

WRITER

The letter of Colossians was written by the apostle Paul to the Christians in the cities of Colosse and Laodicea (4:16) (See "Writer" in the intro. to Rm). It is evident that Paul had never been to Colosse on any trip that is recorded in the book of Acts. However, from the results of his work in Ephesus, he possibly had contact with the disciples in Colosse. We would assume that the disciples had contact with one another throughout the area.

DATE

This was one of the four letters that Paul wrote during his first Roman imprisonment. He was imprisoned in Rome for about two years around A.D. 61-63. During this first Roman imprisonment, he wrote Ephesians, Philipians, Colossians and Philemon. He may have written this letter before the letter to the Ephesians because the letter to the Ephesians seems to expand on the thoughts of what he presents in this letter.

THEME

The theme of this letter is taken from 1:16-18. The key verse would be 1:18: *"And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that in all things He might have the preeminence."* Paul focuses on the present exaltation of Christ. It is in Christ that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells. Therefore, He is over all things since all things were created by Him (1:16). The theme of the letter, therefore, focuses on the Christ of the church, whereas Ephesians focuses on the church of the Christ. Colossians identifies the cause of the church, that is, Christ. By focusing on Christ, Paul writes in order that we know Him according to who He now is (See comments 2 Co 5:16).

PURPOSE

The Colossian disciples, as well as all other disciples

in western Asia Minor, were located in a religious culture that was greatly influenced by Far East mysticism. A mixture of eastern mysticism with Judaism produced a Judaeo-gnosticism that had, by the time of writing, permeated the synagogues. Jewish converts seemed to have brought some of their gnostic beliefs into the church, and thus, were attacking the nature of who Jesus is in reference to His being and authority as one with the Godhead.

The heresy of Gnosticism is not dealt with directly in the letter. From what Paul says in this letter, there was the prevalent belief that Jesus was at least above the level of man. It was believed that He was superior to man, but to some not great enough in deity to qualify Him to be the sacrificial offering of the incarnate God on behalf of humanity. He was superhuman. However, it was believed that He was not deity as God.

In conjunction with the preceding false concepts that seemed to permeate the world view of some of the Colossians, a system of legalistic religiosity came into the church as a substitute for salvation by God's grace (See comments Gl 1:6-9). This system of religion was common in the religious institutions of the culture of both the Jews and Gentiles. Those of this system of religion taught that through legal religious performances one could place demands on God in order to merit salvation (See comments in the intro. to Gl).

Epaphras, who was one of the evangelists of the region, was experiencing the invasion of Judaeo-gnosticism among the Colossian disciples. The influence of this teaching was possibly affecting the church in the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13,16). Epaphras thus traveled to Rome where he explained the situation to Paul. Realizing that the very foundation of the church was under attack by a teaching that corrupted the nature of who Jesus Christ is, the Holy Spirit moved Paul to write this letter to the disciples in the region of Colosse. The letter was directed primarily to the Colossian disciples, though it was to be copied, sent and read to the disciples in Laodicea (4:16) and Hierapolis (4:13).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Paul's purpose for writing, therefore, was to exalt the preeminence of Jesus over all things (1:15-23). He wrote to explain his apostolic work of preaching the truth of the gospel in a world of false religions (2:6 - 3:4), and to exhort the Colossian disciples to maintain Christian principles in their behavior (3:5 - 4:6).

Colosse was a city of Phrygia in the western part of Asia Minor. The cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea were nearby (2:1; 4:13,16). The city of Colosse was located on the Lycus River and was about 160 kilometers (100 miles) east of the city of Ephesus. Colosse was a commercial city that traded in textiles, wool and a precious dye that was unique to the area. It was also a religious center, being the location of the throne of the goddess Cybele. Stoic and Epicurean philosophies, with Egyptian religious beliefs, abounded in the area. Because it was on a trade route between Rome and the Far East, the teaching of oriental religions, with their mysticism, infiltrated the area and flourished at the time the letter was written.

In the 2nd century before Christ, Antiochus III resettled about two thousand Jewish families in the area of Colosse. These Jews were brought from the Mesopotamian area where Judaism had been influenced by religious beliefs of the Far East. The combination of these religious beliefs later led to the development of systematic Gnosticism in Asia Minor in the 2nd century. At the time Paul wrote the prison epistles (Ep, Ph, Cl, Pl), the beginnings of this philosophy had already been initiated in the minds of the religious people throughout the region. The principal beliefs of the heresy were already infiltrating the church. Therefore, in this letter to the Colossian brethren, as well as the other prison letters and the letters to Timothy and the Corinthians, Paul mentions those religious philosophies that denied the eternal being of the Son of God and His present existence as God over all.

The churches in Colosse, Hierapolis and Laodicea were probably started by Epaphras (1:7; 4:12,13), though Paul possibly visited Hierapolis and Laodicea during the almost three years he worked with the Christians

in Ephesus (At 19:10). The church met in at least two houses in Colosse (Compare Pl 2 with Cl 4:9 & 4:15). The homes of members were the customary meeting place of all the disciples at this time in the growth of the early church. We must assume that the disciples that are addressed in all the cities of the New Testament, therefore, were meeting in several different homes of the members throughout each city.

The church in Colosse probably consisted mainly of Gentile converts, though there were many Jews in the region, and consequently, among the disciples. Because there is little direct reference to the Old Testament by quotation, it is believed that the church was composed primarily of Gentiles. However, in the letter there is a strong reference to Judaism which was a system of religion of the Jews that they had constructed after their own traditions (Mk 7:1-9; see comments Gl 1:13,14). It was this system of religion, in conjunction with the religious influences that the Gentiles brought into the church, that Paul attacks in this letter. He begins first by reaffirming the nature of the being, existence and authority of Jesus. Since Jesus is who He said He was, such should motivate Christian behavior. After affirming the nature of Jesus' present existence, Paul thus moves into the Christ-like behavior of those who have submitted to the lordship of Jesus over all things. They manifest in their lives that they believe the gospel.

Introduction

(1:1-8)

Outline: (1) Greetings (1:1,2), (2) Thanksgiving for the Colossians (1:3-8)

Chapter 1

GREETINGS

1:1 This was a common manner of addressing the disciples. Paul addresses these disciples from the ministry of his Christ-sent apostleship. He was a Christ-sent apostle because he was personally called and commissioned by Christ (See Gl 1:11,12; Ep 1:1). Therefore, it was according to his apostleship that he wrote this letter. If

we would call ourselves after Christ, therefore, we must accept the fact that what Paul was teaching in this letter came to him by the Holy Spirit. One cannot claim to be a Christian, and at the same time, affirm that Paul is here giving only his personal opinions or theology concerning these matters. Paul does not write personal opinion or theology. He writes by the direct revelation from God and inscribes these words by the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He writes those things that God wants the disciples to know (2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:20,21). **Timothy:** Timothy was with Paul in Rome at the time Paul wrote this letter. He was the young evangelist who was now seasoned with years of experience and was with his father in the faith (See intro. to 1 Tm).

1:2 Faithful brethren: The word "faithful" is often misunderstood in the present world where people often see Jesus as only a good teacher. The word used here is in reference to those who were true to their faith that was the foundation upon which Christians remain committed to their calling. They were faithful in believing that Jesus was the incarnate Deity who offered Himself as a ransom for humanity (Mk 10:45). These were those who had responded by obedience to the gospel because of their belief in the revealed grace of God (At 2:38; 22:16; Rm 6:3-6). They were thus saints of God because they had been washed in the blood of the Lamb (See comments At 22:16; 1 Co 1:1; Ep 1:1). These were thus faithful disciples who had not turned from their belief that Jesus was the Christ and Son of God who was head over all things. **Grace ... peace:** This was Paul's common greeting to all Christians (See Gl 1:3). Grace is the foundation upon which our salvation rests. Peace with God is the result of grace. It is peace that results from knowing that God so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son (Jn 3:16).

THANKSGIVING FOR THE COLOSSIANS

1:3-5 We give thanks: Both Paul and Timothy were sincerely thankful for the faithfulness of the Colossian Christians (1 Co 1:4; Ep 1:16; Ph 1:3). Their thankfulness was manifested in their continual prayers for them. *We*

heard of your faith: Epaphras had come to Rome and reported to Paul and Timothy the loving nature of the Colossian disciples who maintained their faith (vss 7,8; see 2 Th 1:3). **Love ... for all the saints:** No man can claim to have faith in Jesus without loving also the body of Christ (Mt 5:43-48; compare 1 Jn 3:14-24). All Christians must love the brotherhood of Christians (1 Th 4:9,10; 1 Pt 2:17; see comments Jn 13:34,35). It is by such love that brethren are identified as members of the body of Christ. **Hope ... in heaven:** The reason they had faith in God and brotherly love was because of their hope of eternal dwelling in the presence of God (See Hb 6:18,19; 1 Pt 1:4). Their common hope brought them together into a brotherhood of all those who had the same hope of eternal life (See comments Ep 4:4-6). **The truth of the gospel:** The Colossian disciples had not personally witnessed the death and resurrection of Jesus (See comments 1 Co 15:1-4). The truth of the event of Jesus' death for our sins and resurrection for our hope was reported to them by evangelists who had gone into all the world to preach the good news (See Mk 16:15). The Colossians believed the report of the gospel event and accepted it as true (See comments Gl 2:5).

1:6 That has come to you: The truth about which Paul refers is the good news of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus that was reported throughout the Roman Empire (1 Co 15:1-4). He was not talking about a body of religious regulations to which they must legally conform. He was talking about the report of the death of Jesus on the cross for the salvation of all those who would respond to God's grace through faith (See comments Ep 2:4-10). **In all the world:** This phrase refers to the Roman world (See comments Lk 2:1). By the time Paul wrote this letter around A.D. 62, the report of the death and resurrection of Jesus had gone forth into all the Roman Empire (See vs 23; Rm 1:8). This accomplishment of evangelism could not have been carried out exclusively by the apostles. Jesus had instructed them to teach those they baptized all things that He had commanded them through the apostles (Mt 28:20). Jesus had instructed every disciple, therefore, to go into all the world and preach the

gospel (Mk 16:15). Every Christian went forth under the command of Jesus to preach the gospel to every creature in all the world (At 8:4). The apostles remained in Jerusalem for several years after the initial establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost. They waited in Jerusalem in order to preach to those Jews who continued to come to Jerusalem for the annual Passover/Pentecost feasts that followed the Pentecost in A.D. 30 when the Spirit was first poured out on the apostles. When Jews were converted as they were during the Pentecost of A.D. 30, they returned to their homes throughout the Roman Empire, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus (See comments Is 2:1-4). The great commission of Jesus continues today through the efforts of faithful men and women who have also assumed their responsibility to preach the gospel to the world. **Bringing forth fruit:** In this context concerning fruit, reference was to the conversion of many throughout the known world and in the area of the Colossians. Many were obeying the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus by immersion in water for the remission of their sins (At 2:38; Rm 6:3-6; see comments 2 Th 1:7-9). **Since the day you heard:** When the Colossians were obedient to the gospel, they immediately began preaching the same gospel throughout their region (See comments 1 Th 1:6-8). They accepted the responsibility of evangelizing their area while the evangelists went on to other regions. Therefore, the grace of God not only motivates one to obey the gospel, but also to preach and teach the gospel to others. One's knowledge of the grace of God will not allow him to be idle in a society where people are lost in sin (See comments 1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15). Those Christians who fail to reach out to their neighbors do not fully understand the motivating nature of the gospel of God's grace that was revealed on the cross (Ti 2:11).

1:7,8 You learned it from Epaphras: It could have been that Paul originally preached the gospel in Colosse by teaching faithful men who went forth from Ephesus (See 2 Tm 2:2). One of these men could have been Epaphras. At least in this text, Epaphras is given credit for nurturing the new converts by reaffirming the same good news that Paul had preached (See 2 Co 11:23; 1 Tm 4:6; Pl 23).

Whatever the case, Paul either preached the gospel personally in Colosse, or it was preached in the city by others as a result of his teaching in the school of Tyrannas in Ephesus (At 19:9,10). **Faithful servant:** No greater commendation could be given to those who have dedicated their lives to the ministry of the flock of God (See 1 Co 4:1,2; 16:15,16; 2 Co 11:23). Those who have dedicated themselves to care for the flock of God must be commended for their love and concern for those the Lord purchased with His own blood (At 20:28). In the context of this statement, the word "faithful" would refer to one who is doing something for the Lord. If one is not doing something for the Lord, then he is not faithful. Epaphras was working for others, and thus, he was considered faithful. **Love in the Spirit:** Love is the fruit of the Spirit upon which all relational actions are based among disciples of Jesus (See comments Gl 5:22,23). Love is the bond that holds the community of God together as one body (3:12-17). It holds the community of God together simply because loving disciples are ministering to one another and the communities in which they live.

The Preeminence Of Christ (1:9-29)

Outline: (1) The person and work of Christ (1:9-14), (2) The deity of Christ (1:15-18), (3) The work of reconciliation (1:19-23), (4) The mission of Christ (1:24-29)

THE PERSON & WORK OF CHRIST

1:9 That you might be filled: Paul is not here praying that they be inspired in order to receive direct revelation from God through the Holy Spirit. Only the Christ-sent apostles were given this privilege in reference to the revelation of all truth for the church (See comments Jn 14:26; 16:13). The truth of God was written as inspired Scripture by chosen holy men who were moved along by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tm 3:16,17; 2 Pt 1:20,21). All truth has since been delivered to the church (2 Pt 1:3; Jd 3; see comments Gl 1:6-9; Rv 22:18,19). In this context, Paul is praying that they be filled with the word of God by allowing God's word to permeate their lives (3:16). They must have a submissive disposition

of spirit in order to allow the Spirit to mold their lives through their voluntary obedience to the word of God. If they do such, then God will produce wisdom and understanding in their lives in spiritual matters (1 Co 1:5). In their religious society, the Gnostic teachers were claiming special insights and self-awareness in reference to their salvation (Compare 2:8,23; 1 Co 1:1-23). One characteristic of the Gnostics was their claim to have special insights into the will of God. Their insights were not based on what they had studied in the word of God, but on what they reasoned or felt. Their supposed greater self-justification or insights made them arrogant, and their arrogance had evidently intimidated the Colossian disciples to the point of questioning their sense of salvation. Paul is here exhorting the Colossian brethren to trust in the message of those who had the gifts of wisdom and knowledge among them, for to some of them was *“given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit”* (1 Co 12:8). In contrast to those who exalted themselves after human wisdom and knowledge, they must trust in the wisdom and knowledge that came through the miraculous gifts of wisdom and knowledge. They must listen, therefore, to the inspired prophets who passed through their area (See comments 1 Th 5:19,20). They must listen to what Paul was writing in this letter, for it was inspired by the Holy Spirit.

1:10 The self-acclaimed wisdom and knowledge of the false teachers led to pride, conceit and arrogance. In contrast to such humanly devised wisdom and knowledge, the true wisdom and knowledge that originates from God produces humility and meekness (See comments Ph 2:5-11). The truth of the wisdom and knowledge that comes from God is evidenced by the fact that it leads one closer to God, and thus closer to His word (Ep 4:1; Ph 1:27; 2 Th 1:5; see comments Js 3:13-18). The error of the wisdom and knowledge that originates from man is evidenced in the fact that it leads one to be arrogant. It leads one away from study of the Bible. One can thus determine if the proclaimed wisdom or knowledge of spiritual matters originates from God. If the self-proclaimed teacher

is not studying the Bible, then we can be assured that his wisdom and knowledge are not coming from God. **Being fruitful:** When one's focus is on Jesus for the source of wisdom and knowledge, then he will produce fruit from his labors to the glory of God (Hb 13:21; see Rm 2:6-11; 2 Co 5:10). He will not only produce spiritual fruit within himself, but his spiritual fruit of holiness will influence those with whom he has contact. Others will be drawn to his leadership because of his knowledge of the word of God.

1:11,12 Strengthened with all power: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rm 10:17). Christians must be of a disposition that allows God to permeate their lives with His will (Compare Rm 1:16; Ep 3:16; Hb 4:12). "God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God so that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Pt 5:5,6). God is the source of that power which is able to produce patience and longsuffering with joy (At 5:41; 2 Co 3:2; Ep 4:2; Hb 10:34). But He can produce such only in the life of one who has humbled himself under His control (1 Pt 5:6). The more submissive one becomes in attitude and behavior, the more he is strengthened with the power of God. The more we trust in ourselves, the less God can work in our lives to work for His good pleasure. **The Father who has made us to be partakers:** "For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ep 2:8; see Rm 5:1,2). Christians have been qualified for salvation through the sufficiency of God's grace. They have been delivered from sin from which they could not deliver themselves on the merit of either meritorious performance of law or good works (See comments Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). Throughout our living in obedience to His will, we give thanks to God (1 Co 15:10). Christian behavior is the result of gratitude to God for one's salvation (2 Co 4:15). By our thankful behavior, therefore, we partake of the inheritance that is reserved for all those who have submitted to the will of God.

1:13 He has delivered us: "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live sensibly,

righteously, and godly in the present age" (Ti 2:11,12). God has not subjectively delivered us from the power of darkness against our will. We have responded to the redemption of Jesus on the cross. We responded because we could not accomplish our own redemption by the merit of our religious performance of law and meritorious good works (See Rm 3:9,10,23). We have thus been resurrected with Jesus to walk in newness of life (Rm 6:3-6). Our response to God's grace has brought us into contact with the sacrificial blood of Jesus (Ep 1:7). We have thus been delivered out of the power of Satan's kingdom of darkness (Ep 6:12) and transferred unto the kingdom reign of Jesus. We have been delivered, therefore, by the grace of God through our obedience to the gospel. **Transferred us into the kingdom:** During His ministry, Jesus said that when the will of the Father is done on earth in the hearts of the humble as it is done in heaven (Mt 6:9,10), then the kingdom reign of the Father comes into one's life (Lk 17:20,21). Jesus is now King of kings and Lord of lords with all authority over all things (Mt 28:18; 1 Tm 6:15; 1 Pt 3:22). When His will is done on earth in the hearts of men, then those who have submitted have been delivered unto His kingdom reign. The Father spiritually transfers the obedient from the domination of Satan to the kingship of Jesus. One is transferred from being a disobedient insurrectionist unto being an obedient servant wherein Jesus reigns in his heart. The word "kingdom" in this verse refers to Jesus' kingship and kingdom reign. It is not a reference to the people who have submitted to the kingdom reign, that is, the church. Our obedience transfers us to Jesus. Our addition to the community of God (At 2:47) is the serendipity of our obedience to the kingdom reign of Jesus (Compare comments Mt 16:18,19).

1:14 In whom: It is only when one comes into Christ that there is redemption by His sacrificial blood (Ep 1:7). Only in Christ is there forgiveness by the blood. Therefore, one must come into a relationship with Jesus in order to have both redemption and forgiveness (2:12; Rm 6:3). And one is baptized into Christ (Gl 3:27). This does not make baptism a meritorious work that puts God in debt to forgive our sins. Baptism is a point of reference

at which time God pours forth His grace in the life of the repentant believer. His grace has been poured out by the application of the blood of Jesus on those who respond to the death of Jesus for our sins and resurrection for our hope. Baptism is the response action on the part of those who accept the free gift of grace. Without the conditional response, therefore, the gift cannot be accepted or applied. Without the response, there is no remission. It is for this reason that repentant individuals are taken to the tomb with Jesus in order to be resurrected to walk in newness of life (See comments Rm 6:3-6). As the Son of God was incarnate in flesh that was buried, so we also if we believe in Him.

THE DEITY OF CHRIST

Paul now leads the Colossians through one of the most profound portions of inspired Scripture concerning who Jesus was and presently is. Herein is his explanation of what he reminded the Corinthians. *“Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no more”* (2 Co 5:16; see comments Ph 2:5-11).

1:15 *The image of the invisible God:* Jesus is the reflection or representation of the character and attributes of God (2 Co 4:4; Hb 1:3). Though the creation communicates the existence of God, and the great power He must have for creating the universe (Rm 1:20), we can know the character of God only through a personal revelation from God. God's revelation of His behavior with Israel identified His loving mercy and justice with a rebellious nation that did not deserve His grace. However, His work as revealed in the Old Testament was still insufficient in fully identifying His character and nature. Therefore, through Jesus, God personally revealed Himself to all men. Those who can never get past the physical environment of this world in their search for God, will never come to a true knowledge of God unless they come to Jesus. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me”* (Jn 14:6). Jesus places Himself between God and man. If anyone seeks to find God, he must find Him through Jesus (At 4:12; 1 Tm 2:5). Only through Jesus can one find the true and living God.

Any religionist who does not have Jesus as the center of reference of his faith, will never discover the one true God. We must keep in mind, however, that Jesus gave up being on an equality with God when He was incarnate in the flesh of man (Ph 2:5-11). We see Jesus through the inspired records of His ministry (Mt, Mk, Lk, Jn). However, our understanding of God through the incarnate Jesus is still limited. Jesus did not reveal the "form" of God, for He gave up being in the form of God when He was born into the flesh of man. We view the personality of God through Jesus insofar as we understand Jesus through the inspired record of the Scriptures. Any religion that does not have the Bible central to its study and teaching can never come to a clear understanding of the God of heaven. **The firstborn:** Paul is not here talking about existence, that is, that Jesus was the first of God's creations. The belief that Jesus was the creation of God is totally contrary to the entire context of what Paul is here revealing, as well as all teaching of Scripture. Paul is magnifying the supremacy of Jesus over all things. Jesus is "*the ruler of the creation of God*" (Rv 3:14) in that He originated all things. He is the beginning of all that has been created because of what is stated in the following verse.

1:16 For by Him all things were created: All that exists finds its beginning in the Son of God (See comments Jn 1:1-3; Hb 1:2; 2:10). God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit created all things through the specific work of the Son. Paul's conclusion is obvious. Since Jesus is the Creator, then He is before and above creation. He is the firstborn with all rights above all that is created. He is not the first one that was created from which God created all things. He is the manifestation of the one God who is the Creator of all things. **In heaven ... on earth:** Both the physical world and those of the spirit world were created by Jesus. "*All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made*" (Jn 1:3). We find the origin of Satan in Jesus. It is not that Satan was created as he is in his present evil character. He was created as Gabriel, Michael and all angelic beings. However, he used his freedom of choice to rebel against God (2 Pt 2:4; Jd

6). He thus led himself into all wickedness in opposition to God. **For Him:** The purpose of all things is summed up in this one prepositional phrase. The answer as to why we and the world around us exists is discovered here. We have been created for Jesus. All that exists is in existence for the purpose for which Jesus created all things. Therefore, any religious belief that does not have Jesus as its central figure of all that exists simply cannot be true. Theologies without Christ are the inventions of religiously oriented men who have been misguided in order to establish religions on the authority of their imaginations or their traditions. They cannot come to a knowledge of God unless they come to God through Jesus (Jn 14:6). Since all things were created for Jesus, then we must conclude that man was created for the opportunity to be with Jesus throughout eternity. It is not that men are inherently eternal in nature, but that they are eternal insofar as they come into contact with the One who is inherently eternal, that is, God. Therefore, one must come into contact with God in order to exist throughout eternity. We thus understand that when one is baptized into Christ, he is baptized into an eternal relationship with the source of eternality (Compare Mt 28:19,20). Separation from God, our eternal source of existence, would result in cessation from eternal existence (See comments 2 Th 1:6-9). The world was created as an environment for the adoption of candidates who would dwell with Jesus forever. Anyone who would seek to live with Jesus forever, must respond to His plea to come unto Him as the Bread of life.

1:17 He is: The Greek phrase here is emphatic. It stresses an undeniable truth that must be believed. Paul is stating a fundamental belief that must be accepted by all who would call themselves after Christ. **Above all things:** The Greek word *pro* here is also translated "above" in James 5:12. It is the best translation here. Jesus is before all things, which means that He is above all that has been created. Jesus is above all that is created because He is the originator of all that is. There is no such thing as dualism. God and matter have not coexisted throughout eternity. Evil has not always existed.

Satan is not an eternal equal and opposing power to God. Paul says that the Gnostics are wrong. Jesus, as God, is above all things because all things have originated from Him (Jn 1:1-3; Hb 1:3). Jesus was not a digressed emanation from God who mischievously created the evil world, as was claimed by Gnostics. He was God who created the world. **Hold together:** Since Jesus is the creator of all things, then all things maintain their existence because of His power. He is “*upholding all things by the word of His power*” (Hb 1:3). Jesus is the foundation upon which all that exists continues to exist. He will allow the world to exist until it has accomplished its purpose for which it was created. And since the world was created for the purpose of populating heaven, then we would assume that when the world no longer functions to produce citizens for heaven, then the world will be terminated. The world will not be terminated by some man-made catastrophe, or because men have used up all its resources. It will be brought to an end by the One who created it, once its purpose has been completed.

1:18 He is the head of the body: No greater or worthy head could be found for the global community of God's people than the creator of all things. This is why it is so presumptuous and preposterous for any man on earth to claim to be the head of the church. Such presumptuous proclamations deny the sufficiency of the headship of the One who has control over all things. Jesus is not so impotent in His headship of all things as to need a head of the church on earth (See Ep 1:20-23). Jesus is the head of the universal body that proclaims that He only is the One from whom authority must come (Compare Ep 3:10). He is the only center of reference from whom the body is to receive direction and control (See Jn 12:48; Rm 12:5; 1 Co 10:16,17; 12:12,27; Ep 5:23). Those who would claim headship of God's people on earth minimize the work of the word of Jesus in the lives of men. When obedient people submit to the word of Jesus, they are accepting Him as the only and final authority in their lives. Any who would submit the people of God to the religious authority of men, are actually stealing subjects away from the headship of Jesus. **The beginning:** Jesus is not

only the origin of all things that have been created (Rv 3:14), He is the beginning of the body of those who have believed and accepted His lordship in their lives. **First-born from the dead:** Jesus was the first to be resurrected from the dead never to die again (Compare At 26:23; Rm 14:9; Rv 1:5). His resurrection as the firstborn from the dead is evidence that those who are in Him will also be resurrected never to die again. Therefore, Jesus is the firstborn of all the members of His body. He is not the firstborn of the unbelieving world. The wicked will be resurrected (Jn 5:28,29). However, they will be resurrected to die again (Mt 10:28; 2 Th 1:7-9). Only the sons of God are promised in Scripture that they will be raised for eternal existence. **He might have the preeminence:** And so Paul gives the purpose for the preceding statements. Any theology that displaces Jesus from His present supreme position in reference to the church and creation is an erroneous theology. Any theology that is established that would endanger the preeminence of Jesus over all things must be rejected as an attack against Jesus. What we believe concerning the present authority and position of Jesus is important. Our beliefs affect our values. And values affect behavior. Therefore, our beliefs concerning who Jesus is, and the authority He now has, will affect our behavior. Those who accept Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords will bring their lives into conformity with the King's will. They will allow Jesus to be the Lord of their lives (2 Co 5:16; Gl 2:20). Their behavior, therefore, will reflect the preeminence of Jesus.

THE WORK OF RECONCILIATION

1:19 All the fullness dwell: The Gnostic affirmed that the *pleroma* ("fullness") was the realm wherein God existed. God existed in this realm of purity and light, completely separate from the material and evil world. Gnostics of the latter part of the 1st century who began to infiltrate the church, affirmed that since Jesus was incarnate into physical flesh, and thus into the evil world, He could not have been from the realm of God's existence, a realm of purity. He could not have been from such since Jesus partook of the material world through His incarna-

tion. The Gnostics believed that Jesus was thus an emanation who had digressed from the *pleroma* of God, and then, this so-called emanation mischievously created a world wherein evil existed. Jesus, therefore, was not of the fullness of God, but only an emanation who digressed from God. But Paul counters this erroneous theology. "*For in Him [Christ] all the fullness [pleroma] of Deity dwells in bodily form*" (2:9; Jn 1:14-16). Though Jesus emptied Himself in His incarnation (Ph 2:5-7), He did not give up deity. He was the manifestation of God on earth, though confined to the body of a man. Though we do not understand all that God was through the incarnation, this does not mean that Jesus was not God in the flesh. Knowing this, however, does not help us to comprehend fully all that took place in the incarnation. It is difficult to use the words of our dictionary in order to define something that took place in the transition of God from heaven to earth.

1:20 To reconcile all things to Himself: For this purpose "*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*" (Jn 1:14). One can approach God only through Jesus who is the incarnate Word (Jn 14:6). Through the sacrificial blood of Jesus (Rm 3:25; 5:9; 1 Co 10:16; 11:27), we have been restored or reconciled again to God as we were before the fall of man through Adam (Rm 5:1,10,11; 11:15; 2 Co 5:18,19; Ep 2:14,17). The purpose of the incarnation, therefore, was to bring fallen man into the eternal presence of God. **Peace through the blood:** Sin wrecked the world and all that is in it. However, through the sacrificial blood of Jesus, peace was produced between God and those who deserved destruction because of their sin (Ep 1:10). The sacrificial blood was the result of grace. Peace was the result of the sacrificial blood. The wrath of God that would eventually bring destruction to all in an evil world was thus detoured from those who covered themselves with the blood of the incarnate revelation of God.

1:21 Alienated and enemies: Sin had previously separated the Colossians from God (Is 59:1,2). It is sin that makes us enemies of God (Rm 6:23; Ep 2:1). Sin does such simply because sin is walking contrary to the will of God. Paul reminded the Colossians that they were mentally

warring against God by fulfilling the lusts of the flesh in worldly living (See comments Ep 2:1-3). Nevertheless, God poured out His grace toward them and all men, regardless of their rebellion in sin (Rm 5:8). Through the grace of God, those who were once enemies of God by rebellion in sin can now be reconciled through the cross of Christ.

1:22 In the body of His flesh: It was the incarnate body of Jesus that suffered and died on the cross. He was not a phantom spirit or fable of religiously excited men. He was flesh and bones (Jn 1:1,14; Ph 2:6-8; 1 Jn 1:1,2). **To present you:** When we realize how far God had to come through incarnation in order to reconcile us again unto Himself, then we begin to understand what Paul is trying to tell us in this statement. We must not consider lightly the incarnation of God in the flesh in order to go to the cross. He did such in order that sinful men be presented sanctified before God for eternal dwelling (1:28; Ep 5:27). Our obedience to the cross, therefore, produces three things: **(1)** We are made holy (sanctified) in order to be able to approach God. **(2)** We have become blameless by the blood in that we are no longer accused of being sinners. **(3)** We are viewed by God through the blood to be without reproach.

1:23 If you continue: The word "if" teaches that there are conditions for maintaining the relationship of the previous verse. There is no such thing as universal salvation for all men without any condition on the part of man. Neither is there any substance to the belief that once one comes into a relationship with God that is set forth in verse 22, that he cannot fall from that relationship. Those who have first obeyed the gospel must continue to respond in their lives to the grace of God by which they were saved at the time of their immersion into Christ (See 1 Co 15:1-4). If one moves away from the hope of the gospel, then he will not be presented without blemish before God (See 2 Pt 2:20-22; 1 Jn 1:6-9). Continuing in the faith, therefore, is the condition upon which one's relationship with God is guaranteed. **Preached to every creature:** By the time this epistle was written, the gospel had been preached throughout the Roman Em-

pire (See comments vs 6; Rm 8:22). These words were written about thirty years after the establishment of the church in Acts 2. Therefore, the early Christians had carried out their responsibility of taking the gospel to their world in their generation (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15; At 8:4). Such is a testimony to the fact that they believed the necessity that men obey the gospel in order to be saved (At 4:12). This feat of evangelism could only have been accomplished through the faithful preaching of the early Christians. The early Christians behaved in a way that was only natural in reference to their salvation. Since they were saved by the grace of God (Ep 2:1-10), then they walked in gratitude for what God had done for them (2 Co 4:15). Wherever they were scattered throughout the world, they went forth with Jesus on their lips and thanksgiving in their hearts (At 8:4). They needed no programs for evangelism, for they were God's program to preach the gospel to the world. They sought to do the will of the Father, and the will of the Father is to seek and save the lost (Lk 19:10). For this reason, Jesus came into the world, and for this reason every disciple of Jesus seeks to go into all the world, either personally, or by sending someone else to go (Rm 10:14,15).

THE MISSION OF CHRIST

1:24 Paul was willing to continue in the sufferings of Christ in order to continue the building and edification of the church (Rm 8:17; 2 Co 1:5; 7:4; 12:15; Ph 2:17). In the same manner, and as members of the body, all disciples continue the sufferings of Jesus because the body of Christ continues to be persecuted by the world (See At 14:22; 2 Tm 2:11,12; see Ep 3:1,13).

1:25 Paul was chosen by God not only to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, but also to minister to the global church, especially to the Gentile members (Gl 1:1; Ep 3:2). The accomplishment of his ministry was in fulfillment of the purpose for which God called him (See At 20:22-24).

1:26,27 *The mystery:* The mystery that God would reconcile all men into one body through the cross had been hidden from the minds of men since the creation of the world (See comments Ep 2:11-18; see 1 Co 2:7;

2 Pt 1:10-12). But when the time was fulfilled (Gl 4:4), God, through the apostles, made known to all men the mystery of His salvation. His plan of redemption was then preached throughout the world. **Christ in you:** By Christ living in the hearts of the obedient, His salvation is manifested to the unbelieving world (Jn 13:34,35). The redeemed have Christ living in them because they have submitted to His kingship (Lk 17:20,21). By His living in us we have hope of the glory that will be revealed when Jesus comes again (Rm 8:18; 1 Jn 3:2).

1:28 Him we preach: Christ and the cross were preached to the world that was known to his readers by the time Paul wrote this letter (Mk 16:15; At 20:20). The gospel is the good news about Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for the sins of the world. It is His resurrection for the hope of those who seek eternal life (1 Co 15:1-5). This good news had gone into the world in order that all men be warned of their condemnation outside Christ. The good news of Jesus' sacrificial death was preached to give hope to a world lost in sin. Thousands responded to the preaching of the gospel (At 2:41; 6:7; 8:4). Those who responded to the call of the gospel were taught all things that were commanded by Jesus (Mt 28:19,20; 2 Tm 2:2). Preaching of the gospel is preaching Jesus. The preaching of Jesus results in people responding to the cross. **Complete in Christ:** From the viewpoint of God, every Christian is cleansed of every sin by the continual cleansing of the blood of Jesus (1 Jn 1:9; compare Mt 5:48). Christians cannot live sinless lives. However, their sin is cleansed on the basis of their repentant heart (vs 22; compare Ep 5:27; Jd 24). It is for this reason that all who are in Christ will be presented without blemish before God.

1:29 Powerfully works in me: In other words, it is all about God, not ourselves. All that Paul did was the result of the work of God who worked in him. God works in the life of the one who is driven by the purposes of God. Paul gives God credit for what he does because it is for God that he works (1 Co 15:10; Gl 2:20; Ep 3:7; see Ph 2:12,13). Though Paul was in prison at the time he wrote these words, God was still working in him to carry out His work. Paul was one who never allowed his environ-

ment to determine his mental state of being, or even his work. If he was enduring in times of hardship, he continued to rejoice in the Lord (Ph 4:4). His mental and spiritual disposition was directed by his focus on God and not the circumstances of this world (3:1-3). The reason he maintained this demeanor of life was because of all that God had done for him through the cross of Jesus. When one truly comprehends the magnitude of God's grace, he is driven to work in thanksgiving for the cross (See comments 2 Co 4:15). Our recognition of the grace of God moves us to walk a life of gratitude. This is living the gospel, and thus living in response to all that God did for us through the incarnation of His Son and sacrificial death on the cross for our sins.

Warning Against Heresy

(2:1-23)

Outline: (1) Paul's concerns (2:1-15), (2) Freedom through Christ (2:16-23)

Chapter 2

PAUL'S CONCERNS

2:1 In the first few verses of this chapter Paul continues the thoughts of the end of chapter 1. **Have not seen my face:** In view of this statement, Paul had not visited Colosse. However, what he states here could refer to many of the Christians in Colosse who had been converted since the initial converts in the city. Whatever the case, the Christians in Colosse were evidently established as a result of Paul's work in Asia Minor. The Colossians were only an extension of many efforts that Paul had made in many places of the region several years before. Therefore, the work of the evangelist, as illustrated by Paul's work in Asia Minor, extends far beyond his personal presence. Evangelists should have a vision beyond their personal presence in order to instill within others the vision of preaching the gospel beyond their local regions (2 Tm 2:2). Evangelists should concentrate on doing their work in a manner by which they extend themselves beyond themselves (See comments At 16:6,7; 19:8-10).

2:2 Knit together in love: It is love that binds the Christian community together (3:14; Jn 13:34,35; Ep 3:17; 4:16; 5:2; 1 Th 4:9-12). Legal means to maintain unity in the body will only result in division. The unity that is based on love focuses on freedom. In order to love, one must set the one whom he loves free. A man and woman love one another, and thus they set one another free. Love does not bring others into bondage. The more freedom one individual gives another in love, the more the two are in unity with one another. Legal restrictions bring bondage. Love frees, and thus produces the unity about which the word of God speaks concerning the unity of the body. Disciples of Jesus do not seek to bring one another into the bondage of personal opinions or methodologies. They seek to set one another free, and thus through love they are brought into unity in their diverse opinions and methodologies. **All riches of the full assurance:** Paul's ministry to all members of the body was for the purpose of building them up to the point of understanding all things from the viewpoint of God (At 20:20,27). Their growth in the word of God would transform their thinking from viewing things from a worldly standpoint to understanding the world according to the eternal purposes of God. By understanding the mystery of God in this way, they would gain full assurance in the fact that God was working all things together for good (Rm 8:28).

2:3 The Gnostics thought that they knew the secret knowledge of things because they arrogantly assumed to be in touch with their inner self. However, the finality of all knowledge beyond the physical world that God desires that we should know has been revealed in Christ (1:9,10,28; 3:16; 1 Co 1:24; 12:8). If one seeks knowledge in reference to spiritual things, then he must search the Scriptures.

2:4 Deceive you with persuasive words: Christians can be influenced by the smooth and fair speech of those who deny the nature of who Jesus is and His present headship over all things (2:8). Those who resort to such practices among the disciples have twisted motives (Rm 16:18). Paul here pronounces a warning in order that

the saints be cautious not to accept teachings that attack the nature of who Jesus presently is (See comments Mt 24:23-25).

2:5-7 With you in the spirit: Though Paul could not physically be with them in body, he was with them in mind (1 Th 2:17). He desired to be with them in order to personally witness their faithfulness (1 Pt 5:9). **Walk in Him:** They must let their manner of life be conducted after the nature of the gospel they received and obeyed (Ph 1:27; 1 Th 4:1). They should live the Christian life with the same zeal and eagerness with which they obeyed the gospel. They must not allow their love and enthusiasm to grow cold (See Rv 2:5). They must not become lukewarm (Rv 3:15,16). **Rooted and built up in Him:** The source of the disciples' existence is in Christ (See 1 Co 3:10; Ep 2:20,21; 1 Pt 2:5; compare At 20:32; 1 Th 2:13). If one separates himself from Christ, he will spiritually die. If one separates himself from the body of Christ, he will spiritually die. No disciple can live as an island unto himself, and yet claim to be a part of the body of Christ (See comments Hb 10:24,25). The nature of the body of Christ is that it must nurture itself in order to remain healthy (Hb 3:13; 10:24,25; see comments Ep 4:11-16). **Abounding in it with thanksgiving:** The Christian is zealous in the Lord because of his salvation that has come from the Lord (Rm 12:11). He works in thanksgiving for what God has done through His grace (See comments 1 Co 15:10). Therefore, the Christian works in thanksgiving of his salvation (See comments 2 Co 4:15). He works because he is saved, not in order to be saved (See comments Ep 2:10).

2:8 Beware: A warning that one beware assumes that one can fall from his saved relationship with Jesus. The false teachings to which Paul is probably referring in this context were the Judaeo-gnostic teachers who were infiltrating the fellowship of believers. If the concepts of such teachers were mixed with the truth of the gospel, then the Colossians would be cheated out of their salvation. Any addition to the gospel of God's grace would equal no gospel at all (See comments Gl 1:6-9). **Take you captive:** The Greek word here refers to being plundered. Any philosophy or tradition of man that contradicts the

truth of God's word will lead to the spiritual destruction of those who would believe and practice such doctrines. It is important what one believes because our beliefs are the foundation upon which our behavior stands. In this case, the Christian world view was under attack by philosophies that brought into question the deity of Christ (See comments 1 Co 15:1,2). **The elementary principles of the world:** The traditions about which Paul speaks here were possibly motivated by the spiritualistic or mystical beliefs of those in the culture of Colosse whose religious beliefs had been affected by human reasoning. Such beliefs work contrary to Christ for they do not lead one to Christ. Any philosophy or tradition that does not lead one closer to God is a philosophy or tradition that works contrary to the work of God through Christ (See Gl 1:14; 4:3,9,10). Philosophy is the thinking of man, and thus the more one obsesses with the thinking of man, the further he moves from God. Traditions originate from the behavior of men, and thus the more one focuses on keeping the traditions of men, the less he focuses on obeying the word of God.

2:9,10 The character, essence, attributes and deity of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit were representatively manifested through Jesus (1:19; Jn 1:1,2,14; see Jn 10:30; 17:11,21-24). Those who are in Christ are spiritually complete for God's eternal purpose to create beings with characters that are fit for eternal dwelling. They are complete because of the grace of God. Therefore, the saints of God are the completion of the work of God in the creation of all things. **Head of all:** Jesus is the center of reference from which all things are controlled in heaven and on earth (Ep 1:20-23; 1 Pt 3:22). He is the head of all things for the benefit of the Christian.

2:11 Circumcision not made with hands: Under the Sinai law, the physical circumcision of the flesh was a sign of the covenant relationship Israel had with God (Dt 10:16). Paul metaphorically uses this circumcision to portray the cutting off of the old man of sin by the sacrificial blood of Jesus. When one is immersed into Christ for the remission of sins, he comes into a covenant relationship with Christ, and thus, contact with the sacrifi-

cial blood of the cross (See Rm 6:3-6; compare Rm 7:4; Ep 1:3,22; 1 Pt 2:24; 4:1). However, we must not be confused by Paul's metaphorical use of circumcision. Baptism is not a parallel to circumcision in the sense of being a New Testament type of Old Testament circumcision. In Israel's covenant with God, only males were circumcised. They were circumcised on the eighth day after birth because they were already in a covenant relationship with God as a nation (See comments Jr 31:31-34). In baptism, one is immersed when he believes on the Lord (Mk 16:16). He is immersed in order to come into a covenant relationship with God.

2:12 *Buried with Him by baptism:* In response to the grace of God that was manifested on the cross, repentant believers are immersed in water after crucifying the old man of sin (See comments Rm 6:3-6; Gl 3:26,27). They are resurrected with Christ in order to walk in a new life. The action of baptism is by immersion. The word "baptism" is from the Greek *baptizo*, meaning "to dip," "to immerse," "to plunge," or "to overwhelm." Any action short of total immersion cannot be identified with what Paul is discussing here. As Jesus was buried in the tomb, so the repentant believer must be buried in water.

Faith in the working of God: Though baptism is an obedient response to the grace of God, salvation takes place in the spiritual realm wherein God washes one clean of sin by the sacrificial blood of Jesus (At 22:16). There is no magic in the waters of baptism. There is no meritorious atonement by one's performance of the action of immersion. However, it is at the point of baptism that God pronounces one cleansed of sin, and thus, is brought into a covenant relationship with God. Immersion into Christ is essential to one's salvation, therefore, because of what God promises He does at the point of immersion, not because one has indebted God through a meritorious work.

2:13 *Dead in your trespasses:* Before one is baptized, he is dead because of his inability to keep law perfectly in order to save himself. He is thus dead in sin because sin has separated him from God (Is 59:1,2; Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16; see Rm 6:23; Ep 2:1-3). What man could not do in order

to be justified before God, God has done at the point of one's immersion into Christ. **Made alive together with Him:** In immersion one must understand that it is God working, not man. One is immersed in order to allow God to work in his life because we cannot so work as to save ourselves. As God raised Jesus from physical death, the repentant believer is spiritually resurrected from the waters of baptism in order to be made alive in Christ (See comments Rm 3:4,5). Therefore, in order to be made alive with Christ, one must be buried with Him.

2:14 Handwriting of ordinances: Paul takes his metaphor here from the certificate of debt. In the business of the day, one's debts were recorded in a ledger (certificate) of debt for the purpose that repayment be made. Paul's metaphorical use of this certificate brings to light the tremendous debt each one of us has in reference to God. Because of our sin, we owe more than we can repay. Because of His grace, we will receive more than we can earn. However, through the blood of Jesus, the certificate of debt is erased. We are cleansed of all sin (At 2:38). **Ordinances ... nailed to the cross:** Law required that the debtor repay everything he owed. In reference to our sin, we could not repay the debt. We could never with good deeds meritoriously cancel the debt of one sin. Therefore, we were condemned under the law of sin and death, having no escape through either meritorious obedience of law or meritorious deeds that would atone for sin. The problem is that we cannot keep law perfectly (Rm 3:9,10,23). We can never perform enough good deeds to atone for the sin that keeps accumulating to our account. So it was by God's grace through the cross that God stepped in with the blood of Jesus. The cross cancelled our debt (See comments Mt 18:21-35).

2:15 Having disarmed principalities and powers: The word "disarmed" is from a military word that referred to the stripping off of the enemies' armor after his defeat in battle. Through the cross, Jesus stripped Satan of his power to reign through sin and death. He freed those who come to God's grace by their faith. What men could not do on their own through performance of law that brought sin and death, God accomplished through

the gospel of grace. He reached forth with grace in order to save those who responded to Him through obedient faith. By the work of Jesus on the cross, Satan has thus been stripped of his power over the souls of men. What the world saw as the public humiliation of a Jew on a cross outside Jerusalem was actually the humiliation of Satan in the spiritual realm. Satan now has no power over those who determine to walk in the light (See comments 1 Jn 1:6-9; Rv 20:1-6)

FREEDOM THROUGH CHRIST

2:16 *Let no one judge you:* Since the Christian has been set free in Christ (Gl 5:1), he cannot be judged in reference to the observance or nonobservance of any feast day. It is within the individual liberty of each Christian to honor those days he so chooses (See comments Rm 14). There is no religious significance to any food (See Rm 14:2; 1 Tm 4:1-3). There is no religious significance to Jewish feast days or the sabbaths of the Sinai law (Lk 23:4-44). There is no religious significance to a new moon (Compare Nm 10:10ff; Rm 14:5). This does not mean that one cannot honor a specific holiday with religious significance. What it does mean is that he cannot religiously bind such on himself or others as legal requirements of law.

2:17 *Shadow of things to come:* In reference to the ordinances that were a part of the Sinai law, all such things pointed to the substance that made the shadow. The substance was Christ. Therefore, since the Jews have come to Christ, it is not reasonable that they return to the observance of the shadow as a means of salvation (See Hb 8:5; 10:1).

2:18 *False humility and the worship of angels:* There were evidently in the midst of the Colossians those who professed and practiced certain beliefs of their religiosity through the worship of angels. Instead of identifying with the person of Jesus and His mediatorship with God (1 Tm 2:5), these possibly substituted angels for Christ, and thus, worshiped angels (See comments Hb 1). The Gnostics worshiped what they referred to as intermediary angels. By physical, self-torture called asceticism,

they attempted to reach God through these intermediary beings. **Intruding into those things that he has not seen:** This one statement of Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit should forever warn those prognosticators who suppose that they have experienced the unseen world of spirits. These about whom Paul speaks in this context have claimed to have experiential knowledge about the spirit world beyond the physical world. What Paul affirms in this context is that such wishful thinkers have not so journeyed, and thus, have deceived themselves and those they have influenced. They are only promoting their presumptions as true experiences with the spirit world (See comments 2 Th 2:10-12). Paul's argument is that the only way one can know those things that are beyond the physical world is through the revelation of God. It is not within the mental ability of man to confirm experientially that which is beyond the physical world without the direct intervention of God who would reveal such. One's knowledge of the spiritual working of Satan is not through direct manifestations of Satan, but through the indirect effects of his work to deceive those who have given themselves over to him. **Vainly puffed up:** They were uselessly arrogant in their religious beliefs. Gnostics professed salvation by a self-awareness of knowledge that originated from within themselves. Such beliefs led to arrogance over those who had not graduated to their supposed superior state of spiritual awareness. Their counterpart today would be those who have experienced so-called emotional and spiritual encounters they use to exalt themselves above others. Their supposed spiritual enlightenment is believed to be a higher level of spirituality over those who have not experienced such. But as the Gnostics, all such humanly devised religiosity puffs one up in his fleshly mind. His religious beliefs are supposedly validated by his own emotional inventions or inward self-acknowledgment. Such is human originated religion, and thus, false in the eyes of God. God will allow one to believe in such, but in the end will condemn him for not loving the truth (See comments 2 Th 2:11,12). One should thus be cautious about venturing into a mental spiritual world outside

the word of God. If one does not allow himself to be directed by the word of God in all belief and behavior, he leaves himself open to the deceptions of Satan.

2:19 Not holding fast to the head: When one does not remain steadfast to the control of Jesus over his life, he will be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine that fascinates the emotional and intellectual wanderings of the ignorant (See comments Ep 4:13-16). The false teachers about whom Paul speaks in this context were cutting themselves off from the Head of the body, that is, they were seeking religious knowledge from sources other than Jesus. Once this is done among the disciples of Jesus, only division and destruction follow. **Grows:** When all members of the body maintain Jesus as the center of reference for their lives, the growth of the church will result. For this reason, it is essential that every member of the body seeks God through Jesus for knowledge and spiritual growth (2 Pt 3:18; see Ep 4:18). When all disciples of Jesus look to Jesus as the center of reference for faith and knowledge, they will grow closer together. When men look to their own knowledge and inner spiritual experiences, they grow further apart.

2:20 Died with Christ: The Colossians had crucified themselves with Christ, and subsequently, were buried with Him in the waters of baptism (See comments Rm 6:3-6). Since they had done such, they must separate themselves from the religious regulations of those teachers who would bind on them doctrines and practices that God had not bound (See At 15:10). They must not be brought into the bondage of Sinai law ceremonies, Jewish traditions, or Judaeo-gnostic religiosity. They were not under law as a means of justification, but under grace. Therefore, they were not subject to religious laws as a means of salvation. They were subject to Jesus and His will as a manifestation of salvation (See Jn 12:48; 2 Jn 9; Rv 22:18,19). They were to obey the law of Christ because of the grace of God (See comments Rm 3:31). However, they were not to obey the law of Christ as a meritorious system whereby they would put God in debt (See intro. to Gl).

2:21,22 In their former religious life, the Colossians

had established all sorts of religious codes of behavior. However, Christians are to stay away from constructing a meritorious system of religion that would be after the nature of man-made religions (See comments Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:1-9). **Things that perish:** The commandments of men will not profit in reference to one's justification before God. Such religious systems of justification will perish with those who follow them. Paul's point is clear. Religions that are developed after the religious thinking and traditions of men will perish. If such systems will perish, then the adherents to such will also perish. But the eternality of the word of God assumes the eternality of those who submit to the word of God (See Mt 24:35; 1 Pt 1:25). Because the religions of men are simply in the minds of the adherents of the religions, the religions will perish when the adherents are eternally destroyed from the presence of God (2 Th 1:6-9). Since the faith of the Christian originated from God, that in which he believes will never perish.

2:23 A show of wisdom in self-made religion: As the scribes and Pharisees during the days of Jesus, these religious performers in Colosse manifested great religiosity in their ceremonies and pompous wisdom. On the outside they made a show of religiosity. However, the foundation upon which their religious behavior was constructed originated from within their own minds (See comments Mt 23). **Neglect of the body:** Their ascetic practices gave the pretense of commitment and spirituality. But such religiosity was based on the desires of the worshiper to consider himself religious before God on the basis of his own devised system of religion. Such was not according to the word of God, and thus, it was not worship in spirit and truth (See comments Jn 4:23,24). They imposed on themselves their own religious inventions, and by keeping such inventions, gave a pretense of worshiping God. In their ignorance of the word of God, they worshiped without knowing the true and living God (See comments At 17:23-35; 2 Th 2:10-12). They were as those of Judaism who constructed a useless worship (Mk 7:7,8). Paul's point is that one cannot worship God correctly when he is ignorant of the will of God. Worship

must be based on the will of the One who is worshiped. It is thus presumptuous of anyone to lead himself to believe that he can worship God according to his own religious inventions. If one creates a god in his mind that is totally contrary to the one true and living God, and worships that god according to his own will, then he cannot assume that his worship will be well-pleasing to any god who is out there. Ignorant worship cannot be passed off as true worship of God. It is for this reason that all men must consult the word of God in order to worship the God who is revealed in His word, not some god that one has imagined in his own mind.

Organic Function Of The Church

(3:1 - 4:18)

Outline: (1) Heavenly thinking (3:1-11), (2) The nature of God's children (3:12-17), (3) Relationships in the home (3:18-21), (4) Christian bondservants (3:22 - 4:1), (5) Christian conduct (4:2-6), (6) Final greetings (4:7-18)

Chapter 3

HEAVENLY THINKING

3:1 Raised with Christ: When the repentant believer comes forth from the waters of baptism, the focus of his thinking is changed (See comments Rm 6). His mind is turned to focus on those things that are above and beyond this world. His ambition is not to live in order to use and consume the things of the world upon his own lust, but to use the world to sustain a life that is focused beyond the world. He not only thinks on things above this world, but he seeks them (See comments Mt 6:19-21,33). **At the right hand of God:** Jesus is now where He exercises authority and control over all things (Ps 68:18; Ep 1:20; Hb 1:3; 8:1). As sons of God, we are to seek His control in our lives in order that we be directed to a spiritually abundant life (Jn 10:10).

3:2,3 Since the world view of the repentant believer has changed, so has the focus of his attention. When he died with Christ, his will was replaced by the will of Jesus (Rm 6:17; 2 Co 5:7; 1 Jn 5:12). Of his own conversion, Paul crucified himself with Christ (Gl 2:20). Since Christ lives in the Christian, then the Christian's mind is not on

things of this world. It is on those things that pertain to the work of Jesus among men.

3:4 Jesus is now in glory, but will come again (Jn 14:6; 2 Co 5:10; 2 Th 1:8; 2 Tm 4:1,8). When He does come, Christians will partake of the glory that He now has (1 Co 15:43). It is the hope of all Christians to be where Jesus is (See comments Jn 14:6; see Jn 12:26; 1 Th 4:17). Christians seek to be delivered from this world by the One who has gone on before them into eternal glory.

3:5 Since Jesus is coming again, Paul exhorts that Christians should refrain from behaving after the manner of an unregenerate life (See comments Rm 6; 8:13; 12:2). In contrast to a life after the lusts of the flesh, the Colossians must present their bodies as living sacrifices to God (Rm 12:1). Paul lists the following sins that manifest the nature of those who have given themselves over to the lusts of the flesh: **Fornication** (illicit sexual activity) (Rm 1:29; 1 Co 5:1; 6:13; 2 Co 12:21), **uncleanness** (impurity), **passion** (lusts), **evil desire** (1 Tm 6:9; 2 Tm 2:22; 4:3; 1 Pt 1:14; 2 Pt 2:10), and **covetousness** (materialism) (1 Tm 6:10; see comments Gl 5:19-21; Ep 5:3-5).

3:6,7 The wrath of God: Those whose lives are identified by the nature and behavior of the preceding sins will reap the wrath of God (Rm 1:18; Ep 2:2; 5:6; 2 Th 1:7-9; Rv 22:15). **You also once walked:** The Colossians knew exactly what Paul was discussing because they once lived in a manner that was controlled by the lusts of the flesh (Ep 2:1-3). The behavior of their lives was based on the things of this world. But they had since become slaves of righteousness (See comments Rm 6:17,18). They had repented in order to live as the One who had died for them.

3:8 In this verse Paul turns to the abuses of the mouth that proceed from an evil heart. Anger leads to wrath, wrath to malice, malice to blasphemy, and blasphemy to filthy language (See comments Ep 2:1-4; see 1 Co 6:11). Christians must put such abusive speech out of their lives (Ep 4:22; 1 Pt 2:1; see comments Mt 12:34,35).

3:9 Do not lie: In the Christian community, individuals are to deal with one another with great integrity. Before they became Christians, they may have believed that dis-

honesty and lies were right in human relationships. But such has no place among the disciples of Jesus (Ep 4:25).

3:10 Put on: Those behavioral practices of life that they put off must be replaced with positive actions of righteousness. Now that they were walking in newness of life, their behavior must characterize the One after whom they called themselves (Ph 1:27). **The new man:** One is new because of the washing of sin by the blood of Jesus (See comments At 22:16; Rm 6:3-6; 2 Co 5:17). One is new because he has made a decision to maintain direction in his life that is guided by his knowledge of Christ. He is continually renewed by the knowledge of Christ in walking the Christian life. The renewing process is a continual growth in the knowledge of Jesus (See comments 2 Co 3:18; see 2 Co 4:16; 2 Pt 3:18). Our growth is pointed in the direction of the image of Jesus, and thus, we are continually becoming more like Jesus (2 Pt 1:3-8).

3:11 Neither Greek nor Jew: One identifying characteristic of those who are being conformed to the image of Christ is the fact that they begin to see humanity as God sees all men. God sees no race, social or economic classifications. In Christ one's racism is broken down. Racism is dissolved in the minds of those who grow to understand that we are one in Christ. Though sociological behavior between groups of people divide men in societies by cultural characteristics, such cannot divide disciples (See At 10:34,35; Rm 10:12; 1 Co 12:13; Gl 3:26-29). Being in Christ does not mean that men lose their culture. All men are related with one another in society through their common cultural characteristics. However, when one comes into Christ, his culture is molded by God. He is transformed into the image of Christ, and thus, dwells as one man with all who are in Christ. In the Christian community, therefore, every member is molded to be able to dwell in eternity with those of other cultures. Fellowship in the church becomes the test as to whether one can dwell in heaven with those who have come from different cultural backgrounds. **But Christ is all and in all:** This is one of the greatest statements made in Scripture that declares the fact that it is all about Jesus. In life and worship, the Christian must proclaim the centrality

of Christ to one's behavior. If one's worship is focused on what he can get out of it, then he has missed the point. If one becomes a Christian to see what material blessings he can receive, then he does not understand who Jesus is and what we must be in response to His deity. Every disciple must arise every morning and declare that it is a day the Lord has made, and thus declare that Christ is all in all for the day.

THE NATURE OF GOD'S CHILDREN

3:12 *Elect of God:* God has foreseen that in final judgment He will elect His children out of the world (1 Pt 1:21; 2:5,9). From our standpoint that is confined to time, we have not realized the action of His future election of the church out of the world. However, since God does know the future, and what He will do, then Christians can be referred to in time as the elect of God. Therefore, since we are the ones who will in the future be called into eternal glory, we must put on the nature of Christ with whom we will dwell in heaven. The nature that must characterize the elect is developed by loving God and one's neighbor (See comments Mt 22:37-40; Jn 13:34,35). Interpersonal relationships are based on loving one's neighbor. Love in action will thus produce the fruit of the Spirit in one's life (See comments Gl 5:14,22,23).

3:13 *Forbearing one another:* "Let your forbearance be known to all men" (Ph 4:5; see Mk 11:25; Ep 4:2). In order to forbear one another, one must have a forgiving spirit. All of us are individually different because of the different environments in which we grew up from childhood. We are different because of our religious backgrounds. When we come into the community of God, therefore, there will be individual personality characteristics that will often conflict with one another (See Ph 4:2,3). However, in a spirit of love such differences in personality are groomed to function in harmony with one another as every individual in the community of God is directed by love to be forbearing, gentle and forgiving of one another. In these verses Paul is explaining how the harmony of the community of God is to be carried out. If these things are practiced, every group of disciples will

maintain unity, though there will be diversity of personalities and abilities among the disciples. When disciples are loving toward one another, they set one another free from personal opinions. Since each disciple is focused on Jesus, all disciples are bonded together into one body. Their unity, therefore, is a blessing from God. It is something that is inherent in their individual obedience to the gospel. **Forgiving one another:** In conjunction with bearing one another, Christians in the community of God must go one step further. They must have a forgiving spirit (See comments Mt 18:15-35; Js 2:13). God's forgiveness of our sins through His grace must motivate us to extend the same mercy and forgiveness to others. It is the nature of the Christian community to be forgiving. This is true because within this community are all those who have responded to God's grace. Therefore, as Christ has forgiven all within His body, those within the body must forgive one another (See Mt 5:23-26).

3:14,15 Put on love: Love is the foundation upon which all interpersonal relationships are established (See comments 1 Co 13; Gl 5:14,22,23). This is the motivation from which all actions of reconciliation originate. This is the adhesive that keeps the community of God together at all times (1 Pt 4:8; see Pv 10:12; Js 5:20). Since love sets one free, the greater freedom the disciples give one another, the greater their unity with one another. **Let the peace of God rule:** God has called Christians into the peace of one community. Love must generate peace within the hearts of all members of the body (See Jn 14:27; 1 Co 7:15; Ph 4:7). The lack of peace within the body is the first sign that there is a lack of love among the members (See comments Gl 5:14,15; Js 4:1,2). **And be thankful:** The Colossians knew the turmoil that they had experienced in the world. Satan controls society in order to divide humanity through attitudes of hate, jealousy, envy and dishonesty. However, when one comes into the community of God, all these evil attitudes and actions are to be put away. Christians, therefore, should be sincerely thankful to God for providing a global community into which all men can come in order to escape the ravaging work of Satan in society (See comments 2 Co 4:15). The commu-

nity of God's people should strive to maintain a spiritual atmosphere of love and peace that will draw men unto Christ (See comments Jn 13:35).

3:16 *Let the word of Christ dwell in you:* It is the word of Christ that must permeate one's life in the sense that it directs the behavior of the individual. Through the word of Christ, knowledge is revealed. Through wisdom, the word of Christ is used in a way that will apply such to the behavior of one's relationships with others (See comments Ep 5:18,19, compare comments At 20:32; see Hb 4:12; 13:9). Spiritual growth comes as a result of members studying and applying the word of Christ to their lives. Each member of the body must grow in their knowledge of Jesus (2 Pt 3:18). ***Richly:*** One should not be casual about the indwelling word of Christ. The word of Christ must permeate the entire demeanor of one's life. ***Teaching and admonishing one another:*** The result of the indwelling word of Christ is a sense of one's inclusive responsibility toward his brother. In this case, Paul states that teaching and admonishing be accomplished through the medium of singing. Through singing to one another, the community of disciples function as an organic body. By use of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, each must teach and admonish other members. Paul does not say how this is to be done, nor when it is to be done. Christians have freedom in these areas concerning what Paul has said must be done. Therefore, we must not limit our teaching and admonition of one another through song to the assemblies only. The very nature of the loving and thankful heart of the Christian is portrayed through a spirit of singing with his voice throughout his daily living. Through the medium of words in song, teaching and admonition are expressed to one another as individuals or as groups of Christians. ***Grace in your hearts:*** As God extended grace to Christians for their salvation, the same is to be stimulated in the hearts of Christians toward one another through song. Therefore, through the medium of the words of song, Paul is in this context emphasizing the responsibility that Christians minister to one another, as well as, express their love and gratitude to the Lord. God created us to express joy through singing. In

the community of God's people, singing is inclusive, for God gave every individual the instrument of his voice. When every member is given the opportunity to use his vocal instrument, then he feels included in the family. One of the greatest ways by which Christians can enjoy fellowship with one another is when every member participates with the whole group through singing.

3:17 All in the name of the Lord: The totality of the Christian life is given as a living sacrifice (Rm 12:1,2). The Christian is a priest of God, and as a priest, he is on duty at all times throughout his life (1 Pt 2:5,9). Christ lives in the one who has given himself to Christ (Gl 2:20). It follows, therefore, that all that the Christian does in life is in his function as a representative of Christ on earth. There is no such thing as "church time" and "secular time" in the life of the Christian. The totality of the Christian's being as a son of God is to manifest the nature of Christ in his life. In this sense, therefore, all that the Christian does is determined by the will of his Lord.

RELATIONSHIPS IN THE HOME

3:18 At this point in the Colossian letter Paul turns from relationships between disciples to relationships that are God-ordained in the home (See comments Ep 5:22 - 6:4). He does this in order to emphasize the fact that both church and society are based on good homes. If a fellowship of disciples is composed of families that walk according to the directions of God's will, it will be a strong and vibrant fellowship. Good leaders, therefore, will build the church by building good families. Good families build good societies. In building good characters for society, Paul begins in this context with the wives. **Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands:** The wife has the opportunity in the family to manifest the spirit of Christianity by her example of submission (Ep 5:22; see comments 1 Pt 3:1). A wife who maintains a demeanor of submissive conduct in reference to her husband in the home has great influential power, not only in the home, but also outside the home. Therefore, in order that the husband maintain the headship of the home, the wife must allow such to exist by her submis-

sive behavior to her husband. Wives who do not manifest a spirit of submission to their husbands are not illustrating for their children an example of how to respond to the love of another person. In order to maintain unity in the home, there must be a final authority to which all members of the family expect a final decision to be made in matters of disagreement. If there is no final authority, then the family digresses to a fractured relationship between a man and a woman in which children grow up without a sense of security. Respect for leadership in the church and authority in society must be taught in the home through the example of wives. Mothers train their children to respect authority when they present a model of the same in their relationship with their husbands in the home. Societies that are plagued with crime and anarchy can trace the spirit of such to dysfunctional homes where there were no father figures in the family or where young minds were not trained to respect authority by the example of submissive wives. Therefore, wives should not view their role and work of submission in the home simply from their own point of view. They must understand that they are molding the minds of their children for the rest of their lives. The example of submissive wives, therefore, is not here written simply for the purpose of establishing a correct husband-wife relationship. It is written also for the greater purpose of building societies on the foundation of citizens who have been trained to honor authority. It is written in order to build the body of Christ on the foundation of members who honor the authority of Jesus who is the head of the church. The wife's submission to the husband, therefore, builds strong families, a strong body of Christ and strong nations.

3:19 Paul now turns in this context to the responsibility of husbands in their role in the family, the church and society. **Husbands, love your wives:** In order to guard against the abuse of leadership in the home, Paul reminds the husbands that they are to love their wives. A husband who does not love his wife is a tyrant and an abusive dictator. He behaves without concern for his wife (Ep 5:25). This should explain the extent to which

husbands are to love their wives. It is not an expression of love that is arbitrarily defined by the husband. The behavior of the love is defined by God. It is to be a love “just as Christ also loved the church.” When this quality of love is expressed by the husband, then a wife will respond with submission. Therefore, submission is earned, not demanded. In love, the husband will in all things take into great consideration opinions and desires of the wife. He will allow her to maintain her God-ordained opportunity to be the keeper of the home (Ti 2:5), and thus, assist her in those areas where she must carry out her responsibilities of keeping the home (See Ep 5:21). He will not treat his wife as property. He will not demean her spirit or discourage her work. When a husband loves his wife he will seek to build her up by his loving consideration and encouragement. In doing this, the husband is setting an example for the building of families in the future through his own children. His children will relate to their wives as they have witnessed their father lovingly relate to his wife. If the husband is dysfunctional in his relationship with his wife, he will set a model for dysfunctional families in the homes of his children and grandchildren. He will be setting ungodly models for the leaders in society. Children who grow up in families wherein the husband manifests no love for the wife, become leaders in society who have no compassion for the people. Tyrannical dictators learned their behavior in homes where there was neither a model of authority nor a father figure who manifested love toward wife and children. In this context, therefore, Paul urges husbands and wives to maintain their God-ordained function as godly examples to their children.

3:20 Children, obey your parents: The children also have responsibility in the home. Respect for authority outside the home begins in the home. Paul has already explained the influence the mother has in the family by honoring the God-ordained leadership in the home. He has defined the influence the father is to have by manifesting a spirit of love toward his wife and the mother of his children. He has also explained that the authority of headship is not to be abused by husbands. In the con-

text of the home, children are admonished to be submissive to the authority of both the mother and the father. This assumes that the parents must exercise discipline in the lives of the children. Undisciplined children will become undisciplined adults who manifest no respect for authority in society. In the home, mothers cannot maintain their leadership and discipline of the children if the children are allowed to be insubmissive to the head of the family. Fathers cannot maintain their headship of the family if wives do not give the children an example of submission and allow the fathers to discipline the children. Fathers and mothers must always keep in mind that they are the teachers of society, for they produce the characters of those who make up society and lead in society. When any society is in chaos with crime and anarchy, it is a result of a failure of the family. Therefore, every encouragement must be given to empower the parents of society to train up good citizens for society. Wise are those leaders of any society who look beyond police and jails in their efforts to consider and encourage families to produce better citizens. Every effort must be made to encourage families because it is upon the foundation of the family that every society is constructed. In reference to the responsibility of children in family relationships, it is God's order that they be in submission to parents. If no discipline is exercised in order to maintain this order, the family will be in chaos. The church will suffer, and society as a whole will pay the price in crime and anarchy.

3:21 In order to train children how to be obedient to their parents, Paul places the responsibility primarily on the shoulders of the fathers as the head of the family. **Do not provoke your children:** An unloving father will abuse his responsibility to his children. He will not generate a respectful response in the hearts of those in whom he has generated fear and terror. Fathers who behave as tyrants toward their children cause resentment in the minds of the children (Ep 6:4). Solomon wrote that parents should train up a child in the way he should go (Pv 22:6). It is a wise father who motivates his children to respond with willing obedience by exercising loving care.

Such produces an environment where the child will willingly follow the example of the father who functions as a loving example for both his wife and his children. God wants parents to train their children by the example of their lives. By providing an environment where there is submission to leadership, love and respect for all members of the family, children can grow up in order to manifest the same character in the church and in society. Husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, therefore, must see their Christian work in reference to their responsibility to build the church, and society in general, by their God-directed conduct in the home.

CHRISTIAN BONDSERVANTS

3:22 See comments Ep 6:5-9. Though in this context Paul deals specifically with slave-master relationships that were the common work relationships of the Roman Empire, the principles that he discusses here should also be applied to employee-employer relationships in the free-market capitalistic societies of the modern world. In such societies, an employee is not under bondage as a slave, for he can quit the job whenever he so desires. However, he is to treat his employer with no less respect and servitude as Paul here enjoins on bondservants to respect their masters. In fact, one would conclude that an employee in today's economic structure should treat his employer with even greater servitude in view of the fact that he has freedom to quit the job. In all things, the Christian employee must remember that it is his responsibility to make his employer successful. If through irresponsible conduct he does not, he will be out of a job, and subsequently bring shame on the name of Jesus.

Bondservants: Slaves should obey their masters with a sincere heart. If they give grudging service, such will bring harshness upon them by their masters. Their service should be motivated out of a heart that fears God. In the Old Testament, the fear of God was in reference to one's obedience to God. Those who feared God obeyed His commandments. In this context, when one fears God he will be the best employee he can possibly be in response to the will of God.

3:23 Do it heartily: Such should be the attitude of all Christians who serve either masters or employers (Ec 9:10). Christians should serve with diligence in everything they do (Rm 12:11). Paul's point is that Christianity changes the nature of our service to others. Those employees who are in the world may give grudging service to their employers. But not so with Christians. Their attitude toward their masters and employers should be based on their fear of God (See comments 1 Pt 2:18-25). **As to the Lord:** The service of the Christian is given to others as if he would be working directly for the Lord, and not a master or employer. When the Christian is working for his living, therefore, he is working on behalf of the Lord.

3:24,25 You serve the Lord Christ: When one becomes a Christian, his attitude changes concerning his work in making a living. As a Christian, he goes to work every day for the Lord. By working to earn a living to support his own necessities (At 20:34), he earns in order to help the poor (At 20:35) and to send forth the gospel (Rm 10:15; Ph 4:17). Those bondservants and employees who do wrong to their masters and employers will reap what they sow. Both bondservants and masters, employees and employers should work in view of the fact that all men will stand in judgment before God (2 Co 5:10). As Christians, we must remember that all our service in this world to others is in view of the fact that God served our sin problem through Jesus.

Chapter 4

4:1 Masters: In this concluding admonition in reference to the preceding thoughts, Paul exhorts masters (employers) to deal fairly with their bondservants (employees) (See comments Ep 6:9). Christian masters must understand that they will also give account before their Master in heaven. Therefore, they should deal with their bondservants (employees) in view of the fact that they will stand in judgment for their own behavior (2 Co 5:10). It is an exhortation that is based on the concept that they should do to others as they would want the Lord to do to them.

CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

4:2-4 Prayer: Christians should be of an attitude at all times that is conducive to offering prayer to God (Lk 18:1; Rm 12:12; 1 Th 5:17). They are not only to pray continually, they must be fervent in prayer with thanksgiving (2:7). **That God may open to us a door:** Paul affirms that if we ask God for open doors, He will open the doors of opportunity for us to preach and teach the gospel (See At 16:7; 1 Co 16:9; 2 Co 2:12). Even while in prison, Paul was asking the Colossian disciples to pray for him in order that he preach the gospel. Paul was blessed with an answer to their prayers, for it seems that he even taught and baptized some of Caesar's household (Ph 4:22). **Mystery of Christ:** This is God's plan of grace that was revealed on the cross for the salvation of all men (Ep 3:3,4; 6:19). It was unknown until its revelation to the apostles by the Holy Spirit. **As I ought to speak:** All Christians ought to open their mouths for Jesus. It is the obligation of those who have been washed with the blood of the Lamb to proclaim to all an answer for their problem of sin and death. The fact that one has been saved out of his spiritual death in sin by the grace of God obligates him to proclaim the mystery of Christ to others. With the knowledge of the grace of God comes the responsibility of sharing God's grace.

4:5 Walk in wisdom: Christians should conduct themselves wisely before those who are still in the world (Ep 5:15,16). They should so conduct themselves in a Christ-like manner because their life-style communicates the effect the gospel has had on their behavior (Compare Rm 12:1,2; Gl 2:20; Ph 1:27). Therefore, the Christian should behave in a manner that will stimulate questions concerning his hope (1 Pt 3:15). **Making the most of every opportunity:** Christians should take every opportunity to preach and teach the gospel (2 Tm 4:2). It should be the goal of each disciple to be able to stand before God and say that he did his best in manifesting his appreciation for God's grace (2 Co 4:15).

4:6 Seasoned with salt: That which is seasoned with salt is appealing to the taste. The speech that comes forth from the Christian's mouth should be of such a na-

ture that it is appealing to those who hear. Gentle speech that comes forth from a meek heart draws people to one's demeanor. Harsh speech repels people. Christians should develop a manner of speech that is pleasant and inoffensive to all with whom they come into contact (See Mk 9:50; see comments Js 3:1-12).

FINAL GREETINGS

4:7-9 Tychicus: Tychicus was being sent to the Colossian disciples as a special messenger from Paul to inform them of his state of being (At 20:4ff; 2 Tm 4:12; Ti 3:12). He carried with him this letter to the Colossians and Laodiceans. **Onesimus:** Onesimus was a runaway slave from the household of Philemon (See intro. to Pl). Paul was sending him back to Philemon in the company of Tychicus. By the time this letter was written, Onesimus had been converted, and now, he was a brother in Christ to Philemon. Under Roman law, however, he had to return to his master. Since Onesimus was returning with Tychicus to Colosse, it is probable that Philemon lived in the city of Colosse (Pl 1,2).

4:10 Aristarchus: Aristarchus was a faithful companion of Paul and accompanied him on the ship to Rome when Paul was under arrest at the end of his ministry (At 19:29; 20:4; 27:2). Paul refers to him as a fellow prisoner. We do not know if he was also imprisoned with Paul in Palestine, and thus, went with Luke and Paul as a prisoner to Rome. At least at the time Paul wrote this letter, Paul says he was also in prison with him. **Mark:** This was John Mark who had turned back on Paul's first mission journey into southern Galatia. He was now in Rome with Paul (At 12:12,25; 15:37-39; see intro. to Mk). At this time in Paul's life, Mark was useful to him for ministry (2 Tm 4:11).

4:11,12 Jesus: This was a common Hebrew name and comes from the same root word as the names Joshua and Jeshua (At 7:45; Hb 4:8). The Latin form of the name is "Justus." **Of the circumcision:** Aristarchus, Mark and Justus were fellow Jews with Paul. However, during this first imprisonment, Luke, who was a Gentile, was also with Paul (Compare 2 Tm 4:11). **Epaphras:** Epaphras was

also from Colosse (1:7; 4:12; Pl 23). He may have traveled to Rome with Tychicus. **Laboring fervently:** This is the Greek word that is used to describe a woman in labor pains to give birth. It is also a word that was used to refer to a runner who was earnestly striving to finish a race under great determination. Our English word "agony" comes from this word. With such striving we should also offer our prayers to God (See Lk 22:44; Ph 4:9). **That you may stand perfect and complete:** Here is at least one thing that must be mentioned in our prayers for the brethren. We must pray that brethren base their faith and life on the word of God. We must pray that disciples mature in the faith and maintain their assurance in the grace of God (See 2 Pt 3:18).

4:13,14 A great zeal for you: This should be the behavior of faithful evangelists in their relationship with the sheep of God. They should zealously labor on behalf of the church in order to do the desires of brethren who support and send them forth. In this statement Paul reassures his readers that Epaphras has been a zealous worker on behalf of the disciples in Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis, who possibly joined together in sending him to Rome. **Luke:** This was not just Luke, but Luke the beloved physician who had accompanied Paul on many of his journeys. He went to Rome with Paul. He had written Paul's defense documents for his trial before the Roman court (See comments in intro. to Lk and At). And here, he is still faithfully by Paul's side. **Demas:** At this time during Paul's ministry, Demas was with Paul in prison. However, it seems that things changed by the time Paul wrote the second letter to Timothy, for Demas had forsaken him and returned to Thessalonica (2 Tm 4:10; see Pl 24).

4:15 The church that is in her house: As was typical of the meeting of the early disciples, there was an assembly of disciples in the house of Nympha. There were no church buildings in Laodicea, Hierapolis and Colosse. Christians assembled in the homes of the members as they did throughout the world at the time this letter was written (See At 12:12; Rm 16:5; 1 Co 1:11; 16:19; Pl 2). It was a natural environment for the assembly of the disci-

ples, an environment in which close relationships could be established and maintained. Meeting in homes exemplified the nature of the fellowship that God intended should be maintained among His people when they encountered one another. We must assume that the church in every city was larger than any single group of disciples who could meet in a single house. And since there is no evidence of church buildings until the 4th century, we must assume that the church of Colosse was composed of several groups of disciples meeting in several houses throughout the city. Thus a "local" church was not defined by the ability of all local members to meet together at the same time and place. The city church was composed of disciples meeting in homes throughout the cities where the disciples lived (Compare comments At 14:23; Ti 1:5).

4:16 See that it is also read: The New Testament letters (epistles) were written at different times and for different situations that had arisen to motivate their writing. When the letters were written, copies were made. The copies were then circulated among the assemblies of the disciples. As years passed, these letters were gathered together into what is referred to as the canon of the New Testament. There are twenty-seven letters of the New Testament. The letters were not determined inspired by any council of men many years after the 1st century. When the letters were written, they were considered inspired documents, and thus, preserved and copied in order to be circulated among the assemblies as is indicated here. What the writers wrote in the letters was considered inspired by the Holy Spirit to be written to the early disciples (See comments 2 Pt 3:15,16). **The letter from Laodicea:** It is difficult to determine what letter is here referred to by Paul. Some students believe that this letter was a specific letter that was written to the disciples in Laodicea and was eventually lost. There are other Bible students who believe that Paul refers to the Ephesian letter that was a general letter in the sense that it was written to disciples in the area of western Asia Minor. This cannot be definitely confirmed though this was probably the case. The Bible student must not

be disturbed by the possibility that a personal letter was either lost or destroyed. John had evidently written an initial personal letter to those to whom he wrote the letter of 3 John. However, Diotrephes seems to have destroyed the letter (See 3 Jn 9). An apostle could write a personal letter without that letter being inspired by the Holy Spirit. We must be assured that all letters that were inspired have arrived to our hands today. (Jn 13:16; 14:26; 2 Tm 3:16,17). The truth that was revealed needed to be written only once. Therefore, the inspired documents that we now have as the New Testament are sufficient to reveal all truth that God desires that we have to take us into eternity (2 Pt 1:3).

4:17,18 Take heed to the ministry: Paul here exhorts this evangelist to complete the work of an evangelist to which he had committed himself to do (1 Tm 4:6). He was to do the work of evangelism, that is, seek and save the lost (2 Tm 4:5). Archippus may have become discouraged, and thus, he needed this Spirit-inspired admonition to get on with the work that he had determined to do. **I ... write:** Paul concluded in the greeting of this letter that he personally wrote the letter. He also concluded by asking for their prayers since he was in prison on behalf of the gospel and was facing possible death. We are assured that this prayer of the Colossian disciples on behalf of Paul was answered, for we conclude that he was released from prison in order to continue his ministry (See comments at the conclusion of At 28).

Commentary by Roger E. Dickson

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ABBREVIATIONS

OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**