of life. People tend to try to get us to focus on non-essentials. They may or may not intend to sidetrack our priorities, but it is a natural consequence of such considerations. Paul is trying to warn them against such things.

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, Colossians 2:18

"Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize"

This is a very forceful statement. It begins with a sweeping command. He said, "do not let anyone..." This is as sweeping a command as one can find. Paul's use of the word "defrauding" is very strong. The compound word is "katabraβeuεio" (καταβραβευεῖω). It means "to steal the will of another person."

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The form of the word is a present active imperative. It is a command to do something and never stop doing it. In this case, it is to never let them defraud you or take the control of your life from you and never stop doing this.

"By delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels"

Paul was not speaking in generalities. He explained what he meant. This was sometimes done by demanding extremes of humility. It also was encouraged by urging people to think of themselves as nothing because the flesh was evil. A second detrimental thing that some of these pagan people will do is attempt to force believers to worship angels by saying that you can't be obedient to God if you do not worship His angels. This grows out of their belief that angels were greater than Jesus.

Notice the way Paul wrote this verse. He did not just talk about participating in self abasement. He is talking about people who take total joy in doing these things. It is a picture of total, false commitment.

"Taking his stand on visions he has seen"

When insisting that people do as you say, you face the need to give a basis for your demand. Their "proof" was that they had a vision and this was the message. They claimed it was from God and must be obeyed. This was a lever for applying great pressure. If you take a stand against these people, they put you in the position of thinking that you are fighting against God. Paul was warning these Christians against giving in to such pressure. The flimsy excuse for authority that these people relied upon was a way to put pressure on the Christians to join them in their deceit.

"Inflated without cause by his fleshly mind"

Paul here made a strong statement. He evaluated their approach. He was saying that these people have a very proud impression of their own abilities. He went on to say that this was entirely unmerited. Their pressure grew out of their fleshly oriented minds and not from the mind of God. Though ill-founded, pride can be a terrible stumbling block for the believer.

And not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God. Colossians 2:19

"And not holding fast to the head"

Paul continued his discussion of the source of the error of these pagans. Another reason for their error is that they do not hold fast to the "head." Paul is referring to Christ. If you fail to hold on to Christ, you move in the direction of error. Paul was claiming that this is exactly what these people have done. The way Paul describes this is important. He used the present active participle. Both the present tense and the participle are forms that describe ongoing action. Repetition is a major form of emphasis in the Greek. Paul was talking about really holding on. Observe that Paul is again turning to an illustration of the human body in order to make his point that much clearer.

"From whom the entire body"

Having spoken of Christ as the head, Paul now describes the function of the head in the body. The head controls the entire body. Everything in the body is dependent upon the head and its control.

"Being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments"

The words translated "being supplied" and "held together" are written in the same form. This is important in our understanding of these words. The word translated "being supplied" is "epichoraegoumenon" (ἐπιχορηγούμενον). This is a compound word. It is formed as follows:

- a. The word "epi" (ἐπὶ) means "upon."
- b. The word "Choraegio" (χορηγέω) means "to lead a chorus,"

It means "to be furnished." It means "to be supplied." The head – Christ – has a crucial role in the function of the body of Christ in the same way that the human head controls the way the whole body is supplied with all that is necessary for their function. This includes even the way the joints and ligaments are

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supplied what is necessary for their function. The word translated "held together" is "sumbibazomenon" (συμβιβαζόμενον). It looks like this:

- a. The word "sun" (σύν) means "with."
- b. The word "bibadzo" (βιβάζω) means "to come" or "to knit together." It means "to be furnished" It means" to be supplied."

This word means "to hold together." The form of this word is the same as the previous verb present participle. Both the present and the participle form emphasize action that is going on. One might translate it "being increasingly holding together." In this phrase, Paul was saying that the head is vitally involved in the way the joints and ligaments function by being held together. All this to say that Christ, the head of the church, controls the way each of the parts of the body of Christ function and work together.

"Grows with a growth which is from God."

The Greek text reads a bit differently. One might translate it, "grows and keeps on growing of God". This is an exclamation. Paul is saying that the body not only holds together and functions, but it experiences constant growth. All of this growth comes from God. Through this entire paragraph, Paul has been describing the only way to avoid being controlled by those who hold to these pagan practices but attempt to force you to join them. One of the characteristics of evil is that it does not like to practice alone; it wants everyone else to practice evil along with it. Focusing on Christ the head of the body is the only source of strength against this.

Colossians 2:20-23 – Encouragement to Follow God, Not Men

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, Colossians 2:20

"If you have died with Christ"

This is a conditional "if...then" kind of statement. It is as though Paul cannot comprehend why these people are acting as they do. It does not make sense to Paul. The meaning of the word "died" combines to make a statement that is extremely forceful. The word translated "died" is "apethanete" (ἀπεθάνετε). The word means "died", but it means more. It means "to die to point of drying out." It is "to die to the point of rotting." It means "to die to the point of putrefaction." The form of the word is aorist active. The aorist tense amplifies the fact that the action has taken place. It is like Paul was saying, "if you are really, really dead to these things."

"To the elementary principles of the world"

Now Paul is going to describe what it is they should have died to. The Greek text describes this as "the rudimentary religious systems of the world." It is a way of saying the basic religious expression of the world is idolatry in its myriad of forms. It does not make sense to have entered into a relationship with Christ in which you share His death but still continue to be forced into these pagan practices that are contrary to your relationship with Christ.

"Why as if you were living in the world"

This part of his statement is most forceful. He was saying, "Why is it that you conduct yourself as though you were really living in the world when you are in Christ?" It is a polite way to say to them, you are not making sense by your actions.

"Do you submit yourselves to decrees, such as"

The Greek translation of this portion is a bit stronger. It simply says, "why are you being submitted and continue to be being submitted." Again, Paul is incredulous. He can't believe that this is not only happening, but they are allowing others to do this to them or for them. It seems Paul would be nearly screaming by this point because of the seeming stupidity of their actions.

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"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" Colossians 2:21

"Do not handle"

The word translated "handle" is "apsae" (ἄψη). The word means "to fasten" or "meddle." It is "to make contact" or "touch."

The form of the word is aorist middle subjunctive. The aorist tense identifies completed action and stresses it. The middle voice describes the actions of the subject with reference to itself. The subjunctive identifies possible action. It is not clear if the action takes place or not. One would express the subjunctive as "men ought always to pray."

"Do not taste"

The word translated "taste" is "geusae" (γεύση). The word means "to experience." It is "to take food." It is "to taste" or "eat."

The form of the word is also aorist middle subjunctive. The form of this word is exactly the same as the one above - "do not taste."

"Do not touch"

The word translated "touch" is "thigae" (θίγης). It was sometimes translated as "harm." It was more often translated "touch." It describes a "firm grip." The form of this word is aorist active subjunctive. Paul used both the aorist and subjunctive in all three commands. He used the active form, however, in the final one. The active form describes the actions of the subject. He is the one who should not touch. Observations on form

These statements are presented in the form of a command. That being the case, they should have been in the imperative. Paul rather used the subjunctive. If it was just subjunctive, one might translate it, "you should not touch." Paul however, also used the aorist tense. This form – the aorist – comes close to the command, but stops short of it by indicating an emphasis on accomplished action. Two of these forms are in the middle voice while the third is in the active voice. The word translated "touch" should be in the active voice. This is something the subject would do himself. If you look at the words translated "touch or taste" you may have a different situation. Paul used the middle voice in these statements. The middle voice describes the subjects actions in reference to himself.

Reviewing this verse, these three commands resemble a number of known Jewish laws that the Jews impose upon themselves. The Essenes, for instance, have a number of regulations that are quite like these rules. They allowed themselves to eat no food that was pleasant to the taste. They ate dry course bread and drank only water. If someone touched them and the person was not one of their group, they would have to wash as though they had fallen into the mud. Paul wanted them to know that there was no way that this could deal with the problem of failure to live obedient lives for Christ. No matter how stringent the law was that these Jews imposed upon themselves, still they would fail and their lives would not be changed.

Which all refer to things destined to perish with the using-- in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? Colossians 2:22

"Which all refer to things destined to perish with the using"

Paul is going to remind them of something that may have escaped their attention. The things referred to in verse 21 are all things that will perish as they are used. This is a transient situation. He is making a contrast between the things that perish and Christ who does not even change.

The word translated "perish" is "phthoran" (φθοράν). This word is used, here, to describe "perishing by being worn out" or "used up." This word also was used to describe corruption, decay and ruin. This has nothing to do with wearing out or being used up. It rather describes something that becomes useless by decomposition. Again, Paul drew a contrast between Christ, who does not change, and the things of

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pagan worship which are terminated by their use or decomposition. He clearly is showing the superiority of Christ to these forms of worship.

He drew a second contrast. He spoke of these things as commandments and teachings of men. He contrasts these with the commandments and teachings of God in Christ.

"In accordance with the commandments and teachings of men"

This phrase is a descriptive statement about what these commands are like. They are things that men have devised. They are things that are perishing. They are the product of the minds of men, and not the omniscient mind of God. Paul, in this paragraph, draws repeated contrasts between these religions and the commands of God. In making this statement, Paul was drawing a contrast with the commands that God gives to His people.

These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. Colossians 2:23

"These are matters which have, to be sure,"

The word translated "matters" is "logon" (λόγον). It literally means "word." The use of the word "matters" is not the best translation, but it does fit the context fairly well. Paul is still talking about these human forms of worship previously described.

"The appearance of wisdom in self made religion and self-abasement"

The word "appearance" is understood, but not in the text. The form of the word "have" is interesting. The form is present active participle. Paul used this form often in this part of the book. It is a way of adding emphasis by using two forms – present tense and participle - that both have the same emphasis – ongoing action. Paul admits that these things do have the appearance of wisdom. This is one of the cardinal characteristics of all forms of evil. They have a deceptive appearance. In a host of instances, that appearance is of great wisdom. It seems to make sense, even though closer scrutiny betrays the fallacy of it. Paul gives three illustrations of what he means.

Self made religion.

The word translated "self made religion" is "ethelothraeskia" (ἑθελοθησκία). It means "self-made religion." "It can also be translated "will-worship." Again, it is a contrast to the things that God commands of those who follow Him. These religions are the product of a human mind and appear to be seeking guidance from a form that this mind developed. This, of course, is naïve.

Self abasement

The word so translated is "tapeinophrosunae" (ταπεινοφροσύνη). It means "to be modest." It also means "a humility of mind and conduct." We should keep in mind that these are not the qualities Paul has in mind here. He is talking about that insistence that these Christians look upon their flesh as bad, as evil. The body is evil. Only the spirit is good. That is what these idolaters meant by their position.

Severe treatment of the body.

If one holds that the self is evil, then it naturally follows that one should treat their physical body with a measure of disdain and ill-treatment. That is precisely what they practiced. The problem is that they wanted to force the Christians to follow their lead. Paul, however, points out a problem with their practice. These things are useless in controlling the gratification of the flesh. They impose pain upon the flesh. It does not change the fleshly desires in any way except that these desires may be intensified by the pain. The ultimate test for any religious practice, at least for the non-believer, is does it work? Paul's conclusion is that these things do not work.

In Reflection

If you look carefully, you will see that these same religions are appealing to the church today. The appeal and pressure are the same. Paul's message, however, is also the same. These religions do not meet

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the human need. We need to be as alert as they were. Christ is greater than any angel or any mystic religion. When the false religions have demonstrated their weakness, Christ will still be energizing His church.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 3
HOLY LIVING IN EVERY RELATIONSHIP
COLOSSIANS 3:1-4:1

1. There are six paragraphs in the passage Colossians 3:1 – 4:1. Write a brief summary of eight words or less for each paragraph on the following table.

3:1-4	
3:5-11	
3:12-17	
3:18, 19	
3:20, 21	
3:22-4:1	

2. In Colossians 3:1-4, Paul encouraged the Colossian Christians to seek God's best for their lives.
- a. In 3:1, Paul said, "if you have been raised with Christ."
 1. What is the implication of that statement?
 2. How would you explain Paul's intent when he said, "keep on seeking the things above"?
 3. What is the significance of Paul's mention of Jesus sitting at God's right hand?
 - b. In Colossians 3:2, Paul said, "set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." What did he mean"?
 - c. In Colossians 3:3, Paul said, "you died and your life is hid with Christ in God"
 1. What was Paul talking about?
 2. How would you explain Paul's words when he said, "your life is hidden with Christ in God"?
 - d. In Colossians 3:4, Paul spoke of Christ being "revealed."
 1. To what is Paul referring?
 2. In this verse he also spoke of the Colossian Christians being "revealed". What was he talking about?
3. In Colossians 3:5-11, Paul described a new life that he encouraged these Colossian Christians to pursue.
- a. In Colossians 3:5, Paul instructed these Christians to consider their earthly bodies as "dead" to five different evils.
 1. How would you explain the words that Paul used in this quotation?
 2. Read 3:5 again. He closes the verse with the words "which amount to idolatry."
 - a. Is Paul saying that greed amounts to idolatry or that all five qualities amount to idolatry?
 - b. On what basis did you make your decision?
 - b. Observe that Colossians 3:6 begins with the word "for." This indicates that an explanation is forthcoming. What explanation did he give?
 - c. In Colossians 3:7, Paul spoke of these five evil qualities again. In this verse, he spoke of "living in them," the five evil qualities. He also spoke of "walking in them." What is the difference between the two statements?
 - d. In Colossians 3:8, Paul drew a contrast with 3:6, 7. There are five evil qualities in 3:6, 7. There are also five evil qualities in verse eight. Compare and contrast the two lists.
 1. In what way, if any, are the two lists different?
 2. In what way, if any, are the two lists alike?

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- e. In Colossians 3:9, Paul commands them not to lie to each other. He then said, "since you have laid aside the old self."
 - 1. What does this mean?
 - 2. He also mentions "with its evil practices." To what is he referring here?
- f. Colossians 3:10 is a continuation of the idea in 3:9. How would you put the meaning of this verse in your own words?
- g. Colossians 3:11 is also a continuation of the idea from 3:9, 10. In 3:11, Paul mentioned a very unusual cultural situation. Study the list of groups.
 - 1. He mentioned "Greeks and Jews." What is there about this quotation that would, in most cases, make one of these groups very angry?
 - 2. What is a Scythian?
 - 3. Each group of two appear to be direct opposites. Observe however, that Scythians and Barbarians are mentioned differently from the other three pairs. Are they opposites?
 - 4. In what way or ways are "Greek and Jews" and "circumcised and uncircumcised" different?
 - 5. What, exactly, did Paul mean when he said, "but Christ is all in all."
- 4. In Colossians 3:12-17, Paul talked at length about holy living.
 - a. In Colossians 3:12, Paul urged the Colossian Christians to live a holy life.
 - 1. Paul described these Christians as "holy and beloved" and "chosen of God." What does he mean by these references?
 - 2. Please define the holy qualities Paul mentioned in this verse:
 - a. Compassion d. Gentleness
 - b. Kindness e. Patience
 - c. Humility
 - 3. Why would Paul speak of "a heart of compassion." Why not just mention the quality?
 - b. In Colossians 3:13, Paul spoke of personal relationships within the body of Christ.
 - 1. What is the difference between "bear with one another" and "forgive each other"?
 - 2. In this verse, Paul sets a standard for Christian forgiveness.
 - a. What is the standard?
 - b. What does it mean?
 - c. In Colossians 3:14, Paul adds one more quality to the list of five – love. Study this verse carefully. What is Paul saying about unity?
 - d. Rather quietly, in 3:15, Paul adds two more quality to the list of six holy qualities.
 - 1. Define or at least describe these two qualities.
 - 2. In this verse, Paul used the analogy of "the body." What was Paul saying by the use of this analogy?
 - e. In Colossians 3:16, Paul gives four specific instructions to further their holy lifestyle.
 - 1. What are these instructions?
 - 2. What does Paul mean by "the word of Christ"?
 - 3. Is Paul saying "let the word of Christ richly dwell in you with all wisdom" or is he saying, "with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another"?
 - 4. Describe each of the following:
 - a. Psalms
 - b. Hymns
 - c. Spiritual songs.
 - 5. What is the relationship Paul seeks between their singing and teaching and admonishing one another.
 - f. In Colossians 3:17, Paul instructed them to do everything they do in word and deed "in the name of the Lord Jesus.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 3

1. What does this mean?
 2. Why is it important?
5. In Colossians 3:18, 19, Paul gives a number of instructions concerning holy family relations.
- a. In 3:18, Paul gave wives some instructions for holy family relationships.
 1. What does Paul mean when he tells the wives to be subject to their husbands?
 2. He qualifies this by adding "as is fitting in the Lord." What does he mean by "fitting"?
 - b. In 3:19, Paul instructed the husbands to love their wives.
 1. What does he mean?
 2. What did he mean when he said, "do not be embittered against them"?
 3. Just a thought! Why did Paul have to instruct the husbands to love their wives, but did not have to give the wives the same instruction?
6. In 3:20, 21, Paul gave some instructions for holy child care.
- a. In 3:20, Paul addressed the children.
 1. The text says the child should be obedient to the parents "in everything." Are there ever any situations where this would be an impossible command?
 2. Our New American Standard Version states "to the Lord" while the Greek text says "in the Lord." Is there any difference between the two statements or are they synonymous?
 - b. In 3:21, Paul addressed the fathers in a Christian family.
 1. Paul instructed the fathers not to "exasperate" their children. What does this mean?
 2. Why does Paul feel the need to give this instruction to the fathers?
 3. Why do you suppose he did not say "parents" instead of "fathers"?
 4. The reason for the instruction not to exasperate the children is so that they do not lose heart. What does this mean?
7. In Colossians 3:22-25, Paul gives instructions concerning holy servant relationships.
- a. In 3:22, Paul tells the Christian slaves, in rather broad terms, how to serve their masters, Christian or pagan.
 1. Because Paul's statement is so broad, what does a servant do whose master demands unscrupulous non-Christian conduct by his slave?
 2. People in our time wonder why Paul didn't instruct Christian owners simply to free their slaves. How would you answer this question?
 3. In 3:22, Paul qualified his instructions with three phrases:
 - a. Not with external service, as those who merely please men.
 - b. But with sincerity of heart.
 - c. Fearing the Lord.
 - d. How would each phrase affect the servant's work.
 - b. In 3:23, Paul continued his instructions to the Christian slaves. What does this add to the instructions of 3:22?
 - c. In 3:24, Paul defines the reward system for Christian slaves. What would the slave understand when he heard them read this verse?
 - d. Colossians 3:25 is a warning for Christian slaves.
 1. What warning does he give?
 2. What does Paul mean when he said, "without partiality"?
 - e. In giving instruction to Christian slave owners, in 4:1, Paul spells out a principle of conduct. Describe this principle.
 - f. It seems strange that 4:1 should be included as part of chapter three. What reason can you offer for this unusual linkage?

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- g. How would you apply 3:22 – 4:1 to our culture when there are neither slaves nor slave owners?
- 8. Reflect on Paul's teachings in chapter three. How can our study of this chapter prepare us to be good examples of Christ's life and character in the home and work place?

LESSON 3: COLOSSIANS 3:1-4:1
HOLY LIVING IN EVERY RELATIONSHIP

There are six paragraphs in Colossians 3:1 – 4:1. You will find a brief summary of each paragraph on the following table.

3:1-4	Encouragement to Seek God's Best
3:5-11	Encouraged to Put on the New Self
3:12-17	Exhortations for Holy Living
3:18-19	Holy family Relations
3:20-21	Holy Child Care
3:22-4:1	Holy Servant Relations

Colossians 3:1-4 – Encouragement to Seek God's Best

If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Colossians 3:1

"If then you have been raised with Christ"

The word translated "then" is "oun" (οὖν) and is usually translated "therefore." The word "then" does not carry the force that "therefore" does. It suggests at least a minor conclusion if not a major one. "Then" would give the impression that a next step in a logical presentation is coming. The word "if" suggests a conditional statement is in process. The word "then" does not appear, but is implied. This is a favorite pattern for Paul.

The word translated "you have been raised" is "sunegeiro" (συνεγείρω). The word means "to raise up with someone." It is more than being raised up. It describes a joint action. It is to participate in His resurrection.

The form of the word is aorist indicative passive. The passive voice suggests that this is something done to the subject. It is not something the subject does. God raises the believer with Christ – makes him a participant in Christ's resurrection.

"Keep seeking the things above"

The word translated "keep seeking" is "zaeteo" (ζητέω). It means "to seek for." It is, however, a very strong form. It comes from Hebrew word to "seek a life." It is to seek something as intensely as a person seeks an opportunity to kill an enemy.

The form of this word is present indicative active. This form describes a lifestyle rather than a single action. It is to do something and never stop doing that. Seek and never stop seeking.

The word translated "things above" is "ano" (ἄνω). The word literally means "up." In this form, it would be translated, "that which is above." It refers to heavenly things or places.

"Where Christ is"

Paul is attempting to identify the location of Christ's current ministry. This is, of course, in heaven.

"Seated at the right hand of God"

The word translated "seated" is "kathaemai" (κάθημαι). The word means "to sit" or "to take up residence." The idea of sitting, here, is a picture of a throne room. Only the most highly honored may sit in the presence of the king. It is a sign of outstanding privilege. That is exactly the impression Paul wishes to create in the minds of the readers.

The form of the word is present passive. Again, the passive voice indicates something done to or for the subject. He does not seat himself. He is given permission to be seated by the king. The present tense

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is something that happens and never stops happening. This honor is not a single event, but a way of life for our Lord.

The word translated "right hand" is "dexios" (δεξιός). The word simply means "right hand." In a royal court, position is everything. To be seated rather than standing is a primary honor. To be in the king's presence rather than way out front is equally an honor. To be seated on the king's right hand is the highest possible honor. The person in this exalted position is the most trusted individual in the realm. This person always has the ear of the king. The king has this person at this point because he trusts him for advice and responsibility. Whatever this person asks, he will certainly receive. That is exactly what Paul is saying about Jesus.

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. Colossians 3:2

"Set your mind on the things above"

Paul has just indicated that Christ is "above" in the presence of the Father. Now he instructs these people to focus their attention in that location. The word translated "set" is "phroneo" (φρονέω). The word means "to think," "to have a firm opinion," "fix your mind on a certain course of action." It tends to describe the degree of certainty a person holds.

The form of this word is present active imperative. This means that it is a command. It also is action that begins and never ceases. It is a lifestyle of focusing our attention on things where Jesus is now. It means that despite the condition of things around us, our focus must be on Christ. This is a way to be able to give thanks in the midst of devastating circumstances.

"Not on the things that are on earth"

The word translated "earth" is "gae" (γῆ). It literally means "soil." It is a way of referring to the earth. It also was used to describe the mundane, daily things of life. Paul was a master at the use of contrast. He would tell you what he does mean. He would then, for sake of clarity, tell you what he did not mean. That is exactly what he did in this instance. It is a way of describing our response to circumstances. Life around us may be crumbling. We cannot afford to focus our whole attention on this. In midst of conflict keep attention on the greatness of Christ, not the severity of our problems.

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

"For you have died"

The word translated "died" is "apothnaesko" (ἀποθνήσκω). It literally means "to start to decay." It was used to describe a person who had gone on to their reward. It describes one whose misery has terminated.

The form of this word is aorist indicative active. It describes simple past time. Emphasis, however, is not on time but on the action. It is a way of emphasizing that this is an accomplished fact. There is no doubt about this whatsoever. Some might even translate it you are dead, dead.

"And"

The use of the word "and" suggests that that which precedes and that which follows are equals tied together. The English has something of the same suggestion, but it is not as strong.

"Your life is hidden with Christ in God"

The word translated "hidden" is "krupto" (κρύπτω). The word means "to conceal." It also means "to lay-up in store." The latter seems to make more sense in this instance. The life is set apart for special blessing on that great day. There are blessings and meaning in the meantime. But ultimately, the decision for future blessing – heaven – has already been decreed. The form of the word is perfect passive indicative. God has done the hiding, or laying up. We did not do that. It was not even the result of our doing. The perfect tense describes accomplished action. The English translation "with Christ in God" is not as

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strong a statement as it is in Greek. Greek says, "with THE Christ in THE God." It is very specific. We need to describe what this means

The word translated "with" is "sun" (σὺν). It is almost always translated "with." It should always suggest association with or accompanying. Christ is in heaven. Our lives are set apart with Him there. We are still on the earth; still in earthly existence. Our future, however, is with Him. What does it mean to be "in God"? The word "in" almost always describes a location. There are several New Testament passages where "in" refers to influence, or to make an impression upon someone. We are not only in God's presence; we are under the influence of His way of life as well. It is to increasingly become what He is.

When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Colossians 3:4

"When Christ, who is our life, is revealed"

There is a problem with the Greek text in this phrase. Our text is probably the best rendering of the text. The basic phrase is "when Christ is revealed. The word translated "revealed" is phaneroo" (φανερῶω). It means "to bring to light." It is "to make known." It is "to set in a clear light." This is a picture of the second coming. It is interesting that this is in the subjunctive mood. This form deals with possibility, not certainty. Paul was not suggesting that the Second Coming was uncertain. The Second Coming is absolutely certain. The only uncertainty about it is the time. This, then, would require the use of the subjunctive mood in order to absolutely honest.

Who is our life

This looks like an after-thought. It is not. It is a way of interjecting just how important this idea really is. As often happens, Paul discovers something so marvelous that he does not know how to express it in words. That is his struggle in this phrase. It is a way of saying that He is everything to us.

"Then you also will be revealed"

The Greek text has the ability to be very expressive at this point. Paul used the same word for "revealed" here as he did in the previous verse talking about Jesus. Here, again, Paul used the passive voice to indicate that this is something that God will do for us and not something that we will do ourselves. The word translated "revealed" is "phaneroo" (φανερῶω), as in the previous part of this verse. Here again it means to bring to the light. It is to make known what was not completely known before. It might be said, bring front and center stage under the spotlight.

"With Him in glory"

Paul has just tied our revealing to that of Jesus. Now he will do it again, but another way. He does this by the addition of the words "with Him." This is a tool that Paul frequently used.

The word translated "glory" is "doxa" (δόξα). There are places in the New Testament where this word is a synonym for heaven. The word literally means "majesty." It means "magnificence." It describes one's glorification. It is used, here, to describe the wonder of this revelation of the saints.

Colossians 3:5-11 – Encouraged to Put on the New Self

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. Colossians 3:5

"Therefore"

The word "therefore," in the New Testament, indicates that there is a conclusion following. Add to this the fact that this appears at the beginning of a paragraph. As before it indicates a coming conclusion. Appearing in this position, however, indicates that the coming paragraph is a conclusion for the previous paragraph or paragraphs. In this instance, it is a conclusion for the previous paragraph.

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"Consider the members of your earthly body as dead"

This may not be the best translation of the Greek text. "The word translated "dead" is nekroo" (νεκρόω). The word means "to put to death." It is "to mortify." It is more than simply to consider someone dead. Put them to death. It is to render impotent. It is to make it impossible for the body to function properly. Deal with the human body in this fashion. This is a command.

The form of the word is an aorist imperative. The focus is on completed action, not on time. It is action that is completed. Most importantly, it is a command. We must either do it or be disobedient.

"To immorality, impurity, passion"

Immorality

The word translated "immorality" is "porneian" (πορνείαν). It refers to a specific sinful act as well as a category of illicit sins. It is a form of idolatry. It is giving a body that belongs to God as part of the evil act of adultery. It is a lot like idolatry. The church that tolerates adultery becomes guilty with the parties involved.

Impurity

The word translated "impurity" is "akatharsian" (ἀκαθάρσιαν). It is a compound word – a + kathairo.

- a. "α" means "not."
- b. "καθαίρω" means "to purge," "to cleanse."
- c. Together, these words mean "not cleansed," "polluted."

It means "not cleansed." It describes lewdness. It is a shocking immorality for which the person senses no shame. This is an extreme form of sexual perversion.

Passion

The word translated "passion" is "pathos" (παθός). This is "sexual passion." It is a strong impulse. It refers to scandalous vices of sexual perversion and applies to all forms of sexual impurity.

"Evil desire and greed"

Evil desire

The word translated "evil desire" is "epithumia" (ἐπιθυμία). It is a "violent desire." It is "lust perverted." It describes impurity in worst form.

Greed

The word translated "greed" is "kakos" (κακός). It is "a noble gratification perverted to an evil result." The emphasis is on the evil. It is an insatiable longing for that which was not intended to be yours.

"Which amounts to idolatry"

There is serious debate about whether idolatry identifies "greed" or the whole list of sexual perversion. The word translated "idolatry" is "eidololatria" (εἰδωλολατρία). This word definitely refers to the practices of idolatry. Truth is that in many forms of idolatry there were also adulterous perversions. Textually, it appears that Paul was saying that greed was a form of idolatry. In fact, all of these perversions fell into the same category.

For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, Colossians 3:6

The Greek reads a bit differently, though the meaning is not really changed. You might translate it, "Through which is coming the wrath of the God." The word translated "wrath" is orgae" (ὄργη). It is the source of our word "orgy." It means determined indignation beyond control. It is vengeance that has no limits. Paul was searching for a word to fully express the extreme devastation God's wrath will bring upon those who practice such evil and disobedience.

And in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. Colossians 3:7

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"And in them you also once walked"

Paul was not dealing with possibilities. He was describing the way these people had formerly lived. It was a disturbing reference, but it was something they all knew and understood. The word translated "walked" is "periepataesate" (περιεπατήσατε). The word means "to walk about." It is taken from the Hebrew way of describing a lifestyle; a way of life.

"When you were living in them"

Paul is still trying to describe their former way of life. The form of the word translated "living" is imperfect indicative active. It is a way of indicating this is an incomplete process. This is the way they lived as a way of life.

But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Colossians 3:8

"But now you also put them all aside"

This is a command. The word translated "put aside" is "apothesthe" (ἀποθέσθε). It means "to remove" It is like taking off a dirty shirt. The aorist form insists on a completed action.

"Anger"

The word translated "anger" is "orge" (ὀργήν). It means "serious indignation." It is anger that seeks vengeance. It is close to sheer violence.

"Wrath"

The word translated "wrath" is "thumos" (θυμός). It literally means "to rush." It is a strong passion. It grows out of anger. It puts action to angry feelings.

"Malice"

The word translated "malice" is "kakian" (κακίαν). It describes a bad disposition. It is to be so strong as to be depraved. At root, it is wicked. It is to act upon anger, intentionally planning to hurt or harm

"Slander"

The word translated "slander" is "blasphemian" (βλασφημίων). The central meaning is "to blaspheme God." It has an additional quality. It is to speak against a person in a way that will attack their character. The statement may be true or false, but it is intended to destroy the person's character.

"Abusive speech"

The word translated "abusive speech" is "aischrologian" (αἰσχρολογίων). It is "to use vile, obscene language." It is foul talk.

"From your mouth"

Each of these unfortunate qualities can be accomplished through speech. There are a host of things one can do to damage an enemy by the things one says. Paul is saying that they should put every one of these away for good.

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, Colossians 3:9

"Do not lie to one another"

The word translated "lie" is "pseudesthe" (Ψεύδεσθε). The word literally means "corrupters of the truth of God." Lie is a good translation of this word. It is to be intentionally false. Paul would never have said this had it not been a problem in the church at Colosse.

"Since you laid aside the old self"

The word translated "laid aside" is "apekdusamenoι" (ἀπεκδυσάμενοι). The word means "to put off like a dirty shirt." It means "to renounce something."

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The form is an aorist participle. The action is more important than the time. It also indicates that this is action that is not confined to a single event. The word translated "old self" is "palaion anthropon" (παλαιόν ἄνθρωπον). This might be translated "the old man." In both instances, this describes a former lifestyle that is no longer directing your way of life.

"With its evil practices"

This is a good translation of the Greek words. It is a way of saying that this former lifestyle was comprised of some ways of doing things that were totally evil.

And have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him Colossians 3:10

"And have put on the new self"

The use of the word "and" indicates that Paul is continuing the idea from the previous verse. The Greek text reads slightly differently from our text. One might translate it, "And putting on the new, the renewed one, unto the knowledge from the likeness of the one who created him." This new self is just the opposite of the one that they laid aside.

"Who is being renewed to a true knowledge"

The word translated "renewed" is "anakainoumenon" (ἀνακαινούμενον). This is a combined word.

a. "Ἄνὰ" means "through."

b. "Καινος" means "make new." It stands for making something new out of preexisting things. It is like restoring something to its original state. This, of course, is exactly what redemption accomplishes.

The word translated "true knowledge" is "epiginosko" (ἐπίγνωσκω). There are two main words for knowledge in Greek.

Oida (οἶδα)

This is total, absolute knowledge. This is the word the New Testament uses to talk about the knowledge of God.

Ginosko (γινώσκω)

This is partial, growing knowledge that grows day by day. This is the word that is almost always used concerning human knowledge. Epiginosko is true knowledge, or superior knowledge even though it is not absolute.

"According to the image"

The word translated "image" is "eikona" (εἰκόνα) from which we get our word icon. It describes an exact image. It is a total likeness or resemblance.

"Of the one who created him"

This is a reference to God. The image of this comes from God, the Creator. It is a way of saying that God is the one who gave the increasing knowledge and brought about this renewal.

A renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. Colossians 3:11

"A renewal in which there is no distinction"

The Greek text reads a bit differently, but the essential meaning is not that different. One might translate it, "where there is neither Gentile and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Sythian, slave, free..." Paul is describing a unique culture in which there are no distinctions. Most every culture manages to find someone to look down upon.

"Greek and Jew"

There was a large contingent of Jews in this church. They would be soundly offended to see the Greeks mentioned before the Jews. This was an ongoing hostility that had been going on for many gen-

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erations. The Jews felt spiritually superior to the pagan Greeks. Paul described a cultural situation where there were both Jews and Greeks, but neither group would accept the idea that they were different. This was difficult for either one of the groups to imagine.

"Circumcised and uncircumcised"

This was another way to identify Jews and Gentiles. It was, however, on a different plain. This focuses attention on whether they were participants in the covenant or not. In the minds of both the Jews and the Greeks, it did not matter how you referred to it, there was a tension here that would be hard for either one to accept, more so for the Jews than for the Greeks.

"Barbarian, Scythian"

This is a strange addition to his argument. Prior to these two groups, Paul mentioned Greeks and Jews; circumcision and uncircumcision. The important factor there is that there is an obvious difference between the different pairs of designations. Following this pair of designations, you have another pair of obviously different groups – slave and free. This raises the question, why would Paul identify two groups that were not as different as the others he mentioned in this passage? Paul talked about both barbarians and Scythians. The Scythians were barbarians and worse. They were a group of people who lived in an area that we would roughly identify as modern day Russia. They were a tribe of nomadic raiders who were notorious for their cruel and barbarous lifestyle. These people originated in what we know as western Siberia at least 4000 years ago. As time passed, they moved into what was later called northern Persia.

They were savages that lived north of the Black Sea and in the area of the Caucasus Mountains. They were a nomadic people. Their cultural awareness left a great deal to be desired. They were filthy people – never washed in water. They drank the blood of the first enemy they killed in battle. They were thought to make napkins out of the scalps of their victims and used the skulls for drinking bowls. Their sword was their god. They sacrificed every one hundredth man taken in battle to the sword deity. War was their chief business. They came across the Caucasus Mountains in 632 B.C and went as far as Egypt. Everything in their wake was devastated. A group of them settled in what came to be known as Beth-Shaan. This is the reason that at one point the city was called Scythopolis. The Parthians were a branch of this vicious group.

Barbarians, on the other hand, were not a national group. This was an identifier given to anyone who was crude or offensive in their concern for human life. Much later, the Greeks used this term to identify anyone who did not learn to use the Greek language. What started out to be any group of people who were insensitive to human life ended up being a general term to identify anyone who did not observe the cultural identifiers (speaking Greek) of a particular national group.

As one can easily see, these two groups – Scythians and barbarians – really are more dissimilar than one would at first consider. There were barbarians and their vicious near relatives the Scythians. Though both had severe barbaric tendencies, they had no use for each other.

"Slave and freeman,"

This was an interesting addition to the separated groups mentioned in this verse. In the general culture, there was serious separation between the slave and free people. There was an interesting situation in the church, however. The church did not attack the slavery issue. It is not clear, in Scripture, why this attack was not made. The closest the Scriptures come to dealing with that issue is in Colosse where Philemon had to make a decision about his slave Onesimus. In his letter to Philemon, Paul did not directly call for an abolition of slavery, but his intentions about Onesimus were painfully clear. They did, however, refuse to accept the culture's position on the differences between slaves and free. There were both slaves and free people in the church. In the culture, the slave and free were never on the same level. In the church they were not separated at all. Indeed, in some instances the leader of the church was a slave. In some instances the only person in the congregation who could read was a slave.

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In the culture, slaves must walk two or three steps behind their master. In the church, the slave and master would walk side by side. In the church the slave and master would sit side by side. They saw slave and master as having different tasks, but not different values. This caused serious friction between the different slave owners of the community. Because this was a production-oriented society, the owners depended upon the slaves to provide the products they could sell to make a living. Any situation that threatened this would be looked upon with strong animosity.

"But Christ is all and in all"

Paul described his intent in a carefully worded way. He had listed the groups that were alienated from each other. He then pointed out that these groups were totally focused upon Christ. This left no room to focus on their mutual alienation. The culture had a growing hostility between the listed groups.

In the church, people in the same categories existed side by side. The groups were so totally focused on Christ that they did not accept the alienation that existed between their two groups. Other people of the same background might be divided, but those in Christ were united in their devotion to Jesus Christ

Colossians 3:12-17 – Exhortations for Holy Living

And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; Colossians 3:12

Having just listed a long series of detestable qualities they should avoid, Paul now gives a series of exhortations to a life of beautiful character that befits their faith.

"And so, as those who have been chosen of God"

The Greek text is slightly different – "now be clothed like those chosen of God." Paul deals with spiritual growth much as a person would change clothes. It is not that it was that easy. It rather describes the level of the change in the person. The word translated "chosen" is "eklektoi" (ἐκλεκτοὶ). It means "someone who is valued as being very special." The emphasis is not on the chosen, but on the reason for being chosen. This person is dearly beloved by God

"Holy and beloved"

The word translated "holy" is "hagioi" (ἅγιοι). The word holy has a double emphasis. In many places in the New Testament, the word "holy" describes being set apart for divine service. On the other hand, it was also used to describe becoming increasingly pure and cleansed. Paul's intent, in this instance, seems to include both elements. He wants them to become increasingly like God in terms of purity of life. The instructions point in that direction. Paul also has been instructing them to live a life that is totally available to God.

The word translated "beloved" is "aegapaemenoi" (ἠγάπημενοι). It is a derivative of the word "agape." It means "to be loved and valued." It is "to be held in high esteem." It is someone in whom one takes delight. These two qualities become the way Paul identifies these people. A higher honor would be difficult to imagine.

"Put on a heart of compassion"

The words "put on a heart" do not appear in the Greek text. They certainly are implied, however. He is going to list several qualities that are very tender in their makeup. The word translated "heart" is really "splagchna" (σπλάγχνα). This situation needs explanation. The word literally means "intestines." The Jewish people thought of the abdominal area as the seat of warm, positive emotions. This is where they believed tender affections are located. One might say it this way; "have tender affections in these ways." There follows a list in the rest of this verse.

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"Kindness and humility"

The word translated "kindness" is "chraestotaeta" (χρηστότητα). It means "kindness." It is sometimes translated "gentleness," "goodness" or "virtue." It describes a gentle outlook toward other people even in situations where the person might not be as responsible as they might be. It is a picture of a person who has the ability to display virtuous conduct under the worst possible conditions.

The word translated "humility" is "tapeinophrosunaen" (ταπεινοφροσύνην). The word means "humility." It sometimes is translated "modesty." It describes a decorum of appropriateness. It pictures a person who would put the most embarrassing situations in a kindly, workable light and find a way to make lemonade out of the lemons of life. This is a person who senses his/her value without becoming arrogant in the face of opposition.

"Gentleness and patience"

The word translated "gentleness" is "prautaeta" (πραύτητα). The word means "gentleness." It is sometimes translated as "meekness," "forbearance" and "kindness." Each of these qualities has the common ingredient of tenderness. It is the deep concern for the protection of the feelings of others. It is the ability to sense the need for action, and at the same time determined to deal with others involved in a way that is protective and loving.

The word translated "patience" is "makrothumian" (μακροθυμίαν). It is a compound word:

- a. Makros (μάκρος) means "large" or "long".
- b. thumos (θύμος) means "tempered."

For this reason it is sometimes translated "long suffering." On other occasions it is sometimes translated "slow to avenge injuries." We must keep in mind that patience is always dealt with in circumstances of stress. It is the ability to contain one's own emotions when others are unable to do so. It is the ability to respond in a concerned way when others attack and are not caring. It is the ability to take the time to consider consequences before allowing any emotions to be expressed. What a beautiful tribute Paul paid to these people in the midst of his exhortations!

Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Colossians 3:13

"Bearing with one another"

The word translated "bear with" is "anexomenoi" (ἀνεχόμενοι). It means "to endure patiently." It is sometimes translated "bear with." It is a compound word:

- a. "Ana" (ἀνά) means "in the midst."
- b. "Exo" (ἐξο) means "to have."

The intent is that in the midst of turmoil one must be able to contain the self in order to endure the weakness found in another person. It is an intense desire to help a person who is causing you grief. This is the way Christians need to see each other.

"And forgiving each other"

The word translated "forgive" is "karidzomenoi" (καριζόμενοι). This word comes from the same root as the word "grace." It means "to bestow favor one does not deserve." It is "to gratify" or "to show kindness." The best expression of it is "to forgive." It is more, however, than saying "I forgive." It is a canceling of responsibility for the wrong because of a gracious attitude of the offended party toward the one offending.

"Whoever has a complaint against anyone"

The scriptures acknowledge our humanity. It does not treat our relationships as though they were perfect. There will be situations where one believer has a legitimate cause against another. Paul simply takes that possibility seriously and suggests how to deal with it.

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"Just as the Lord forgave you"

Paul makes a shocking comparison in this verse. He instructed that we should forgive as the Lord has forgiven us. Our forgiveness is undeserved. He offered forgiveness before we asked for it. There were no strings attached to His forgiveness. The forgiven wrongs are to be forgotten. The offended party initiates the reconciliation. Forgiveness restores to place before the infraction.

"So also should you"

We should do exactly the same thing. This becomes a measuring stick for our own forgiveness of others.

And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Colossians 3:14

"And beyond all these things"

Paul has already listed a large number of very important qualities that should be found in the Christian's life. He concludes the list by adding one more.

"Put on love"

Paul urges the Colossian Christians also to practice agape love. This is love that has no requirement. There is love if the person responds positively. There is love if the person responds negatively. There is even love if the person does not respond at all. It is the word for love always used to describe a God kind of love.

"Which is the perfect bond of unity"

The Greek text reads a bit differently. It says, "the love which is the bond of COMPLETENESS OR PERFECTNESS. What is the difference? Both unity and completeness are qualities of the Christian life. Love is a vital ingredient in both unity and completeness. Neither unity nor completeness is adequate without love. Unity is involved in what we call completeness. Completeness is the broader category of the two.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Colossians 3:15

"And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts"

The use of the word "and" suggests a continuation of the thought of the previous verse. Paul does two things with one statement:

- a. He exhorts them to let the peace of Christ rule in them.
- b. At the same time he informs them, and us, that this is God's intent for our lives.

By referring to this peace as "the peace of Christ," he has separated it from any other kind of peace. What is the "peace of Christ"? It is peace that characterizes the life of Christ. You see this peace when the Pharisees were attacking Jesus. You see this peace when Jesus stood silently before Pilate and refused to speak on His own behalf. You see that peace when Jesus' family came to take Him home so that He would not embarrass the family any more than He already had. It is a total calm in the midst of devastating circumstances. It is a peace that prevails when nothing seems peaceful.

"To which you were called in one body"

This is a reference to the church, the body of Christ. This is God's intent for the life of the believer. Anything less is beneath what God intends for His people.

"And be thankful."

Paul describes this thanksgiving as an ongoing process. It is not a single activity. It is rather a way of life.

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Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16

"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you"

Literally the text reads, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell and keep on dwelling in you." It is like saying, make a lifestyle out of letting the word of Christ dwell in you. This is another way of saying that we do what Christ did and taught.

"With all wisdom"

It is interesting that Paul included this phrase. The Gnostics claimed that the Christian faith was intellectually inept. Here Paul is saying that one of the major claims of wisdom is that the word of Christ would dwell in our hearts. Being obedient to the word of Christ is indeed great wisdom.

"Teaching and admonishing one another"

This describes a two-step process. It begins with teaching each other the truth. Having taught the truth, they are to urge each other to be obedient to what they have learned. This is a picture of individual believers being teachers to each other. It is not searching out a professional to teach, but with the help of God teaching each other.

"With psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"

In this instance, Paul identified three different kinds of spiritual music with which they are to teach each other.

PSALMS – down through the centuries, Psalms have been set to music, indeed, that was their original intent.

HYMNS – These are songs of praise to God that were not part of the book of Psalms.

SPIRITUAL SONGS – These were songs or odes that were written by the believers. These compositions were intended to bring praise to God and enlightenment to God's people.

They were to use every form available to them to sing praise to God and share enlightenment with each other.

"With thankfulness in your hearts to God."

The Greek text reads a bit differently. It says, "with GRACE, singing in your hearts to God." Their singing was to be both a source of inspiration and learning.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. Colossians 3:17

"And whatever you do in word or deed"

The Greek text reads a bit differently. It reads, "in all you do..." The intention is exactly the same. Paul is trying to cover all the bases.

"Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus"

Doing something in the name of the Lord does not mean saying the name. Doing something in the name of the Lord is doing it under His authority. When we pray in Jesus' name, we pray under His authority. Because we are His servants, we always serve under His authority. We do only the things He instructs us to do. Doing everything in the name of the Lord is to do everything according to His command. It is doing everything He commands. It is doing nothing that He does not command us to do.

"Giving thanks through Him"

We can only give thanks through Christ because He is our only access to the Father. We either give thanks through Christ or we do not give thanks. It is as important to give thanks as it is to do as He commands.

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"To God the Father"

Our thanks and praise must be directed to God the Father. It is through Him that we are able to do anything at all. There are many things that Jesus does, but He only does the things that please the Father and accomplishes His will for our lives.

Colossians 3:18-19 – Holy Family Relations

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Colossians 3:18

"Wives be subject to your husbands"

This paragraph moves in a totally different direction than the previous one. He was talking about teaching and giving praise. Suddenly Paul turned and began giving commands concerning the family relations in Christ. The word translated "subject" is *upotassesthe* (υποτάσσεσθε). It is a compound word:

a. "Υπο" (ὕπο) means "under."

b. "Tasso" (τάσσω) means "arrange."

This is a military term. Every soldier is arranged under the command of an officer. In the same way that a soldier is arranged under the command of an officer, the wife is to be under the direction of her husband. This does not mean that the husband is a household dictator. It does mean that there is a divine order of authority in which both the husband and the wife have a proper role to carry out. It is not a matter of master and servant, but rather mutual responsibilities.

"As is fitting in the Lord."

The word translated "fitting" is sometimes translated "proper." For those who are "in the Lord" this is the way God intended the relationship to be. We must keep in mind that God has a cooperative picture of marriage, rather than a competitive one. If there is competition, then the Lord's plan for the family places the wife in a subservient position. If it is a cooperative arrangement, then they are mutually serving.

Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them. Colossians 3:19

"Husbands love your wives"

The word translated "love" is "agape" (ἀγαπή). This is "unconditional love." This word is sometimes translated "delight in your wives." Again, it is sometimes translated "set store by your wives." The form of this word for love is important. It is in the subjunctive. This form is used when the outcome of action is uncertain. It would be more accurate to translate this phrase, "husbands should love their wives." It is as much a command for the husbands to love their wives as it is for the wives to be subject to their husbands.

"And do not be embittered against them"

The word translated "embittered" is "pikrainesthe" (πικραίνεσθε). It means "to cause one to be angry." It is "to cause one to be very harsh." Men and women are not emotionally or psychologically the same. Men do not always understand why a wife would do the things she does or responds the way she does. Paul is saying bitterness and anger are not going to solve that problem.

Colossians 3:20, 21 – Holy Child Care

Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Colossians 3:20

"Children be obedient to your parents in everything"

The word translated "obedient" is "hupakouete" (υπακούετε). The word literally means "submissive." It is not just obeying, but also placing oneself in the parent's care and control. The form of this word is present indicative active. It is like saying, be submissive and never stop being submissive to your parents. The scope of this submission is "in everything."

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"For this is well pleasing to the Lord"

The Greek text reads a bit differently. It reads, "The children, go on being submissive to the parents in everything for this is well pleasing "in the Lord." The issue has to do with the difference between "to the Lord" and "in the Lord." First, there is no problem with the Greek text in this instance. As far as we can know, now, the text is as true to the original as we will get. The phrase "to the Lord" suggests that a certain course of action will please the Lord. There is nothing wrong with that idea. That is simply not what the Greek text says. The phrase "in the Lord" suggests that children being always submissive to their parents fits the lifestyle of the people of God very well. Again, there is nothing wrong with this idea either. For this author, at least, it is simply preferable because it is in the text.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart. Colossians 3:21

"Fathers do not exasperate your children"

The word translated "exasperate" is "erethidzete" (ἐρεθίζετε). The word means "to irritate" or "to provoke." The emphasis is not so much on the irritation as it is on the exasperation. Our children may not be too happy if we will not let them do as they wish. A greater danger is that if we "hound" or "badger" them, they will become so exasperated that they will give up trying. A hot flash of anger is not nearly as dangerous as a person simply giving up and not showing any interest in a paternal correction because they see no hope of ever satisfying the parent. It is not accidental that this is an instruction given to fathers and not to mothers. It is a fair assumption that this is a weakness that plagues fathers much more than mothers.

"That they may not lose heart"

The word "that" suggests that an explanation is forthcoming. The word translated "lose heart" is "athumosin" (ἀθυμῶσιν). This is a compound word:

1. The letter "a" added to the front of a word means "not."
2. "Thumos" (θύμος) means "strong passion."

It is translated "wrath," "to be disheartened." It is "to be despondent." This instruction is well taken for fathers in the church.

Colossians 3:22-4:1 – Holy Servant Relations

Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Colossians 3:22

"Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth"

The Greek text reads a bit differently. You might translate it, "the servants, render submissive service and keep on rendering submissive service to your fleshly masters, not in eye service as men pleasers, but in simplicity of heart fearing the Lord." The word translated "obey" is "hupakouete" (ὑποκούετε). This is a compound word. It is broken down as follows:

- a. "Hupo" (ὑπο) means "under."
- b. "Akouo" (ἀκούω) "to hear."
- c. "Hearing" is more than sensitivity to sound. In the New Testament, the ability to hear almost always involves doing what one has heard.

Paul attempted to describe the kind of obedience he wanted these slaves to give their masters. He called for an obedience that was submissive and serving, not demanding and misleading. Notice that this applied to "all things." No part of the slave's life was exempt from this kindly obedience. The form of the word translated "obey" is present indicative active. It is to do something and never stop doing it. Paul described a lifestyle of service, not a single act.

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"Not with external service"

As previously indicated the Greek words for this phrase are "not in eye service" "Eye service" has two connotations.

- a. It is to serve beautifully when someone is watching, but otherwise do as little as possible.
- b. It is to be very rebellious, but in the presence of the master be a model servant treating him royally.

Everyone in that culture would know all about this, they had seen it many times.

"As those who merely please men"

Every servant knew exactly what their master wanted them to do. In most instances they were capable of providing the kind of service the master wanted to see. Men pleasers acted in such a way as to make the master think that was the kind of service they were providing. Obviously, that was simply an act.

"But with sincerity of heart"

The word translated "sincerity" is *aplotaeti* (ἀπλότητι). The word literally means "simplicity." It was used to identify benevolence or kindness that was without alloy. The New Testament authors used this word as an image of service that was exactly what it appeared to be. It was like gold that had no alloy in it. It was what it appeared to be. The use of the word "sincerity" is a good choice. Sincerity comes from the Latin "sine cera" – "without wax." Sculptors, when learning would sometimes make a mistake when a piece was almost finished. As a good piece, it was a total loss. They couldn't afford that loss so they tried to fix it up.

They would put wax on the mistake and it would become invisible to the naked eye. Because of this, many sculpted pieces, especially the better ones, were displayed outside. When the sun hit the spot where the wax was, the wax would soften and run revealing the mistake. Reputable sculptors would display their work only in the heat of the day and then outdoors. It was a way of demonstrating that there were no hidden errors on this piece. It was a way of saying, "what you see is what you get." It was sincere – it was what it appeared to be. Paul wanted these servants to serve in such sincerity that the beautiful service that they offered is exactly what it appeared to be. The "of heart" was a way of saying that the kindly actions reflected their kindly thinking toward their master.

"Fearing the Lord"

This phrase adds a Christian quality to the sincere service. There were pagan slaves who served their master very well. They perhaps wanted to avoid making the master angry. They might even have had a desire to do a good job. Paul gave the Christian slaves a different perspective. He instructed them to sincerely serve their masters because of their reverence for the Lord. Good service became an aspect of worship. It was an expression of their deep desire to be obedient to God

Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; Colossians 3:23

"Whatever you do"

The wording in the Greek text is a bit different, but the meaning is in total agreement. You might translate this verse, "In everything, you should do your work from the soul as to the Lord and not man." Paul has made this an all-inclusive statement. Nothing and no part of life is excluded from Paul's command.

"Do your work heartily"

The word translated "heartily" is *psuchaes* (ψυχῆς). It means "the soul," "the inner self," or "breath." It is a way of saying that your work should reflect what you are, not just what you do. You may be physically working for the master-owner. As a Christian, however, you scrub the floors for the Lord, these floors just happen to be in the house of your owner. It is to do everything you are required to do as a gift of worship to the Lord. Brother Lawrence, the Italian Brother who was unable to accomplish all that was needed to become a priest, was given a place to work in the kitchen of the monastery. He was heard on

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morning to say as he left the breakfast table, "I must hurry to worship" as he went into the kitchen to wash the pots and pans.

"As for the Lord"

It is not that these servants did not know the difference between working for the master or for the Lord. It was that they could serve their master while doing every deed on behalf of Christ and as a gift of worship to Him.

"Rather than for men"

People do not always appreciate what one does for them. They may or may not be kindly disposed when they see what one has done. This is never true with God. Paul was saying that if they do their work as for God, rather than doing it for their owner, they would never have to deal with whether the Lord would be kindly disposed with what they did. Certainly the master would get the benefit of their labor, but it should be done as an act of worship to the Lord.

Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. Colossians 3:24

"Knowing that"

The word translated "knowing" is quite interesting. It is "eidotaes" (εἰδοτάς). It means "to be absolutely certain." Know so completely that you have absolutely no doubt. It is a lot like the word "Oida" (οἶδα) which means "to know everything". The difference between the two words is that this word carries the connotation of gazing at something until you know every tiny detail.

"From the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance"

You may be working for your owner, but be certain you will receive your ultimate reward from the Lord. No matter who the employer may be, the Christian always works for the Lord. It is interesting that Paul speaks of "the reward of the inheritance." The "reward of the inheritance" is a way of saying one day we will receive our reward for our godly labors from the Lord Himself. We are twice paid. We receive our regular wages for our work. There will come a day when God will give us our reward for the way we have served Him in the employ of our earthly employer.

"It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."

In the Greek, this is a very dramatic statement. One might translate it "we serve and never stop serving the Lord Christ." The way Paul refers to Jesus and the Father are always significant. In most instances, Paul places the word "Christ" before the word "Lord." A notable exception to this is when he is speaking of the Son as being his master. This is one of those exceptions. Paul wants these servants to realize that they may belong, physically, to a master who purchased them at the slave auction. Nevertheless, they perform their work for a Master who paid a higher price for them – death on the cross. Therefore, Paul wants them to keep in mind that no matter how the earthly owner treats them or responds to their efforts, they are servants of the "Lord Christ."

For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. Colossians 3:25

"For he who does wrong"

Paul's use of the word "for" suggests that an explanation is forthcoming. The Greek text is a bit briefer and more forceful than our translation. The Greek text reads, "For the wrongdoer will certainly receive the wrong and it is not in respect of persons." Though rather brief, it is a very forceful statement to say the least.

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"Will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done"

As indicated above, Paul's statement is brief and direct. It is not just that there are consequences for wrong actions. It is that the things that you do to others will be done to you. This can be repeatedly illustrated from Scripture.

"And that without partiality"

The words "without partiality" do not appear in the text. The words "not respect of persons" have exactly the same intent. The fact that one is a believer does not exempt him from God allowing him to experience exactly what he had done to others. This statement causes one to take pause concerning his daily actions and attitudes.

*"Masters grant your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a master in heaven."
Colossians 4:1*

"Masters grant your slaves justice and fairness"

It may come as a surprise to some that the word for a slave owner and our word to identify our relationship to Jesus are exactly the same word – "kurios" (κύριος). This word identifies a person who is master. It points out one who has Power and authority. It means "one to whom service is due." That is, however, exactly what our relationship to Jesus is all about. He is the Master and we are His servants. The scriptures even speak of the fact that we have been "bought with a price." That price, however, was Christ's death on the cross. Paul, in this verse, is talking to slave owners who are Christians."

The word translated "grant" is "parexesthe" (παρέχθε) It means "to offer," "to provide." It is the source of the translation "grant." There is an atmosphere in this word that the word "grant" does not provide.

It is like a presentation. Paul is saying I want you to offer justice and fairness to your slaves as if it were a prize gift to a friend. It is not because they earned it. It is rather a gift that you provide just because you want to do so.

The word translated "justice" is "isotheta" (ἰσότητα). It comes from the basic idea of being equal, similar. This is a compound word:

1. "Isis" (ἴσις) means "similar," "equal."
2. "Timae" (τιμή) – means "value," "esteem," "dignity."

In our culture we say that every person is equal before the law.

The word translated "fairness" is "dikaion" (δίκαιον). "The word means "justice." It describes the root or principle of justice. One of the essentials of this quality is that it must be equitable. It is instituted to protect the innocent and prosecute the guilty. It is a basic ingredient in righteousness. The two words not only sound the same, they come from the same root. We must ascertain what the difference between the two words really is. "Justice" is a legal word and deals with law. "Fairness," however, deals with character and the quality of life. The difference between the two words is that justice deals with law and fairness deals with holy character, but both have an essential investment in equality of individuals.

"Knowing that you too have a master in heaven"

Inevitably, the slave owner thinks of himself as the final authority. He is responsible to himself and no one else. Because of this, many slave-owners acted in a way that was less than admirable. Accountability is the universal equalizer. Paul is reminding the owners that they answer to God in the same way that their slaves answer to them. In the same way that he is free to administer punishment to slaves that perform poorly, so God is in the same position as far as he is concerned and will also exercise judgment upon him if he is less than fair in the judgment that he administers.

Summary

Repeatedly throughout the Scriptures there is this insistent call for God's people to live a holy life. Two related factors permeate this entire chapter.

HOLY LIVING IN EVERY RELATIONSHIP

- a. Our intimate relationship with the holy God.
- b. The call for us to be holy, to be increasingly like Him.

Our culture is not markedly different from that which defined life in Colossea. Isn't the call of the Scriptures the same for us? It tries to help us see, more clearly, this intimate relationship with God, who is holy, and urges us to be more like Him. The question is, has that been happening?

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 4
HOLY LIFE FOR SLAVE OWNERS AND FELLOW WORKERS
COLOSSIANS 4:2-18

1. There are four paragraphs in Colossians 4:2 – 18. Write a brief summary of eight words or less for each paragraph on the following table.

4:2-6	
4:7-9	
4:10-17	
4:18	

2. In Colossians 4:2-6, Paul gives instructions for prayer.
- a. In 4:2, Paul gave instructions to the Colossian Christians concerning their prayer life. In this brief verse there are three instructions:
 1. What are these instructions?
 2. What does alertness have to do with prayer?
 - b. In 4:3,4, Paul requested that they pray for him. What was the nature of his request?
 - c. In 4:5, 6, Paul gave instructions about conduct in the presence of non-Christians.
 1. In the first part of 4:6, Paul gave two descriptions of our conduct in the presence of unbelievers. What are these descriptive phrases?
 2. What purpose does Paul identify with this care?
3. In Colossians 4:7-9, Paul explains that Tychicus will give them information about his situation.
- a. In 4:7, Paul described Tychicus in three ways.
 1. What did he say?
 2. What did this mean?
 - b. In 4:8, Paul explained, at least in part, why he sent Tychicus to them. What two reasons did Paul give?
 - c. In 4:9, Paul mentions that Onesimus was also coming.
 1. How would this information affect the Colossian Christians?
 2. Paul also mentions that Philemon was coming. What does he say about Philemon?
 3. What significance can we attach to the fact that Paul sent both Tycgicus and Onesimus to bring this letter?
4. In Colossians 4:10 – 17, Paul sends greetings from fellow workers.
- a. Paul spoke of Aristarchus in 4:10 as a "fellow prisoner." Does this mean that he was a prisoner in the same way that Paul was?
 - b. In 4:11, Paul gave some information about Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus Justus. What did he say?
 - c. In 4:12, Epaphras, though he was from Colosse, did not make the trip. The text does not explain this. Have you any idea why he did not go also?
 - d. In 4:13, Paul gives an impression of Epaphras. What did he say?
 - e. In view of Paul's statement in 4:11, what can we say about Luke and Demas in verse 14?
 - f. In 4:15, Paul sent greetings to Nympha. What can we discover about her from the text?
 - g. In 4:16, Paul gave instructions to circulate this letter to the other churches in the area. In view of the situation in Colosse, why would he give such instructions?
 - h. In 4:17, Paul sends a forceful message to Archippus.
 1. Who is Archippus?

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2. Why would Paul send this message?

5. In 4:18, Paul sent his personal greeting. Read this verse very carefully. What does it tell you?

LESSON 4: COLOSSIANS 4:2-18

HOLY LIFE FOR SLAVE OWNERS AND FELLOW WORKERS

There are four paragraphs in the fourth chapter of Colossians. You will find a summary for each paragraph on the following table.

4:2-6	Praying Fellow Workers
4:7-9	Tythicus Brings Information About Paul
4:10-17	Greetings From Other Believers
4:18	Paul's Personal Greeting

Colossians 4:2-6 – Praying Fellow Workers

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; Colossians 4:2

"Devote yourselves to prayer"

The Greek text reads, "you should pray and never stop praying." Paul was not talking about people who pray all day every day in their monastery. He is talking about prayer as a vital part of every thing in life. He spoke of prayer as a lifestyle rather than a continuous action.

"Keeping alert in it"

The word translated "alert" is "graegorouvtes" (γρηγοροῦντες). This word means "to stay awake, as on a military watch." It is to be very vigilant. The form of this word is important. It is a present participle. The present tense suggests ongoing action. A participle describes action that keeps happening. It is a way to emphasize, strongly, the ongoing nature of this action. It is like saying keep on keeping alert in prayer. The instruction to keep on being alert suggests that there is some form of danger that can surprise the person at a moment of weakness. Paul knew that one of the easiest areas of life in which to be surprised by the enemy is during our prayer time.

"With an attitude of thanksgiving"

Often the attitude of prayer is expectation of receiving. Paul is saying that the attitude of their prayer should focus on giving thanks to God. There are many who do not know how to give thanks. Very often this is because they do not recognize that God has been answering their prayers. That is, if they pray at all.

Praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; Colossians 4:3

"Praying at the same time for us as well"

The Greek text reads, "Be praying together about us. The meaning is much the same. The form of the word "praying" is important. It is a present participle. The present tense talks about ongoing action. The participle describes action that is going on at present. The two ongoing forms emphasize the ongoing nature of this praying.

"That God may open to us a door for the word."

This verbal image is as common for us as it was for them. God is the one who opens the doors so that the Gospel can be preached. Paul is seeking even greater opportunities to preach the Gospel.

"So that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ"

The use of the words "so that" indicate that a statement of purpose is forthcoming. When Paul uses the words "mystery of Christ," he is talking about our inability to comprehend how God could send His Son

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to die for us when we are busy rebelling against Him. This is the message that caused people to forsake their sin and seek forgiveness in Christ.

"For which I have also been imprisoned."

The Greek text says nothing about Paul's imprisonment. Paul is writing this letter from a Roman prison. He is there because he dared to preach the Gospel and would not be silenced. This made his Jewish enemies try all the harder to silence him. The Greek text says of the mystery, "as behooves me to speak." It is Paul's calling to proclaim the mystery of the Gospel of Christ even though it would get him into trouble with the Roman authorities.

In order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. Colossians 4:4

"In order that I may make it clear"

The use of the words "in order that" suggests that a statement of purpose or direction is about to be given. The word translated "that I may make it clear" is "phaneroso" (φανερῶσω). It literally means "to bring to the light." It is to hold something up to the light for a clearer vision of the details. Our text has interpreted the word a bit, but has done no violence to the meaning of the text.

The form of this word is aorist subjunctive. The subjunctive describes a possibility. It identifies what ought to happen. The use of the word "may" is an attempt to be faithful to this form.

"In the way I ought to speak"

The word translated "ought" is "dei" (δεῖ). A good translation of this word would be "behooves." Paul was saying that in view of everything God has done and now requires of us, this is the way one ought to speak. This is a gentle reminder that God has a specific way in which He wants us to speak in any given situation. This, of course, can only be determined as we allow the Holy Spirit to speak through us.

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Colossians 4:5

This verse looks a bit different in the Greek Text. You might translate it, "walk and keep on walking in wisdom toward those outside, redeeming the special time."

"Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders"

The word translated "conduct" is "peripateite" (περιπατεῖτε). It means "to walk." "Walk" is used in two different ways. It is like saying, "putting one foot ahead of the other." It also describes a way of living your life, as it is used here.

The form of this word is very important. It is a present indicative active form. This describes action that happens and goes on happening. It describes a lifestyle rather than a single action. This is a reference to how one conducts himself in the presence of non-Christians. Wisdom is the characteristic of that way of living. It does not mean that we will be geniuses. It does mean that we will use the utmost care and make the best possible choices for our words and actions when dealing with those who do not live for Christ.

"Making the most of the time"

The word translated "making the most" is "exagorazomenoi" (ἐξαγοραζόμενοι). The word literally means "to redeem." We commonly speak of making the best use of our time as "redeeming" it. That is what the translators had in mind.

The form of the word is equally important. The form is present participle. The present form identifies action that goes on and never stops. At the same time, a participle describes action that is in the process of happening. Both parts of this form describe ongoing action. This is a means of placing unusual emphasis on this fact.

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The word translated "time" is also very interesting. Greek has two different words to identify time. "Chronos (χρονός) is the way you identify the time on your watch. It is time that happens on a moment by moment basis.

The word "kairos" (καίρος) however is a different kind of time. When a woman is about to give birth to her child, she may say to her husband, "it is time." It does not matter what the clock says, day or night, it is TIME. This is kairos time. It is the word used when the Scriptures said, concerning the coming of Jesus, "in the fullness of time..." Paul was saying that regarding the opportunity to witness to the unbeliever, we must redeem and go on redeeming this special time.

Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person. Colossians 4:6

Again, the Greek text reads a bit differently than our translation. It reads, "Let all the words of you in grace be seasoned with salt to know how it is appropriate to carefully answer each one." Paul used two word pictures to describe how carefully they should talk with non-Christians.

"Let your speech always be with grace"

With this image, Paul described the quality of our speech. Grace describes the atmosphere that our choice of words conveys to those to whom we witness. It should be in keeping with the kindness of God's love that offers forgiveness to people who do not deserve it. Nothing less would be helpful, much less acceptable.

"Seasoned as it were with salt"

First century people did not have a long list of substances that would serve as seasoning their food. Salt made up most of the list. Salt made a very ordinary meal palatable. The same should be true of our speech with the non-Christian. This describes the choice of words we use when describing one's present condition and what it will be like if one accepts the grace of God in Christ. Paul knew that it would be easy to say something that would irritate the unbeliever. At that point, the person would be preoccupied with tension and pay no attention to what you are trying to say to him in order to invite him to Christ.

"So that you may know"

The word translated "know" is "eidenai" (εἰδέναι). In Greek there are two basic words that are translated "know." The word "ginosko" (γινώσκω) identifies knowledge that is true, but incomplete and increasing all the time.

The word "oida," (οἶδα) however, describes the fullness of knowledge. It is the word used to describe God's knowledge of all things. The word used here is a form of the word "oida." In effect, Paul said, "so that you may know absolutely."

"How you should respond to each person"

Each conversation with each person requires a different approach and different responses. Paul is suggesting that we need to know how to make every one of these responses if we are to be able to reach these individuals for Christ. This takes great care. It also takes the help of the Holy Spirit guiding us to make just the responses that are necessary to reach this individual.

Colossians 4:7-9 - Tychicus Brings Information About Paul

As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. Colossians 4:7

"As to all my affairs"

Paul was convinced that he would soon be released from prison. Apparently the decision had not yet been announced and Paul hoped it would be before Tychicus left to go to Colossae. The Colossians were concerned about Paul. They would want to know how he was doing concerning his health. They would

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want to know how he was doing concerning his imprisonment and the effect it was having on him. Rather than write about it, he wanted Tychicus to tell them personally when he arrived.

"Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant"

Tychicus had been a faithful servant with Paul for some time while the apostle was in prison.

"Tychicus, our beloved brother."

This is more than a nice way to refer to a friend. They did refer to other Christians as brothers. However, it had additional meaning. They literally treated fellow-believers as family. It means that they would defend each other, even with their life. If a fellow believer got into financial trouble they would help. If a fellow believer was behaving in an untoward way, they would bring it to his attention as they would a family member. They would expect the family member to reflect the lifestyle of the family – namely the life of Jesus. If this did not happen, they would attempt to help. To speak of someone as "beloved" was more than a kind statement. It is an expression of agape love. It states that you will love them, no matter what they do. They may or may not respond to our love. That is not a significant consideration for agape love. It indicates that this loving relationship has no boundaries. It is to love just because you love.

Tychicus the faithful servant.

Perhaps a better way to say this would be "the faithful deacon." There is no doubting that Tychicus was a real servant in the work of the Lord in Rome. As you can see from the text, Paul is also going to refer to him as a servant in the next phrase. It appears that Tychicus was a deacon in the church at Rome. It indicates that God had called him to a special task in the church and he had been set aside for that task by the church itself. In the Pastoral epistles, Paul describes the qualifications of a Deacon and there is no doubt that he would fulfill these in his life.

"And fellow bondservant"

The difference between servant and bondservant is not different words. A bond servant had to be a servant before he could be a bondservant. The difference between the two is important.

Servant

He could become a slave in basically two ways. He could get into financial trouble and have to become a slave to pay the debt. Most slaves were taken captive at the end of a victorious campaign. The people were given to the soldiers as payment for their services and they sold them at the slave market. The crucial understanding about the slave is that he became one by force.

Bondservant

A slave might be well treated by his master. In such cases he might prefer to serve as a bondservant rather than to be freed. He would request that the master accept him as a bondservant. This was a legal arrangement. The slave would declare his intentions before the city officials. The master would then pierce the servant ear with an awl. Ashes were rubbed into the wound and proud flesh would develop. The rest of his life he would carry this recognizable sign that he was a bondservant. The servant would be a bondservant for life. The crucial understanding about the bondservant is that it was by choice, not by force. The context indicates whether it is slave or bondservant, not different words. Tychicus was indeed a bondservant who served along with Paul.

"In the Lord"

Notice that Paul adds the words "in the Lord." There is a dual relationship here. Paul and Tychicus related to each other in the work of the church in Rome. They had another relationship in which they both participated. They were also "in Christ." Their sins were forgiven. They sustained an ongoing intimate relationship with Christ day by day.

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"Will bring you information"

This is Paul's attempt to give the people as much information and comfort as possible. If they receive the information from a person rather than from a letter it is more helpful. They can ask questions that come to their mind. They are also much more likely to feel that they have received the full information.

For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; Colossians 4:8

"For I have sent him to you for this purpose"

Paul identifies the fact that this is the reason that he sent Tychicus to them. He knows that they care and wants them to be well informed. As we know, this is not the only reason. Onesimus is also coming with him. There is a whole other agenda concerning Onesimus that must be cleared up. This is an expression of Paul's concern for these people.

"That you may know about our circumstances"

As is usually the case, there is not a single motive here. The motives, however, all center around Paul's desire that they be put at ease and informed about exactly what is happening to him. Again, if the concern about Paul can be dealt with, then the people can focus their attention on the very weighty issues that also must be cleared up while Tychicus is with them.

"And that he may encourage your hearts."

The word translated "encourage" is "parakalesae" (παράκαλεσις). This is a compound word:

- a. "Para" (παρά) means "beside"
- b. "Kalew" (καλέω) means "to call."

This is the same word that is used to identify the Holy Spirit. It was also the word that identified an attorney. He would be a person who would stand beside you in court to plead your case. Paul's use of this term indicates that he wants to do more than make them feel better about his situation. He wants them to be comforted in the way that the Holy Spirit is our comforter concerning the struggles and pains of life. This gives us an indication of how these people felt about Paul and how he felt about them.

And with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here. Colossians 4:9

"And with him Onesimus"

The people would already know this because Onesimus would travel with Tychicus. Paul is doing some advance work in preparing them for seeing Onesimus and making decisions about what should be done concerning him and his guilt of running away with money. Prior to seeing the two men, neither Philemon nor the congregation that met in his house would know that Onesimus or Tychicus were coming.

"Our faithful and beloved brother"

In this phrase, Paul used three different words to describe Onesimus. As previously indicated, Paul is laying some ground work to encourage Philemon to release Onesimus and send him back to Rome to serve with Paul. Paul spoke of Onesimus as being "faithful." This is not how Philemon or the congregation had thought of him until now. They thought of him as a guilty runaway slave and thief. This is a far cry from Paul's description of "faithful." Paul spoke of Onesimus as "beloved." Paul is establishing in the minds of Philemon and the church his impression of Onesimus.

The Christian slaves in Philemon's household would have another set of nouns with which to describe Onesimus. One of the first epithets they would choose for him would be "thief." They would also choose the word "deceiver." They would classify him as unchristian in his conduct. They would consider this a violation of a great trust. No doubt most of these slaves would like their freedom. The Christians among them, however, would take exception to the way Onesimus achieved his freedom. They would be particularly offended because he had stolen a large sum of money with which to pay for his trip to Rome. Ob-

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serve that Paul used the same word - "beloved" to describe Onesimus that he had used to describe Tychicus. It would be hard for Philemon to agree that that word would apply to both Onesimus and Tychicus. It is to love without reservation. Paul would insist that this is the way God loved us in our sin and we can offer Onesimus nothing less.

Think about Philemon reading this letter before the rest of the church heard it. The text does not tell us how Philemon felt. It is reasonable to assume that he would be, to some extent, offended by Paul's presentation of his run-away slave in this light. He would have to be a most unusual Christian to be able to hear these descriptions of the run-away and not think of the money he had lost through the theft. He would have to think very hard to put behind him the betrayal of trust of which Onesimus was guilty. He would also have a difficult time dealing with the pressure the other slave owners would place on him to get him to make an example of Onesimus so that their own slaves would think twice before attempting the same thing.

Paul also spoke of Onesimus as "brother." Again, Paul has used the same term to describe both Tychicus and Onesimus. This would be particularly repulsive for Philemon if not for the whole church. If Onesimus is a brother, as they understood that term, then it would be their responsibility to give him the benefits that family represents. They would be required to defend him, even if he was in the wrong. It would mean that if Philemon decided to punish him in the usual way – severe beating - these members of the church would have to defend Onesimus against Philemon. They would be risking their lives. It would mean that they would be required to assist Onesimus to repay the money he had stolen to finance his get-away.

Who is one of your number"

Certainly it is a fact that Onesimus had come from this household. It is equally true that Paul is using this fact to attempt to create some support for Onesimus. There is a natural resistance when someone uses such information in an attempt to pressure you to follow a given course of action. In most instances, this would create a reverse reaction. Paul was taking a serious risk by using this approach.

"They will inform you about the whole situation here"

Paul wanted them to hear the information about his situation first hand. This helps put many fears to rest. Also, if there were some late breaking developments in Paul's case, they would be able to share this with the church.

The word translated "inform" is "gnorissousin" (γνωρίσουσιν). The word means "to declare" or "reveal." It is more than passing on information. The root of this word is "ginosko" (γινώσκω) which we have described earlier. It is a level of growing knowledge. It is not to know everything, because that had not as yet been decided by the court. They are to reveal everything that they know about Paul's situation in the court.

The form of this word also is interesting. It is future indicative active. It means to reveal and never stop revealing what they know, but at a future time – when they arrive in Colosse.

Colossians 4:10-17 – Greetings From Other Believers

Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas' cousin Mark about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him; Colossians 4:10

"Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner"

His name means "best ruler." In Acts 19:29, he and Gaius were seized in the Ephesian riot which was apparently stirred up by the silversmiths. These two were called men of Macedonia. They were companions of Paul in his travels. (Acts 20:4) – He came from Thessalonica. He was apparently with Paul all the time after the riot in Ephesus. He traveled to Jerusalem with Paul. He was in Rome with Paul – (Acts 27:2) He worked in Rome with Paul. Paul's statement in this chapter causes one to wonder if Aristarchus was not also a prisoner in Rome. Tradition has it that he was martyred during the reign of Nero.

HOLY LIFE FOR SLAVE OWNERS AND FELLOW WORKERS

"Sends you his greetings"

Mail service was not the best. When a letter was being sent it usually meant it was being hand-carried as in this case. Everyone in the area would send their greetings. This would be their only opportunity to do so.

"And also Barnabas' cousin Mark"

Mark had two names: **John** – a Jewish name; **Mark** – a Roman name. His mother was named Mary – (Acts 12:12). The church in Jerusalem met in her home. This probably means the father was already dead or gone. This was a wealthy family; they had many slaves. Mark was also a cousin to Barnabas who also was wealthy. Barnabas lived in Cyprus. Cyprus may have been Mark's previous home. In 44 A. D. Mark and his mother were both Christians. Mark was converted through Peter's influence. (I Peter 5:13) Mary was a Jew with strong Jewish feelings. It is possible that Mark left Paul and Barnabas over the issue of Gentile Christians. He was in Rome with Paul. Paul spoke of him as "fellow worker;" "a great comfort." He was useful for ministry. He may have founded the church in Alexandria and became the first Bishop of the church there. He was apparently martyred in 62-63 A. D. under Nero.

"About whom you received instructions"

This probably means that Paul was sending Mark on a mission and he was to stop in the vicinity. The Christians offering each other hospitality was extremely important in the first century. Other accommodations were rare and often offensive to their Christian principles.

"If he comes to you, welcome him"

Obviously, it was not certain that he would come that way. Paul was sending notice just in case.

And also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision; and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. Colossians 4:11

"And also Jesus who is called Justus"

This verse indicates that he was a Jew. He is mentioned only in Colossians 4:11. He was a member of the inner circle of Paul's friends and associates in the first imprisonment in Rome.

"These are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision"

One wonders why Paul, who thrived on erasing boundaries between Jews and Gentiles, here draws attention to the fact that these people are Jews.

"And they have proved to be an encouragement to me."

The word translated "encouragement" is *paraegoria* (παρηγορία). The word means "to exhort" or "encourage." It is like an advisor who is so helpful that he seems to be more an encouragement than a fellow worker.

Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. Colossians 4:12

"Epaphras, who is one of your number"

This verse says he was a bonds slave of Jesus Christ. This name is a contraction of Epaphroditus. He was a Gentile by birth. He was with Paul in Rome during the first Roman imprisonment. He was a missionary through whom the Colossians were converted (Colossians 1:7) He was probably instrumental in conversions throughout the Lycus valley. Paul referred to him as "beloved fellow servant." He also referred to him as faithful minister of Christ. This phrase suggests that Epaphras came from Colosse. If so, he would be well known in the church there.

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"A bonds slave of Jesus Christ"

He thought of himself as a bond servant to Christ in the way that regular slaves chose to be the bond-servant of their owner. This is an excellent view of how a person sees their intimate relationship to Christ. They belong to Christ, by desire, as completely as any natural bond servant belongs to his master.

"Sends you his greetings"

Like others, when a letter was being carried, everyone took part in the greetings if they knew the recipients. This was particularly true in the church because of the intense fellowship they felt with each other.

"Always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers"

The words translated "laboring earnestly" are "panatote agonidzoemnos" (πάντοτε ἀγωνιζόμενος). They mean "to contend and never give up contending." He has a tremendous ministry in prayer.

"That you may stand perfect"

The words translated "stand perfect" are "stataete teleioi" (σταθῆτε τέλειοι). These words mean "to be established completely." He wants there to be nothing lacking in their growth. He prays to that end continually

"And fully assured in all the will of God"

The word translated "fully assured" is "peplaerofaemenoi" (πεπληροφημένοι). It means "to be fully convinced." It is to have no reservations about what it is God wants.

For I bear him witness that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. Colossians 4:13

"For I bear him witness"

This is something that you do not hear Paul saying very often. It is not that it doesn't come up. Paul just does not say these kinds of things very often. When he does, it should be taken very seriously.

"That he has a deep concern for you"

Epaphras was deeply concerned for these people and had been for a long time. He had a serious interest in their founding and growth.



"And for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis"

As mentioned earlier, these cities are not far apart. As you can see on the map, they are about ten miles apart. These churches exchanged letters and also exchanged speakers for their groups. It was natural for them to do this, and quite natural for Paul to mention it to them.

Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas. Colossians 4:14

"Luke the beloved physician sends you his greetings"

This name is a brief form for Loukanes. He could have been a Jewish proselyte. He lived in Philippi a long time. This may have been his home. He is probably the best educated man in the New Testament. He may have studied with Gamaliel in Jerusalem. If so, he could have met Paul there. We know he met Paul in Troas. He was widely traveled. He cared for Paul during his illness in Galatia. In his gospel and the book of Acts, He wrote the best Greek in the New Testament along with Hebrews and perhaps Jude.

"And also Demas"

He was a fellow worker with Paul in Rome. II Timothy indicates that there came a time when he abandoned his faith and left Paul. "He having loved the present world." (II Timothy 4:10) He went to Thessalonica. The name Demas is a contraction of the name Demetrius.

Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. Colossians 4:15

"Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea"

Colossea and Laodicea were not very far apart. One could walk from one to the other in a few short hours. These two churches shared and exchanged a lot. It is not surprising that Paul instructed them to greet the brethren who are in Laodicea. They saw each other enough so that this would not be a hardship to carry out.

"And also Nympha and the church that is in her house."

The church in Laodicea was very large. Nympha lived in Laodicea. This large congregation met in her home. This means that she had to have a very large house. It also meant that she had to be a person of really great wealth. She was a very important person in the church at Laodicea. This is the only place in the New Testament where she is mentioned. It must have been difficult for Paul to work with her because he was firmly convinced that women should not be leaders in the church.

And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. Colossians 4:16

"And when this letter is read among you"

Almost all of the epistles were addressed to a specific church, but were read by all the churches in that region. This letter dealt with a situation that was more prominent in Colossea than in the other churches, still it should be passed on just like the other epistles. The way this is written, it sounds as though Paul was afraid that it might be read by the Colossian church leaders, but not by the church or other churches. It is doubtful if that would happen.

"Have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans"

It is doubtful if any statement in the epistles is unnecessary. If it was commanded, there was probably some reason to do so. Normally, they would read each others messages. It was intended that way by the authors and expected by the people. Chances are it would apply to them almost as much as in Colossea.

"And you for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea"

We do not have a copy of the letter that Paul wrote to the Laodicean church. This verse makes it clear that such a letter existed. They were expected to share that letter with the other churches in the area. By

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mentioning the Laodicean letter to the church at Colosse, Paul made sure that they knew about it and would inquire about it if it were not given to them to share.

And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." Colossians 4:17

"And say to Archippus"

We need to be aware of information about Archippus. In Philemon, he was called a fellow soldier. He may have been Philemon's son or at least a close relative. There are several somewhat doubtful traditions about him. He may have been one of the 70 disciples. He may have been bishop of Laodicea. He was later martyred. Lightfoot says he was stoned to death along with Philemon, Onesimus and Apphia during reign of Nero.

"Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord"

Whoever he was, he was quite involved in church leadership and quite committed to Christ. Paul wanted to remind him that God had commissioned him to serve and he should be very careful to carry out that ministry.

"That You May Fulfill It"

It is one thing to begin a ministry. It is quite another thing to bring it to successful conclusion. Paul is reminding Archippus that he was to carry out every last detail of the work to which God had called him. The word translated "fulfill" is "plerois" (πληροῖς). It means "to fill full." They had trouble with false weights in that era as well. They developed a way to assure accurate weights. The container would be placed in the bin of wheat. It would be filled with the wheat until it ran over on all sides. Only then could they say that it was full. Paul was graphically urging him to carry out his ministry until every last detail had been completed and it could be accurately termed "filled full."

Colossians 4:18 – Paul's Personal Greeting

*I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.
Colossians 4:18*

"I Paul write this greeting with my own hand"

Observe that Paul said, "I write this "GREETING." He did not say that he had written the entire letter. It is most doubtful if Paul wrote this entire letter or any other. His poor eyesight was most prohibitive at this point. We know that Timothy did some of Paul's writing. As he came to the end of the letter, however, Paul took the pen in hand and recorded these few words of greeting to the people he loved so much.

"Remember my imprisonment"

Had persons of lesser stature written these words one might think they were feeling sorry for themselves for being imprisoned for their faith. Paul could make this deep, intense request because they knew his heart. He wanted to be released so that he could go on preaching the Gospel. He yearned for the opportunity to preach to them and to those who had never heard the Gospel of grace.

The word Paul used for "remember" was "mnaemoneuete" (μνημονεύετε). The word means "to call to mind." It also means "to make mention of," "to speak." It is a reference to their prayer life.

The form of the word gives us an insight into Paul's heart. It is a present indicative active form. It is a command, not a request. The present tense describes an action that begins and never ceases. It is like Paul was saying, "Remember my imprisonment in prayer and never stop praying for my release."

"Grace be with you."

Somewhere in each of the epistles of Paul that we have record of, he wishes the grace of God upon the recipients. This is probably an outgrowth of the fact that he was deeply conscious of his own unworthiness in receiving God's grace and wants the same to be the portion of every one in the church. Paul was

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never reluctant to correct the errors he observed in the church. At the same time it grew out of his love for them not his exasperation. It was the product of his great care for their progress in the Christian life.

Upon reflection

As you ponder your study of this epistle, it becomes increasingly clear that their situation and ours are surprisingly similar. Oh, they did not have interplanetary travel and communication. They didn't have access to computers and a myriad of other technological marvels that we take for granted. Still, the things they faced and the things we face have a familiar ring.

They lived in a culture that was collapsing under the weight of its own decadence. Sound familiar? They lived in a cultural setting where the existence of right and wrong was seriously questioned and most often denied. It was a cultural setting where the politically correct choices of the leadership, channeled through the masses set the stage even for the practice of law in an empire that considered one of its greatest contributions was the establishment of a legal system which has been the foundation of the legal systems for people of freedom ever since. The Roman Empire was not really destroyed; it rotted from within. There are few vices identified in this epistle that are foreign to our cultural way of life.

To the people of Colossea, in the midst of their despair and the bankruptcy of their lifestyle, Paul offered them Christ. To those who were "brothers" and "sisters" in the faith, Paul urged them to focus their lives upon a commitment to increasingly live like Jesus and take a lonely stand for God and for righteousness.

We stand at the same crossroads with essentially the same options before us. The world is watching, with great interest, to see what the followers of Christ will do when our commitment must be decided and practiced. What will they see in us?

INTRODUCTION TO PHILEMON

These were desperate times in the Roman Empire. Less powerful nations were tired of the dominance of Rome. They were more aggressive in their dealings with Rome. The huge army required to protect the empire's interests had become a serious strain on the assets of the empire. The rich were getting richer and the poorer were getting poorer. The widespread, unwieldy empire was leading an increasingly lavish lifestyle. What people did not realize was that lavishness produces weakness and debauchery carries a huge price-tag.

At the same time, on average at least 60% of the population were slaves of the 40% free population. In the smaller, off-the-trade-route cities, like Colossea, the percentages were even higher because these areas survived by goods production which was always work intensive. This made the free population nervous and very sensitive to the issues and conditions dealing with slavery. The poorly kept secret was that without slavery, the empire would collapse. The slaves did the work; the owners got rich; the slaves got more work. Riches have a way of redefining the lifestyle of everyone in the community, even the poorest slave.

There was an obvious code that set forth how people reacted in their slavery-defined culture. The code insisted that the slave walk three paces behind his owner. The slave sat behind the master if he sat at all. A slave was never permitted to speak publicly especially in the presence of a free man. The owners had the power of life and death over their slaves. The slaves were basically treated like a hand-tool. If it breaks, it isn't expensive, I'll just get a new one.

At this time, the church was already in serious trouble with the culture over the issue of slavery. A Christian owner and slave walked side by side, in public, and sat side by side even in church. Captured teachers and professors were often the only people in the community that could read and write. When a congregation received a letter from Paul, or another of the apostles, this was often read to the group by a slave. In several situations, the slave was the pastor of a church or at least an elder in the congregation. Every Christian was called "brother" or "sister" and the slaves were not excluded from this tradition. This would be a poorly kept secret among the slaves in the city. Some of the slaves were weary of their bondage and beginning to talk more openly and forcefully about "their rights."

Voices were heard, here and there, talking about how the Christians were creating a situation they would all be sorry for in the very near future. At the same time, some Christians were cautiously talking about how God had freed Israel from their Egyptian slavery and perhaps Rome was headed for the same kind of tragedy if they did not change their ways. It was an issue most people wanted to pretend didn't exist, but it would not go away.

It is against this electrically charged background that Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon. Paul had no choice but to send him back. There was a law that if a person found a run-away slave, he must return him to his owner who would decide on the punishment – usually death. Paul wanted Philemon to forgive Onesimus and allow him to return to Rome to serve with Paul. However, Paul wanted it to be Philemon's choice to do this, not his necessity.

The other slave owners, when they heard of the return of Onesimus, would put even greater pressure on Philemon to make an example of Onesimus so that their own slaves would get the message that this was not a wise thing to do.

Paul was so eager for Philemon to do "the right thing" that he was unable to allow Philemon to make up his own mind. He put so much pressure on Philemon that it was nearly impossible for Philemon to make up his own mind. Paul was a very forceful leader and was used to seeing people "do the right thing." We will see this in action repeatedly throughout our study of this very short letter.

Philemon was probably a convert of Paul in Ephesus. It is clear that there was a deep and trusting relationship between the two Christian leaders. From this epistle we know that the church in Colossea met at his home. There was a sizeable Christian community in Colossea and this means that Philemon's home

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had to be very large. From this, we also know that he had to be a man of unusual wealth in order to have a home large enough to house the whole Christian community for their gatherings for worship and fellowship.

Apphia was Philemon's wife and Archippus apparently was their son. It appears that Archippus was either a presbyter or an evangelist in the church in Colossea. There is a tradition that Philemon was the Bishop of Colossea. There is another tradition that states that Philemon, Apphia, Archippus and Onesimus were stoned to death before Androcles, the Governor, during the reign of Nero. We cannot vouch for the dependability of these traditions.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 5

MAKE UP YOUR MIND

PHILEMON 1-25

1. In a Bible Encyclopedia or Bible Dictionary, read as much as possible about what it meant to be a slave in the first century.
2. There are five paragraphs in the short epistle of Paul to Philemon. On the following table, write a summary of eight words or less for each paragraph.

1 – 3	
4 – 7	
8 – 16	
17 – 22	
23 – 25	

3. In verses one through three, Paul extended his greetings to Philemon's family and the Colossian Church.
 - a. In verse one, Paul identified himself as a "prisoner of Christ Jesus." Think carefully about this identification.
 1. How would the Roman authorities evaluate this claim?
 2. Check the other epistles written from prison. (List them.) How did Paul identify himself in these epistles?
 3. How can you account for the difference between his self-identification in this epistle and the ones where he was writing from prison?
 - b. In verse one, Paul included the name "Timothy our brother" as the senders of this epistle.
 1. In seven of the thirteen epistles that bear the name of Paul, he lists someone who writes along with him. The remaining six epistles bear only the name of Paul.
 - a. Why would Paul list Timothy as a co-author of this epistle?
 - b. What does Paul mean when he identified Timothy as "our brother"?
 2. Paul spoke of Philemon in two ways: "beloved brother" and "fellow worker." How does the word translated "brother" relate to the church that met in Philemon's house?
 - c. In view of the content of this brief epistle, why does Paul, in verse two, address this epistle also to Apphia, Archippus and "the church in your house" as well as to Philemon?
 - d. In verse three, as in 12 of his 13 epistles, Paul wished Philemon "grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." What is the significance of this wish?
4. In verses 4-7, Paul expressed his gratitude for the Christ-like quality he observed in Philemon's life.
 - a. In verse four, Paul used the word "you." To whom does Paul refer with the use of this word?
 - b. In verse five, Paul explained his thanksgiving.
 1. Read these first five verses again. To whom does Paul refer with the word "your"?
 2. In verse three, Paul referred to the Son of God as "Lord Jesus Christ." In verse five, however, he referred to Him as "Jesus Christ." What, if anything, is the difference between these two ways of identifying the Messiah?
 3. In verse five, Paul speaks of "your love and faith toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints."
 - a. What does he mean by the word "saints"?
 - b. In view of your overview of these 25 verses, why was it important for Paul to say this?

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- c. In verse six, Paul described his prayer and wish on behalf of Philemon.
 - 1. What does Paul mean when he said, "the fellowship of your faith"?
 - 2. How does "the fellowship of your (Philemon's) faith" become effective through the knowledge of every good thing.?"
 - 3. What does Paul add to his petition by the inclusion of the words, "which is in you for Christ's sake"?
 - d. In verse seven, Paul spoke of having, "come to have much joy and comfort in your love."
 - 1. What does he mean by this statement?
 - 2. How is this statement vital to Paul's purpose in the epistle?
 - e. In verse seven, Paul also said, "because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you."
 - 1. Why is this important?
 - 2. What does it add to Paul's message in the epistle?
 - 3. Paul, a second time, referred to Philemon as "brother." What is the significance of this?
5. Verses 8-16, Paul begins his plea for Onesimus.
- a. What message does Paul send by saying, "though I have enough confidence to order you"?
 - b. In verse eight, Paul spoke of the ability to command Philemon to do that which is "proper." What does Paul mean by the word "proper"?
 - c. In verse nine, Paul continued, "yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you."
 - 1. What is added by this statement?
 - 2. What is the difference between "order you" and "appeal to you"?
 - d. What does Paul mean when he said, "since I am such a person as Paul the aged"?
 - e. Look at the way Paul wrote the sentence in verses eight through eleven.
 - 1. What is the relationship between the statements "I am such a person as Paul the aged," and "And now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus"?
 - 2. Why would Paul say these things?
 - f. In verse 10, Paul made his appeal. Study what he said.
 - 1. What does Paul mean, "I appeal for my child"?
 - 2. Why would he say this?
 - g. In verse 11, Paul made a play on words.
 - 1. What is gained by the "useful" "useless" emphasis?
 - 2. How does this help Paul's argument?
 - h. In verse 12, Paul made an emotional statement.
 - 1. What did he say?
 - 2. How would this help Paul's purpose?
 - i. In verse 13, Paul explained what he really wanted to see happen.
 - 1. How could what Paul wants be on Philemon's behalf?
 - 2. Why does he stress his imprisonment AGAIN?
 - j. In verse 14, Paul explained his attitude.
 - 1. What explanation can you give for what Paul described as "without your consent"?
 - 2. Paul explained his concern, "that your goodness should not be as it were by compulsion, but of your own free will." In view of what Paul has said up to this point, what could he possibly mean by this statement?
 - k. In verse 15, Paul described a possible reason as to why this whole thing may have happened. If Paul was right, what is the meaning of his statement in this verse?
 - 1. In verse 16, Paul continued his explanation. What was Paul really trying to say clearly in this effort?
6. In verses 17-22, Paul increased the pressure on Philemon.

QUESTIONS FOR THE PHILEMON STUDY

- a. In verse 17, Paul spoke of two things: "regard me as a partner" and "accept him as you would me."
 1. What do these two situations have to do with each other?
 2. What is the implication of Paul's statement?
 3. Could their partnership depend upon this? Should it?
- b. Read verse 18 very carefully.
 1. What could Paul possibly mean when he said, "IF he has **wronged** you in ANYTHING"?
 2. Again, what could Paul mean when he said, "If he **owes** you ANYTHING"?
 3. Think seriously about Paul's statement, "charge that to my account".
 - a. Paul was a Roman prisoner. Would he have had a large amount of personal funds?
 - b. How could he seriously make such a promise?
 - c. Again, read verse 19 very carefully.
 1. What would be the significance of Paul writing, "this with my own hand"?
 2. Paul added a parenthetical statement, "lest I should mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well." Think carefully about whether or not it is appropriate to tell someone they are in your debt because you led them to faith in Christ.
 - d. In verse 20, Paul addressed Philemon a third time as "brother."
 1. What should be the impact of this repetition?
 2. Paul made two requests.
 - a. What does Paul mean when he said, "Let me benefit from you in the Lord"?
 - b. What did Paul mean when he said, "Refresh my heart in Christ"?
 - c. How do these requests fit with Paul's announced purpose in verse 14?
 - e. Read verse 21 a couple of times.
 1. If Paul was this confident of Philemon's obedience, why would he put such impossible pressure on him as he did in the previous 19 verses?
 2. Paul said, "Since I (*absolutely*) know you will do even more than what I say."
 - a. Again, if this is true, then why the badgering pressure applied in the previous 19 verses?
 - b. Again, how can one understand this to be compatible with Paul's announced purposes in verse 14?
 - f. Read verse 22 several times.
 1. How would you describe the tone of Paul's instructions in this verse?
 2. Keep in mind that it would take Paul several weeks to travel from Rome to Colossea. It would take about a minute to prepare a sleeping place for him. How would you describe Paul's reason for the instruction in this verse?

7. Verses 23-25, Paul gives his parting greetings from himself and several of his co-workers in Rome.

 - a. In verses 23 and 24, Paul sends greetings from five people. Get all the information you can about these people.
 1. Epiphras
 2. Mark
 3. Aristarchus
 4. Demas
 5. Luke
 - b. In verse 25, Paul closes the epistle as he began it, wishing them the grace of God. Read verses three and twenty-five several times.
 1. In what ways are they similar?
 2. In what ways are they not quite alike?
 3. Why do you think Paul wrote this way?

8. In retrospect, think carefully about your study of Philemon.

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- a. If you could talk to the apostle Paul about this brief epistle, what questions would you ask?
- b. Again, if you could talk with the apostle Paul about this epistle, what would you want to say to him?
- c. Why do you think the council included this epistle in the Bible?
- d. What does this epistle teach us for our problems today?

LESSON 5: PHILEMON 1-25
MAKE UP YOUR OWN MIND

There are five paragraphs in the epistle to Philemon. You will find a brief summary of each paragraph on the following table.

1-3	Paul's Opening Greetings
4-7	Paul's Gratitude for Philemon's Christ-like Life
8-16	Paul's Plea on Behalf of Onesimus
17-22	Paul Applies Increased Pressure on Philemon
23-25	Greetings and Farewell

Philemon 1-6 – Paul's Opening Greetings

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker. Philemon 1

"Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus"

Paul begins with his name, his trademark. Paul's statement about being a prisoner is insightful. He claimed to be a prisoner of Christ Jesus. The fact is, he was in a Roman prison. He was not in Christ's prison. None the less, Paul was making a statement. He was in prison on behalf of Christ Jesus. He was a prisoner because of his stand and commitment to Jesus Christ. It is like he was saying, "I may be in a Roman prison, but I am a prisoner of Christ Jesus and not Caesar." It is as though he said, "I would not be a prisoner at all if Christ had not wanted me to be here."

"And Timothy our brother"

The text is not clear why Timothy is mentioned here. There are several possibilities: It may have been because he was with Paul in Rome. That however is a doubtful reason. It could be because they wanted Philemon to know that Timothy was in agreement with what Paul was writing. That is possible. It had happened before. It could be that Timothy was Paul's scribe for this letter. Paul's eyesight was so poor we know of no single letter that he wrote completely. There is one section of this letter where Paul indicates that he is writing that particular portion. This appears to be the reason Timothy is mentioned here.

Paul always speaks with extreme care and caution. Because of this, we must always be on the alert to discover why he writes as he does. One of the questions that arises with each of his epistles is why does he indicate a co-author in some epistles and not in the others. On the following table, observe how each of his epistles begins.

EPISTLE	AUTHORSHIP
Romans	Paul
I Corinthians	Paul and Sosthenes
II Corinthians	Paul and Timothy
Galatians	Paul and all the brethren
Ephesians	Paul
Philippians	Paul and Timothy
Colossians	Paul and Timothy
I Thessalonians	Paul, Silvanus and Timothy
II Thessalonians	Paul, Silvanus and Timothy
I Timothy	Paul
II Timothy	Paul
Titus	Paul
Philemon	Paul

WHEN FAITH CONFRONTS CULTURE

We know that Paul had a problem with his eyesight. This probably provided the reason someone had to be scribe for his letters. The study of ancient letters, however, does not reveal that the name of the scribe was often included in the letters. There is little possibility that Paul did the writing on any of his epistles.

The above table contains some interesting pieces of information. Look at the epistles in which only the name "Paul" is found in the opening statement. The epistle to the Romans was a very crucial message to a church that was pivotal in sending the gospel message to the Gentiles. Ephesians was a church that faced some serious struggles in their attempt to live transformed lives in a decadent society. I and II Timothy and Titus were very personal letters to young pastors for whom Paul was mentor. Philemon was one of the most delicate messages that Paul ever had to write. We also know that then as now, when names were added to a document, it was intended to convey the idea that these people were in agreement with the author.

It appears that these issues, perhaps among others, account for the fact that Paul sometimes used only his name and at other times included co-authors along with his name.

Paul refers to Timothy as "brother." Some believe that this is simply a term by which Christians refer to each other. Christians do that, but there is more to it. Christians viewed each other as family. Family members had specific responsibilities. If a brother got into financial difficulty, a "brother" would come to his aid. If a person was threatened, a "brother" was required to defend him. If a man died, his "brother" was required to care for the family as though it was his own. A Christian from the former Soviet Union explained it this way, "If I call you my "brother" it means that if the KGB is after you, you can hide in my root cellar."

"To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker"

The word translated "beloved" is "agapaeto" (ἀγαπητῶ). This is a form of the word agape. It means one who is loved without limitations. He will be loved totally whether he responds or not. He will be loved just because he is, not because he does pleasing things. He, too, is a brother with all that this involves. Paul also referred to Philemon as a "fellow worker." The word translated "fellow worker" is "sunergo" (συνεργῶ). The word "Sun" (σύν) means "with" and "Ergon" (ἔργον) means "to work." It is commonly understood that it means that Paul and Philemon worked together in the ministry in Ephesus. If you look, you will discover that Paul spoke of each of his associates as fellow workers. There is a Greek form Paul could have used if he wanted to say that they worked for him. He did not want to say that. They worked with him. There was no doubt that Paul was the leader. There was equally no doubt that Paul was a worker with them.

And to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.

Philemon 2

"And to Apphia our sister"

Obviously, Apphia is not Paul's natural sister. She is his sister "in Christ." It was the early church's way of saying we view all believers as family, with its privileges and responsibilities.

"And to Archippus our fellow soldier"

Again, Archippus was not a military soldier. Paul has a penchant for graphic images. Archippus is, however, a fellow-worker with Paul as was also his father, Philemon. As previously indicated, Archippus was probably an elder or an evangelist in the Colossian church.

"And to the church in your house"

"The church in your house" is what it was. The early church did not have church buildings as such. They met in homes. There were some who met at the riverside. In Colosse, the church met in the home of Philemon. This tells us just how huge his home was. It also indicates the extent of his personal wealth.

MAKE UP YOUR OWN MIND

Paul wrote four personal letters that appear in our Bible – I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus and Philemon. Philemon, however, is the only one of the four that is addressed to the church as well as the individual named in the letter. There is a reason for this: If Philemon reads the letter to the church, then the church will be watching to see how he deals with the apostle's instructions. This is a form of pressure that Paul is applying to Philemon to get him to do what he feels Philemon ought to do. We will see repeated instances throughout this brief letter where this very thing happens again and again.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Philemon 3

"Grace to you and peace"

In 12 of his 13 epistles recorded in the New Testament, Paul wished for them grace and peace. Only in Romans does he simply wish them grace. Surprisingly, only in I and II Timothy does Paul wish him "grace, MERCY and peace."

"From God our Father"

The source of this blessing is important. Paul first identified the source of grace and peace as "God the Father." This identification has a number of ideas involved in it. If one speaks of God as "Father" it has both theological and personal significance.

1. THEOLOGICAL

To speak of God as Father points one's attention to the creative act. God brought into being all things that are or have been. It also focuses our attention on the fact that God does not change. Before time, God is. All that God ever was or did, He will always continue to be – the Changeless One.

2. PERSONAL

"Father" is a very meaningful reference in the Jewish culture. We must keep in mind that the church at Rome was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. The leadership and power structure of the church, however, was dominated by people who were Jews. It is, therefore, not surprising that Paul would use many different Jewish images in his message. "Father" is responsible for our origin. He is the source of one's care. Father is the establisher of our future – marriage, economic assets, location, etc. Father is the model after whom the entire clan designs itself. In this paragraph we have spoken of the Jewish culture. This is the background out of which Paul thought and wrote. Granted, there were some Jews in the fellowship, but Paul was writing out of his family understandings. By the same token, these other cultures had something of the same understandings though it was not as deep-seated in their culture as it was among the Jews. For instance, the same understanding of marriage, its arrangement and the way it affects the bride are practiced to this day in India.

"And the Lord Jesus Christ"

Paul also identified the source of grace and peace as "the Lord Jesus Christ." For some people "Lord Jesus Christ" is simply the full name of God's Son. It is much more. Among the Jews, names had powerful meaning.

"Lord"

The Greek word for "Lord" is "kurios" (κύριος). It means "Master." It is the name by which every slave called his owner. This name carefully identifies the relationship between the Christian and God's Son. A servant exists for the benefit of his owner. A servant's only purpose in life is to carry out the wishes of his owner.

"Jesus"

1. Obedience is the only acceptable response of a servant to the request or command of his owner. The master expects only total obedience from those who call him "lord."

Again, "Jesus" is not Messiah's first name. The word means "savior." In Matthew 1:21 the angel said,

"And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins." Matthew 1:21

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There are many ministries the Son of God performs, but none more crucial than "save His people from their sins." This is the cornerstone of the Gospel.

"Christ"

This word is the Greek form for the "anointed one." The Hebrew form is "messiah". He is the "coming one." He is the one God set apart to redeem us from our sins.

Philemon 4-7 – Paul's Gratitude For Philemon's Christ like Life

I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, Philemon 4

"I thank my God always,"

This is a statement Paul makes in almost every epistle. It is stronger than our text indicates. You might translate it "I give thanks and keep on giving thanks to the God of me always remembering you." Because Paul uses this statement frequently some may feel that it is a perfunctory statement. It should be seen as a common, but very sincere desire on his part.

"Making mention of you in my prayers"

Paul prays for this family and congregation repeatedly. He wants them to be aware of this prayer support. It is a specific mention of them in his prayer time.

Because I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints. Philemon 5

"Because I hear of your love,"

The word "hear" is important because of its form. It is a present active participle. The present tense describes ongoing action. The participle describes action in progress. Here are two forms that both highlight not just a single action of hearing. It is like a present tense with strong emphasis. Paul said he had heard repeatedly of their love.

The word translated "love" is "agape" (ἀγάπη). This is a God-kind of love. It has no requirements in order to be received. It is to be loved just because you are.

"And of the faith"

He has also been hearing of the faith of Philemon and the congregation. The word translated "faith" is "pistin" (πίστιν). It does not mean that they believe all the right things, though they do. It is an expectation that they would be shocked of God did not do as expectation requires. Their faith was obvious enough to draw comment from several.

"Which you have toward the lord Jesus"

Their faith and love are directed toward the Lord Jesus. One of the products of this relationship is that God, in Christ is the central priority of their lives. God is the total focus of their Christian life.

"And toward all the saints"

Paul expresses confidence that Philemon has love for all the saints. The word translated "saints" is "hagios" (ἅγιος). Usually it would be translated "holy". That is what a saint is. It does not mean one who never makes a mistake. It is not one who prays day and night. It is not one who is totally detached from the world around him. It is rather one who daily seeks to be holy because God is holy. Paul acknowledges that Philemon still makes mistakes. He also seeks forgiveness and struggles to be more like his Master.

And I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. Philemon 6

MAKE UP YOUR OWN MIND

"And I pray that the fellowship of your faith"

The word translated "fellowship" is "koinonia" (κοινωνία). This word is often thought to mean a social gathering to eat and enjoy company. The word literally means "to share." It is to have in common. Paul is talking about the faith that they share in common. The word translated "faith" is "pistin" (πίστιν). It does not mean that one believes the things that are accurate concerning the Christian faith. It does mean that one expects God to be God and would be shocked if He would ever fail to be that dependable and powerful. Paul prays that their shared faith would have a positive effect.

"May become effective through the knowledge"

The word translated "effective" is "energaes" (ἐνεργής). It is usually translated "effective." It also carries the idea "of being energetic."

It is like saying may this faith energize your work for God. If God does not energize our efforts, then nothing is going to happen though we understand the whole process very well.

The word translated "knowledge" is "epiginosko" (ἐπιγινώσκω). This is a compound word. "Epi" (ἐπι) means "above." "Ginosko" (γινώσκω) means "knowledge." It identifies incomplete knowledge that is increasing. It involves discernment and recognition. "Epiginosko" describes a fuller participation by the knower in the object to be known. Paul used this term at least 15 of the 20 times it appears in the New Testament. Paul's idea is that superior knowledge renders superior results.

"Of every good thing"

Paul talked about "all the good." Good is not just the opposite of evil. The word "good" is sometimes translated "virtuous." It is sometimes used to express generosity. It also was used to describe that which is profitable. Paul is talking about all of these aspects of the word. There is no doubt that Paul thought highly of Philemon. There is also no doubt that these statements would make Philemon feel good about himself. Paul is pulling out all the stops to point out the better qualities he sees in the life of Philemon.

"Which is in you for Christ's sake"

The Greek text reads a bit differently. It reads, "in you unto Christ." Paul is saying at least two things: Philemon is doing some very good things. Secondly he does them on behalf of God and not himself. This, too, had to make Philemon feel very good. Every person likes to be appreciated. To some extent, we all like to hear that we are doing good things for the right reason.

For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. Philemon 7

"For I have come to much joy"

In more recent times there is a tendency to confuse joy and fun. This is a gladness over the opportunity to serve God. It is a sense of rejoicing to see God at work through changed lives. It could even be quite visible through tears that even in pain, God is honored. Paul saw that kind of surpassing joy in the love displayed by Philemon.

"And comfort in your love"

The word "and" indicates that he is continuing the same thought from the previous verse. The word translated "comfort" is "paraklaesin" (παρακλήσιν). As indicated earlier, this is a compound word.

- a. "para" (πάρω) means "beside."
- b. "Kaleo" (καλέω) means "to call."

The word comes from the courts. Rich men, particularly Pharisees, would lend money to widows knowing they could not pay it back. In fact, it was illegal to require them to pay it back. When no payment was made, the rich would take the defenseless widow to court to take away her home or her son in payment. The Scribes detested this and would walk up and stand beside the widow and say, "I am your paraclete; I am the one called alongside to comfort and defend you." This is the word by which the Holy Spirit is often identified in the New Testament. He is the comforter. This compound word means "to call be-

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side." It identifies an attorney who comes to the aid of a widow who is being taken advantage of by the Pharisees in the court. It is a comfort brought about by relief from tension caused by one's inability to deal with the problems that are greater than our ability. This is the kind of comfort the agape love of Philemon has brought to the heart of Paul. This, too, had to make Philemon feel good about his efforts to be helpful.

"Because the hearts of the saints"

The word "because" does not appear in the text. You might translate this portion, "The affection of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother." The word translated "hearts" is "splangxna" (σπλάγχνα). The word literally means "intestines." It was thought, among the Jews, that the abdominal cavity was the seat of all tender affections. It is to these emotions or feelings that Paul makes reference in this word.

The word translated "saints" is "hagion" (ἁγίων). The word literally means "holy ones." It does not mean people who never smile or make mistakes. It does mean they are forgiven. It means that they are "in Christ." It means they are seeking diligently to be "imitators of God" as Paul said in Ephesians 5:1.

"Have been refreshed through you, brother."

The word translated "refreshed" is "anapepautai" (ἀναπέπρωται). This word means "to soothe," "to cause to rest." It means "to dwell," "to take up residence." It is to have a house with foundations as the Old Testament talks about rather than a tent which regularly moves. It is the reinvigoration that takes place when one has had the soothing rest.

The form of this word is also important. The form is perfect passive indicative. This is completed action. The emphasis is on the fact that this has already taken place. It is measurable. This refreshment takes place through Philemon. It had to make Philemon feel good to hear Paul say this.

Paul called Philemon "brother," again. This is the second time in seven verses that Paul refers to Philemon as, "brother." There is no doubt that the use of "brother" identifies family. Certainly, Christians saw each other as family. Just as certainly, the use of "brother" ultimately meant family responsibility. Family was required to come to the aid of a member who found themselves in financial trouble to the point that they would be sold into slavery. Family was required to defend other family members whose lives were in jeopardy. You will remember this is what Abraham did when Lot was taken hostage. Family was required to care for a brother's immediate family if he died. Family was required to meet whatever need life might present to another member of their family. Paul was reminding Philemon that he had some responsibilities to deal with Paul whether he wanted to do so or not. The repeated reminder served to call to Philemon's attention the things that Paul wanted him to act upon.

Philemon 8-16 – Paul's Plea on Behalf of Onesimus

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do that which is proper Philemon 8

"Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ"

The word translated "therefore" is "dio" (διὸ). There are several connectives that indicate the coming of a conclusion. "Dio" is one of these, but it is not the strongest. It tells you a conclusion is coming, but it is not a major conclusion like the divisions of a book. In cases like this, it is appropriate to use the word "wherefore" instead.

The Greek text would translate this portion a bit differently. One might translate it, "Wherefore, I am having much freedom/boldness in Christ." The difference is in the meaning of the word "confidence." The word "confidence" is an accurate translation. It appears, however, that the word "boldness" or the word "freedom" convey what Paul was talking about more precisely.

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"To order you to do that which is proper"

The Greek text reads, "to be commanding you to the fitting/ proper." The question is, who determines what is proper or fitting? We know of no other Christian leader who commanded those under his care to free their slaves. Does God give Paul instructions He gives to no other apostle or leader? There is nowhere in Scripture where instructions are given to free slaves. None of the other apostles, to our knowledge, gave this kind of instruction or teaching. What convinced Paul that this qualified to be given as a presbyter's instructions? We do not know the answer to these questions, if there is one.

Yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you-since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus – Philemon 9

"Yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you"

The Greek text reads a bit differently. "Through the love, rather, I plead and keep on beseeching you." The agape love is the basis upon which he is making his decisions about how to approach Philemon.

The word translated "appeal" is "parakalo" (παράκαλῶ). This is the same word we described in verse seven. Again, it is the same word the New Testament uses to identify the Holy Spirit. It identifies one who pleads on our account. Paul turned it around and used it to identify his pleading on behalf of Onesimus.

The form of the word translated "appeal" is present indicative active. This form indicates action that begins and never stops. It describes a lifestyle rather than a single action. Paul is not asking for a single action, but for a change in Philemon's total lifestyle.

"Since I am such a person as Paul, the aged,

The Greek text reads, "I am such as Paul the presbyter." The word for "aged" is "archaios" (ἀρχαίος). The word in this context is "presbutaēs" (πρεσβύτης). This is what a presbyter was called in that day. Paul's claim is not that his age should cause Philemon to obey him. He was claiming that the fact that Paul was a presbyter should give Philemon all the reason he needs to do as Paul insists. Not everyone would agree that this was the province of the presbyter or leader of the church. That is, however, the position Paul is taking here.

"And now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus."

The word translated "prisoner" is "desmios" (δέσμιος). The word literally means "fettered." In all probability, Paul did not wear chains. We know that he was not in a prison cell in Rome. He rather had his own home there. We would refer to this as "house arrest." He carried on an elaborate ministry from his private home in Rome. Paul spoke of himself as a "prisoner of Christ Jesus." Paul traveled to Rome and to imprisonment at the expense of the Roman Empire. Roman records would show that he was a Roman prisoner awaiting trial before Caesar. Still Paul affirmed that he was a prisoner of Christ rather than Caesar. In a certain sense, that was absolutely true. Certainly, Paul was a Roman prisoner because of the stand and things he undertook on behalf of Christ. The mention of both the fact that Paul was a presbyter and also a prisoner on behalf of Christ were intended to place pressure on Philemon to do as Paul wanted him to do. This was not accidental, but rather calculated to have this very effect. Most thoughtful Christians, today, would agree that slavery is inappropriate for the believer. Whether it was appropriate for Paul to apply this kind of pressure to help bring Philemon to the point where he would do what Paul thought was "proper" is a different question. One of the beautiful things about scripture is that it never hides the warts.

I appeal to you for my child whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus, Philemon 10

"I appeal to you for my child"

A second time, Paul used the word "parakalo" (παράκαλῶ). A paraclete is usually one who brings comfort by his intervention. Paul used the word here to identify one who seeks comfort through getting what he wants to see happen. Though Paul used the same form of the same word, he used it in a different

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way in verse 10. In verse nine, Paul spoke of inviting or requesting. In verse 10, however, he used the word to describe begging for a life to be spared. This picture is a beautiful presentation of a law of the courts of that day as well as today. If a man was convicted of murder, he was often sentenced to die on a cross. Paul took this image straight from the Roman courts of that day. Before a sentence of death was given, the judge was required to allow the criminal's mother to plead with him for the life of her son. Only after this had happened could the judge pass sentence. Paul put himself in the place of a grieving mother who comes to intercede for her son. Paul pleads with Philemon on behalf of Onesimus in the same way a mother would plead with the court to spare the life of her son. In a very real sense, Paul was begging that Onesimus be spared because the penalty for a runaway was usually death.

"Whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus"

Paul drew another parallel, the kind he loved to use. He compared his bringing Onesimus to spiritual birth with the way a mother would bring her child into the world. In this segment, Paul drew an unusual picture. They would never have known of a baby being born in prison. It was illegal to imprison a woman. Paul describes two struggles in the same picture. There is the picture of Paul in prison having only been obedient to Christ. You have a second picture of the struggles Paul endured in leading Onesimus to faith in Christ, with all that would involve concerning his run-away situation.

Who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. Philemon 11

"Who formerly was useless to you,"

Paul, in this sentence, is involved in a critical play on words. It has to do with the name "Onesimus." The name "Onesimus" literally means "useful" or "helpful." Recently, Onesimus had been anything but helpful. There are two different ways to carry out this play on words. Again, the name "Onesimus" means useful. In Greek you can change a word from positive to negative by adding the letter "a" at the beginning of it. The second way to do this is to use another word that means the opposite of useful. That word is "archaeston" (ἀρχηῆστον) and means "unprofitable." That is exactly what Paul did. The effect would be the same. Look at what Paul accomplished. He frankly admitted that Onesimus had proven to be unprofitable for Philemon. At the same time he offered a way to redeem an awkward situation because Onesimus had been very profitable to him.

"But now is useful both to you and to me."

The words "but now" indicate the coming of a very strong contrast. Paul is going to contrast what Onesimus had obviously been to what he could become. This, of course, was intended to place additional pressure on Philemon to do the "loving thing" and release Onesimus to return to Rome and serve with Paul. He would be useful to Philemon in that he would be providing a servant for the Gospel by sending Onesimus back to Rome to serve with Paul. He would be useful to Paul because if Onesimus was released and returned to Rome, he would continue to be the useful worker for the Gospel he had been since coming to faith in Christ.

And I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, Philemon 12

"And I have sent him back to you in person"

There is a long list of levels of pressure that Paul is placing upon Philemon in this brief epistle. This verse is just one more. He stressed the fact that he sent Onesimus back to Philemon in person. There is no doubt that Paul placed a great deal of trust in Philemon by sending Onesimus back to him in person not knowing how Philemon would deal with this problem. Paul did not waste that information in his presentation. He used it for all it was worth. It is like he is saying, I am placing an unbelievable amount of trust in you in sending Onesimus back to you without knowing what you will do with and to him. I am expecting you to keep that trust in mind as you make your decision about how to deal with this former run-away who is now a brother in Christ.

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"That is, sending my very heart."

This is a very emotionally filled statement. On the critical side, the word "heart" does not appear in the Greek text. The Greek word for "heart" is kardias" (καρδίας). It describes the organ that pumps blood. The word used in the Greek text of this verse is "splanchna" (σπλάγχνα). This word literally means "intestines." The Jews thought that the intestinal cavity was the seat of all tender affections for the human body. It is easy to understand why the translator would use the word "heart" in this translation. This emotional statement was intended to place irrefutable pressure on Philemon to do what was "proper." If Philemon goes against Paul's very forceful suggestion, then he is taking a stand against the tender affections of Paul. Because Paul and Philemon were very close friends, this places a great deal of pressure on Philemon to do what was "proper."

Whom I wished to keep with me, that in your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; Philemon 13

"Whom I wished to keep with me"

The word translated "keep" is katgechein" (κατέχειν). The word "keep" is a good translation of this word. We should keep in mind, however, that this is an epistle in which the idea of prisoner is very prominent. It is not accidental to discover that this word was also used to convey the idea of incarceration. Philemon would be keenly aware of this. Though Paul has stated that he wants this to be Philemon's own choice, still he now tells Philemon what he really wants to see happen. Now it is very clear that should Philemon choose not to do the "proper" thing, he would clearly be going against the stated wishes of the apostle, who was also a personal and close friend. There is a very calculated form of pressure in this statement.

"That in your behalf he might minister to me"

The use of the word "that" indicates that a statement of purpose is about to be given. The purpose that Paul cites is one that was intended to be to the benefit of Philemon. There is a sense in which it would be to Philemon's benefit to do the "proper" thing. It is just as clear that both Paul and Onesimus would benefit greatly if Philemon did the "proper" thing. Having said that, I must also admit that Paul does own up to the fact that he would be aided substantially by the assistance of Onesimus in Rome.

The word translated "minister" is "diakonae" (διακονῆ). It means "to serve." It is "to give assistance." The form of this word is present active subjunctive. The present tense describes action that begins and never ceases. The subjunctive indicates something that may happen, but it is not certain.

"In my imprisonment for the gospel."

Paul repeatedly reminds Philemon that he is a prisoner for the Gospel. This repeated information would place pressure on Philemon to help Paul in any way he could. He could do this, perhaps, by releasing Onesimus from slavery and allowing him to return to Rome to serve as a fellow worker with Paul.

But without your consent I did not want to do anything, that your goodness should not be as it were by compulsion, but of your own free will. Philemon 14

"But without your consent I did not want to do anything"

The use of the word "but" indicates that a very strong contrast is about to be described. Paul will describe the contrast between the good thing that he wants Philemon to do and the need for Philemon to make his decision of his own free will. In this sentence, Paul suddenly speaks very carefully. One might translate this segment in this way, "but apart from the assent of you, I was disposed to consider nothing." The things that we are pointing out should not be misconstrued to mean that Paul is being less than honest. That is certainly not the intent. There are times, however, when we have extremely strong feelings, that we are not aware of the effect that our actions and words have on other people. It appears that this is a prime example of that situation.

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"Your goodness should not be as it were by compulsion"

Again, this portion is a bit different in the Greek. It reads, "In order that not as from compulsion/force the love of you". Truthfully, Paul does not force Philemon to make a decision. Just as truthfully, he makes it increasingly difficult for Philemon to make any choice except what Paul wants him to make. Paul speaks of what Philemon is going to do as an expression of love. Here again is just one more tiny pressure to do the "proper" thing.

"But of your own free will."

Again, the Greek text is a bit more precise. The Greek text reads, "but from voluntary." Paul knew that Philemon would not be able to make any choice at this time that was of his own free will. Too much pressure had already been applied. He could, however, volunteer to do what the intense pressure of Paul had almost coerced him to do. We must not be too harsh with Paul at this point. He is dealing with an issue that could not only divide the church, but unleash opposition and persecution that could exterminate the church in Colosseae. It is much easier for us to think of what he should have done than it was for him to take the stand that seemed most appropriate.

For perhaps he was for this reason parted from you for a while, that you should have him back forever, Philemon 15

"For perhaps he was for this reason parted from you"

The use of the word "for" suggests that Paul is about to give a reason for his previous statements. The Greek text reads a bit differently, but not seriously. It reads, "For perhaps he was removed from you for a season." The English version places emphasis on the reason Onesimus was taken away. The Greek version places emphasis on the time he was removed. Paul is suggesting that there may be more than one reason that Onesimus was "parted" from him. This would be a shock to Philemon. He would be aware of the sinful act of Onesimus, but of no other reason he was absent.

"For a while, that you should have him back forever."

The words "for a while" do not appear in the Greek text. The presence of the word "that" suggests that a statement of purpose is forthcoming. This may be very confusing for Philemon. He would be thinking in human physical terms. Onesimus had come back. Philemon would now have him back as long as he lived. Paul, however, was not thinking in physical terms, but spiritual. Again, the word "forever" does not appear in the text. The Greek text uses the word "eternally." This would immediately tell Philemon that Paul was talking in spiritual terms. The inference here is very strong. Paul is suggesting, not saying, that perhaps this is God's will; God's way to give Onesimus back to Philemon as a brother and not a slave. The inference here is that unless Philemon cooperates with what Paul is doing, he might be taking a stand against God. This is a very powerful form of pressure on Philemon. The last thing he would want to do was to place pressure on God or be found standing against what God is doing in the world.

No longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. Philemon 16

The Greek text reads as follows for this verse. "No longer as a slave, but more than a servant, a brother beloved, especially for me but much more for you, in the body and in the Lord."

"No longer as a slave, but more than a slave"

Paul deals with this as though Philemon would have no feelings about what Onesimus had done. Philemon would be humiliated in the community. He would face serious morale problems among his other slaves because of this. Paul deals with it as though Philemon should feel nothing. Philemon probably had other slaves that had become a Christian. The fact was, however, that they were still his slaves. In that respect, what Paul was saying would not make sense to Philemon. Let me be quick to add

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that Paul was, in fact, telling the truth. It was a truth, however, that would be most difficult for Philemon to grasp much less appreciate.

"A brother beloved, especially to me"

In these 16 verses, Paul has not hinted at the fact that Onesimus did anything wrong. That fact would not be wasted on Philemon. Paul suggested that Philemon would have Onesimus back as a "brother beloved." Philemon would understand that Paul meant as a Christian. However, Paul in referring to Onesimus as a "brother beloved" used the same term to identify Onesimus as he had previously used to identify Philemon. I am not sure that this would please Philemon at this point.

The terms "brother beloved" had some very important meanings attached to them.

"Brother"

As we have indicated, there are some important understandings about being a "brother." It certainly means more than an identification of a person as a Christian. It means that Philemon would be required to defend Onesimus, with his own life if necessary, if he were in any trouble, and he really was. It meant that if he were in any financial trouble, it would be Philemon's responsibility to help meet that need. That would rub salt in an already raw wound.

"Beloved"

The word translated "beloved" is "agapaeton" (ἀγαπητόν). It is a form of the word agape. This is love that has no requirements. It is the love God had for sinners who rebelled against him. It is love that does not consider what the person had done in the past. It describes a love that is expressed just because the person exists.

"Especially to me"

Paul made it clear that he had a personal involvement in the way Philemon made his decision about what to do with this slave. If Paul really wanted him to make up his own mind, he would leave out all the extraneous information and deal with how a Christian deals with the sins of a non-Christian who has become a Christian. In this statement, Paul is staking a claim in this decision.

"But how much more to you"

Surely by this point in the letter, Philemon knew very well what Paul was driving at. Paul would be right in saying "much more to you" in spiritual terms. However, if Paul took the former slave back with him, Philemon had gained, physically nothing. He had ultimately lost a slave. Paul was suggesting that there would be benefit for Philemon, spiritually, if he accepted Onesimus as a brother and let him go back to Rome as a free man. One can understand where Paul is coming from, but one can also understand how difficult it would be for Philemon to hear what Paul is suggesting.

"Both in the flesh and in the lord."

"In the flesh"

Paul was saying that if Philemon did the "proper" thing, it would mean a great deal to him, from a human standpoint. He left no place for Philemon to even be initially disturbed at what Onesimus had done.

"In the Lord"

Paul is bypassing the instructions he gave to others about what one does if a brother has done anything against you. Philemon would wonder about this, to be sure.

Philemon 17-22 – Paul Applies Increased Pressure on Philemon

If then you regard me as a partner, accept him as you would me. Philemon 17

"If you regard me as a partner"

This is a conditional "if...then" statement. In some circles it would be considered a threat. I doubt that Paul intended it that way. I am just as certain that Paul meant it when he said if we are partners in the Gospel then you should accept him as you would accept me.

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"Accept him as you would me"

This is an unusual instruction. The relationship between Paul and Philemon and between Philemon and Onesimus were very different.

The relationship between Paul and Philemon

Paul had done Philemon no harm. Paul, rather, had led Philemon to the Lord, for which he was grateful. They were both coworkers in ministry and shared a great deal in this respect.

The relationship between Philemon and Onesimus

Onesimus had been a trusted servant, but he had broken that trust. He ran away which was a financial loss to Philemon. He created a problem with the servants who had not run away from Philemon's household. Onesimus now was a Christian, but he had not made things right with Philemon. To this extent, Philemon was an offended party. Nowhere does Paul even intimate that there was an apology due from Onesimus. Nowhere does Paul even hint that Philemon had suffered any wrong or loss because of what Onesimus had done.

But if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account; Philemon 18

"But if he has wronged you in any way"

The use of the word "but" indicates a contrast with the former material. The use of the word "if" suggests uncertainty. That uncertainty would exist only in the mind of Paul. There was no "if" in the mind of Philemon. He knew exactly what Onesimus had done that wronged him in several ways. The word translated "wronged" is "aedinaesen" (ἠδίνησεν). It is translated as "wronged," but it is more than that. It also means "to injure." It was sometimes translated, "if I have acted unjustly." There can be no doubt that Onesimus acted unjustly. This statement appears to grow out of Paul's feeling that God took Onesimus away in order to bring him to salvation and because of this Philemon should forget about everything else. It is otherwise naïve to ask "if he has wronged you IN ANY WAY." Paul here gives evidence of the fact that he is viewing Onesimus the way God would view him. In the eyes of God, Onesimus is no longer guilty of any wrong. Grace has cancelled his guilt.

"Or owes you anything"

The word translated "owes" is "opheilei" (ὀφείλει). It means "to incur a debt." It means "to be obligated by what is due or fitting." It is "to be delinquent in terms of finances." He had to have deprived Philemon of his services for a long period of time. It is widely believed he had stolen a large sum of money to finance his trip to Rome. There is no verification in the text. It is clear that Paul is applying every possible of pressure to get Philemon to volunteer to release Onesimus.

You may remember that in our study of Colossians chapter one, Paul talked about the way blessing multiply under the blessing of God. Was he applying this idea to Philemon's situation? He might be, but we do not know for sure.

"Charge that to my account."

The pressure is increased again. Literally it says, "charge my account and keep charging my account." We do not know what that means. We do not know, but the amount we are talking about has to be huge. We do not know of any private funds that Paul had available to him.

I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (lest I should mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). Philemon 19

"I Paul, am writing this with my own hand"

Paul suddenly turned quite legal in this message. It appears that Paul had not written the rest of this message. A scribe could write a message, but a signature had to be made by the person identified. It was a way of guaranteeing what he had said. He apparently was taking responsibility for a large sum of money.

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"I will repay it"

This is written very forcefully. It is a way of emphasizing the promise that he is making. One must ask the question, where would Paul get this kind of money to repay what Onesimus probably had stolen?

"Lest I should mention to you that"

This is a parenthesis. It is said like a planned after thought. This kind of statement is usually designed to catch a person off guard. One cannot say what Paul intended, but that is what this kind of statement usually accomplishes. There is no shortage of pressure in this statement.

"You owe me even your own self as well."

It also makes his promise to pay superfluous. It is like saying, "I think this should cancel out that debt." Of course, Paul is speaking spiritually; speaking about bringing Philemon to faith in Christ.

Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Philemon 20

"Yes, brother,"

The use of the word "yes" gives this statement a very casual sound. Paul refers to Philemon as "brother" for the third time in 20 verses. Again, this word carried intense meaning for the people of that culture. It meant that they mutually had responsibility to care for the financial needs of the other. It also meant that they had responsibility to defend each other no matter what may be the cause or results. Paul is forcing Philemon to keep in mind that Onesimus is now his Christian brother. Philemon may feel that Onesimus owes him a great deal, but Paul is making it clear that as the brother of Onesimus, Philemon must bear responsibility for the troubles Onesimus faces.

"Let me benefit from you in the Lord"

The Greek text is quite forceful. Paul wrote, "I from you, I receive benefit in the Lord." Paul indicated that he would be a beneficiary if Philemon did as he instructed. The addition of the words, "in the Lord" apparently suggest that he is talking in terms of the ministry in Rome and not for himself personally.

"Refresh my heart in Christ"

Again, our translation uses the word "heart" when the word is "tender affections." The word translated "refresh" is "anapausin" (ἀνάπαυσιν). It means "to give rest," "to interrupt strenuous work." It is to find a fixed place for home. The other side of this understanding is staggering. If Philemon does not allow Onesimus to return with Paul, then the apostle would not be refreshed. It is a way of hinting that a refusal would build a wall between the two friends.

Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. Philemon 21

"Having confidence in your obedience,"

The word translated "confidence" is "pepoithos" (πεποιθῶς). It means "to be totally persuaded." It is to be very tranquil because of one's confidence in another. Paul had confidence in Philemon's obedience.

"I write to you"

Actually this is an aorist tense. The aorist is punctiliar or pointed action. One might say it, I wrote to you. This is intended as a way to assure Philemon of how much confidence Paul had in Philemon's determination to do what is right. Again, there is intense pressure here. If Philemon does not do as Paul is pressuring him to do, then he will be disobedient to Paul who is a presbyter in the church and should be obeyed by the people in the church.

"Since I know that you will do"

The word for "know" is "eidos" (εἶδῶς). It is more than just knowing. It is the word used to describe the knowledge of God. It is full knowledge. It is knowing all there is to know about a given subject.

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Paul attempted to express unusual confidence in the obedience of Philemon. It may have seemed that certain to Paul, but it was not nearly that clear to Philemon. Those who criticize Paul for his position in the book of Philemon speak of this statement as just one more way for Paul to place pressure on Philemon to acquiesce and do what Paul thought was appropriate.

"Even more than what I say"

This is a forceful statement. It is like saying, "I know you will do and never stop doing above and beyond what I say". It is a certainty that all of this has been unnecessary because you will do even more than that." If that were the case, then Paul has belabored the issue unnecessarily. Paul is walking a fine line. He wants to help Philemon see that his stand, at this point, is crucial to the whole witness of the church. At the same time he does not want Philemon to do this solely because he was forced to do so. I doubt if we could have done a better job of balancing these two concerns had we done the writing. At the same time, one must ask, "just how much more could Philemon possibly do than what Paul is pressuring him to do?"

And at the same time also prepare me a lodging; for I hope that through your prayers I shall be given unto you. Philemon 22

"And at the same time also"

Again this is almost an after thought. It is as though a thought just came to him as he was writing. In many instances a sentence designed like this introduces a contrary thought. One thing it certainly does is to add a whole new dimension of pressure for Philemon to do as Paul insists.

"Prepare me a lodging"

The word translated "prepare" is "etoimadze" (ἐτοιμαζέ). It means "to get something ready." It is "to prepare as requested." The form of this word is present indicative active. It is something you do and keep on doing.

A problem develops here. Rome is a long way from Colosseum. It would take Paul weeks to travel there if he left immediately. In that era, people did not sleep in beds. They slept on a mat on the floor. It would take all of 10 seconds to prepare a lodging for him. It is difficult to anticipate that they needed advance warning to have things ready for him to come for a visit. It seems more plausible that it was a way of saying to Philemon that he was coming to see what he had done with Paul's instructions in this letter.

"For I hope that through your prayers"

Paul had been waiting for his trial for nearly two years. There was almost daily anticipation. Paul said, "I expect and keep on expecting." The expectation did not have to do with the docket of the court. His expectation had to do with the prayers of Philemon and the people of the church in Colosseum.

"I shall be given unto you."

Paul knew that he was innocent of any charge that might be brought against him. He was very certain that he was going to be released and able to come to Colosseum for a visit.

Philemon 23-25 – Greetings and Farewell

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, Philemon 23

"Epaphras my fellow prisoner in Christ greets you"

Epaphras

This name is a contraction of the name Epaphroditus and a very common name during the Roman era. He was selected to carry the gift from the Philippian church to Paul when he was imprisoned in Rome. Epaphras worked so hard with Paul that he ruined his health and almost died. Paul sent the Philippian letter with him so that the people could see that he was well.

As do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. Philemon 24

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Mark

His name was John Mark; One name was Hebrew, the other Greek. Apparently his mother was Jewish and his father a Roman. He was a close associate of both Peter and Paul. He was apparently led to Christ by Peter. John's mother was a member of the Jerusalem congregation which met in their home. Barnabas was Mark's cousin.

Mark traveled with both Paul and Barnabas. Mark caused a problem between Paul and Barnabas when he left their missionary journey. He apparently had regained Paul's good graces by the time Colossians was written. II Timothy 4:11 indicates that Paul considered him a "faithful Christian worker." He was apparently a scribe for both Peter and Paul.

Aristarchus

He was a faithful companion of Paul. In Acts 19:29, he was seized along with Gaius in Ephesus during a riot there over Christianity. He was a native of Thessalonica. He was called one of the "men of Macedonia." He accompanied Paul to Palestine. He was apparently a prisoner along with Paul. Tradition indicates that he was martyred during the reign of Nero.

Demas

Paul referred to him, in this passage, as his "fellow worker." He was a trusted associate of Paul in Rome. He finally left and went to Thessalonica. We know little more about his life. The way Paul reported that Demas had left him suggests that he had ceased to struggle for the gospel.

Luke

He was a traveling companion with Paul. He was a gentile. He may have come from Antioch and another guess is that he may have come from Philippi. The "we" section of Acts indicates that he was present when these events took place. He was a member of the church. He accompanied Paul to Rome. He was intimately familiar with the Old Testament and this has caused some to believe that he was a Jew. He was a highly trained physician. He wrote the most beautiful Greek in the New Testament in the books of Luke and Acts.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Philemon 25

This was a customary way for Paul to close a letter. It has convinced many that Paul, indeed was the writer. Throughout his life and ministry, Paul was always puzzled by the Grace of God – how it could have been given to a man like him. Though he could never grasp the full meaning of this grace, he wanted every believer to know that grace as he knew it.

In the opening paragraph of this very brief epistle, Paul addressed the recipients. In verse two there is a statement that is sometimes overlooked. The text reads, "and to the church in your house." This indicates that the letter is not just addressed to Philemon and his immediate family, but was intended for the hearing of the church that met in their home. This means that the whole congregation would know what Paul was pressuring Philemon to do. They would also know just how obedient Philemon was to the pressured suggestion Paul made in this letter. This was just one more form of intense pressure Paul applied to Philemon to make a courageous stand in an area where nothing of this nature had ever happened before. Paul was asking Philemon to place his very life at risk in order to take a stand for the Lord.

Reflections

Many questions come to mind as we reflect on this epistle. Essentially, there is no mention of Onesimus' error. It is as though he did nothing wrong. In fact Paul said to Philemon, "IF he has treated you unjustly in any way and IF he owes you anything." These are conditional statements and do not presume that this has actually happened. In the epistle, Paul mentions the possibility that God either allowed this or caused this in order to bring Onesimus to faith in Christ. That would mean that if God did, in fact, allow or cause this, to deal negatively with Onesimus would be taking a stand against God.

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According to the laws of the empire, Onesimus wronged Philemon in a number of ways. This is not a conditional possibility, but an absolute condition. In spite of this, Paul never mentioned that he had done wrong.

There is a problem between what Paul recommends here and what he gives as instructions in other epistles about the same subject. Elsewhere, slaves are instructed to obey their masters, even the abusive, pagan masters. That being the case Onesimus was certainly out of line in what he did in relationship to Philemon. Wrongs require apology and confession. When this happens, the forgiveness of the believer must be anticipated. There is no mention of this in this epistle. The total emphasis is on what Paul is practically demanding Philemon to do.

There is a very strong statement to the effect that Paul wanted this decision to be of Philemon's free will. The problem, however, is that there are a string of statements all through the verses of this brief epistle where Paul is placing almost impossible pressure on Philemon to do what is "proper." There is little real opportunity for Philemon to act on his own free will.

In Paul's defense, we must realize that he was dealing with an impossible situation. The law of the land was against Philemon doing what Paul thought was "proper." The other slave owners would not give Philemon any peace unless he would give the most severe punishment to Onesimus as a way of sending a message to the other slaves that this is what happens to slaves who run away.

Up until this time, the church had taken a stand on slavery that made the other slave owners uncomfortable, but it was always short of releasing them. Paul is crossing new territory and as usual, it is always an uncomfortable passage.

There are two traditions that have come down to us concerning Onesimus. There is one tradition that says that the name of the Bishop of Ephesus was a man named Onesimus. It is thought that it was this slave. There is another tradition that says that Philemon, Apphia, Archippus and Onesimus were stoned to death in the presence of the governor of their province. There is no way to validate either of these traditions. They are interesting, but not helpful. If you think about this for a moment, however, you realize that if either of these traditions are true, both Philemon and Onesimus obviously placed their commitment to God in Christ ahead of even their own lives. On occasion, we encounter the need to make decisions that could be physically costly. When that time comes in your life and mine, what will we do?

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that both Philemon and the church that met in his home were in a very delicate situation. In Colossians, Paul called upon every member of the fellowship to take a very strong, visible stand for righteousness. From earliest times, as a person took an increasingly strong stand for righteousness, that person was increasingly exposed to severe forms and expressions of persecution. Add to this the fact that this church lived in the midst of some of the most barbaric people in the world. Paul was literally asking the people of this fellowship to lay down their lives for the Gospel.

In the letter to Philemon, Paul pressured this close friend and leader of the church to take such a radical stand that would shock the entire world. Modern farmers think more of their herd of cattle than the slave owners of that day thought of their slaves. The possible implications of Philemon's decision could tear the Roman Empire apart and precipitate the total destruction of the empire. That, of course, is exactly what happened, eventually. It is to this that the Scriptures elude when it speaks of "filling up what is lacking of the sufferings of Christ."

Interestingly, the only situations of slavery in our time are Christians being sold as slaves because of their faith in Christ. There is more persecution in our time than in any era of the life of the church of Jesus Christ.,

Again, when war is over, no nation on earth kills every one hundredth prisoner of war as a sacrifice to the sword god, or do we? Is it really different when nations scramble to secure fissionable material so that they can boast of their nuclear capability and threaten their neighbors? Is it really different that nations invest huge sums to perfect a nuclear delivery system when millions of their people are literally starving to death?

The message and commands of the Gospel do not change. The Gospel calls upon every believer to take an ever increasingly strong and visible stand for righteousness. If we could only see it, we are called upon to live our lives in such a way that our character and lifestyle would shock the whole world.

Think for a moment, about our thoughts and prayers. In the book of Acts, the apostles rejoiced that they were privileged to suffer for the cause of Christ. What do we think; how do we pray when people in some parts of Africa are sold as slaves because of their faith in Christ? Have you ever rejoiced at this? Do you know anyone who does? Is there any hint of rejoicing when our brothers and sisters in Christ in places like China and the Eurasian countries are imprisoned and beaten to death because of Christ? How do we respond when we hear of a situation in Eastern Europe where people came to the church on Sunday only to discover the head of their pastor lying lifelessly on the altar of the church? Basically, these are not viewed as causes for rejoicing.

One of the recurring themes of the Scriptures is that if Jesus is our Lord, we will share both His character and His sufferings. Faith MUST inescapably confront the people and values of our decadent culture.

In the short term, this confrontation will inevitably lead to persecution and suffering for the cause of Christ. It is not that Christians must learn to enjoy suffering and pain. It is that awareness that in the suffering of Jesus, our redemption was made secure. In our suffering for the cause of Christ, we make it possible for the lost to see the presence of Christ in us and then they might seek the forgiveness of Christ for themselves. It is a prophetic word, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

In the long term, we know that we must suffer. We know that it definitely appears that we are and will be losing. It appeared to the Pharisees that they had definitely gotten rid of Jesus. Only later did they realize how erroneous that presumption had been. Despite what the short term appears to be, we know that as Jesus rose triumphant from the dead, He will return in glory to rule and reign over all the earth.

We do not come to the point of rejoicing that we are found worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ by the stiffening of our will. This only comes as day by day our love for God and our abiding in Christ grow

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and keep on growing until nothing on earth is more important than faithful service to the one who gave His life in order that we might live.