

# COLOSSIANS

## INTRODUCTION

Absolutely nothing of any significance has ever been said against the authenticity of this epistle.

This letter purports to be from the apostle Paul; and only in an imagination running wild is it possible to associate the letter with any other person than that of the blessed apostle himself. The Christology of the epistle, the emphasis upon being “in Christ,” the conception of Christ as the “head” of the church which is His body,” and likewise every line of the whole letter are indelibly stamped with the mind of Paul.

A group of three cities, Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae, located about a hundred miles east of Ephesus, had relatively strong congregations of Christians in apostolic times. In ancient times Colossae was the largest and most important; but by the times of the apostle Paul, its importance had declined.

In all probability Paul had occasion to visit the Colossians while residing three full years at Ephesus (Acts 19:10); and if not, then certainly some of the Colossians had opportunity to hear Paul.

Colossians was written from Rome during Paul’s first imprisonment which makes the date of it somewhere near the years 60 or 61. The ISBE gives 58 A. D. as a possibility. Since this letter was in a sense a twin of Ephesians, both being dispatched by the same hand and the same carrier at the same time, the date of both must be the same.

The only outline Paul used in his letters was that of laying down the doctrine of what to believe in the first part, and then laying down the rules of proper behavior in the latter part of his letters. The Christology is very high in Colossians, making Christ the full possessor of “godhead.” “The body of Christ” with Himself as “head” is also prominent.

All of the sacred scriptures are relevant to all ages and conditions of men. It is with profound thanksgiving to the Providence which has preserved for over two

thousand years the richest truth continued in this letter to the Colossians, that we again look closely at the words which have inspired and blessed Christians through the years.

## **CHAPTER 1**

This is one of the most important chapters in the Bible because of the Christology which reaches a climax of surpassing importance in verse 28.

It begins with the usual Pauline greetings (verses 1-2) and occasions of thanksgiving for the Colossians (verses 3-8); next comes a profound paragraph on the preeminence of the Son of God (verses 9-23), and then the superb mention of the mystery and the secret of human perfection to be achieved “in Christ” (verses 24-29).

### **Verse 1**

“Paul, an apostle . . .” All Christians are “saints,” but not all Christians are apostles. “Apostle” was the high title given by Christ Himself to his chosen representatives.

“Apostle” emphasizes the truth that Paul was Christ’s representative, not the representative of the church.

The medieval conceit that the Holy Scriptures belonged to the church and were, in some sense, the property of it and therefore subject to their exclusive interpretation, is defeated and destroyed by the apostolic title itself.

“Timothy our brother . . .” The Greek has “Timothy, the brother,” and by his word Paul dissociated Timothy from any responsibility or authority for the letter to the Colossians.

Alfred Barry, *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. VIII, p. 96 noted: “In a special epistle like this, Timothy would be joined with Paul, as usual, but in a general epistle to the churches in Asia, the apostle alone would rightly speak.”

## **Verse 2**

“The saints and faithful brethren. . .” D. A. Hayes, *Paul and His Epistles*, p. 369 wrote: “They were in Christ as surely as they were in Colossae. They had their residence in Colossae and walked about in Colossae; but they had received Jesus in their hearts as Lord, and they also walked in Him as they went about their business day by day.”

William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, p. 104 said: “Wherever a Christian is, he is in Christ.” That is why outward circumstances cannot destroy a Christian. No matter what happens in his environment, or his property, or even to his body, he, through it all, remains safe in Christ Jesus.

## **Verses 3-4**

“Faith . . . hope . . . love . . .” make up Paul’s famed triad, found in these two verses. Having heard of your faith . . .” James Macknight, *Apostolic Epistles With Commentary*, Vol III, p. 479 wrote: It was Paul’s custom when absent from the churches which he had planted to make inquiry as to their state.” Thus it is very possible that Paul here referred to their continuing in the faith and not to their being converted. Colossae was a Phrygian city; and the New Testament emphatically declares that Paul “went throughout Phrygia.” (Acts 16:6)

“Your faith in Christ Jesus . . .” Ernest G. Ashby, *op. cit.*, p. 483 wrote: “Christ is the sphere in which His faith works rather than its object; in other words “faith” derives its significance from their position “in Christ.”

“Faith in Christ,” properly understood, usually means the Christian’s fidelity to God as he continues to walk “in Christ.”

## **Verse 5**

“Because of the hope . . .” This clause makes “hope” the pinnacle and summit of the famed triad of faith, hope, and love, just as love is designated in 1 Corinthians 3:13.

It is clear enough that Paul did not here merely “seem to be saying,” but that he emphatically affirmed that the Christian’s faith and love are derived from and

founded upon the hope which they received through the preaching of the gospel. Both faith and love are “by reason of hope.”

“In heavens . . .” David Lipscomb, *New Testament Commentary*, Vol. IV, p. 251 wrote: “This appears to be a superlative expression here, including all regions and spheres of the unseen world.”

“The truth of the gospel . . .” “refers to a revelation of eternal truth, itself as changeless as the truth revealed.” The holy gospel was at that point in time winning its supremacy over all civilized thought and it was particularly needful to warn the Colossians against the sudden growth of wild speculations, as contrasted with the unchanging eternal truths of the gospel.

### **Verse 6**

“In all the known world . . .” Ernest G. Ashby, *op. cit.*, p. 484 wrote that this: “Is not to be understood as hyperbole.” William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 51 supplied the following quotations:

Justin Martyr: There are no people, Greek or barbarian, or of any other race, however ignorant . . . whether they dwell in tents or wander about in covered wagons, among whom, prayers and thanksgiving are not offered in the name of the crucified Jesus to the Father and Creator of all things.

Tertullian: We are but of yesterday, and yet we already fill your cities, islands, camps, your palace, senate, and forum. We have left you only with your temples.

### **Verse 7**

It was Macknight’s opinion that the word “also” in verse 8 properly modifies “from Epaphras” and that this verse becomes a denial of what it is usually quoted as affirming, that is, that Paul did not convert the Colossians. He said: “The Colossians had learned the true doctrine of the gospel, not from the apostle alone, but they had learned it from Epaphras also.”

### **Verse 8**

Ernest G. Ashby, *op. cit.*, p. 484 said: “This is the only explicit reference to the Holy Spirit in the letter to the Colossians.” Paul declared that “love” was the

first fruit of the Holy Spirit; and thus this verse is a testimony to the Holy Spirit's work in the hearts of the Colossians. (Galatians 5:22)

### **Verse 9**

In this and verses following the limitless aspirations of Paul's prayers for fellow-Christians is observable. Note the unlimited nature of this request: D. A. Hayes, op. cit., p. 358 wrote: "He asks that they may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom . . . unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God!"

It should be particularly observed that the knowledge here prayed for is the knowledge of God's will.

### **Verse 10**

"In every good work . . ." nothing could be plainer in the word of God than the fact of good works being required of those who hope to enter heaven. Paul emphatically made good works a prior condition of eternal redemption, even for those already saved by the blood of Christ, a truth which is clearly visible in this verse. Notice also what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Romans 2:6-11.

Paul did not teach that men, in any sense, earn salvation, or that perfection in keeping all God's commandments must be attained; but despite this, those who work evil will be lost, regardless of how much they profess to "believe" in the Lord.

### **Verse 11**

"All power . . . all patience . . ." "According to his glorious might . . ." The strengthening of the Christian "according to" the might of God's glory is beyond all calculation.

### **Verse 12**

"Who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints. . ."

## **HOW GOD QUALIFIES MEN TO BE SAVED**

I. Men must hear the truth to be saved; and it is God who sends out preachers into all the world that men may hear it. (Romans 10:14ff)

II. Men's hearts must be opened to receive the truth; and that all-important event is produced by the word of God which opens men's hearts. (Acts 16:14ff)

III. Belief enters into qualification for salvation; and, as Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." (John 6:29)

IV. Repentance also figures in salvation (Luke 13:3, 5); but it is God who grants repentance. "God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life. Acts 11:18)

V. Confession of Christ is one of the prior conditions of salvation (Matthew 10:23-33) but it is God who reveals the great truth which men confess. Thus when Peter confessed Christ (Matthew 16:16), Jesus responded by telling him and all the apostles that "flesh and blood had not revealed it to him" but "the Father in heaven" had done so! Thus it is God who does the qualifying when one confesses the Savior.

VI. One is baptized "into Christ;" and after Pentecost, salvation is not promised in the New Testament to any unbaptized person whomsoever. Jesus said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." (Mark 16:16) but, when one is baptized, is he thus attempting to earn his salvation, or does his obedience of this command deny that salvation is of grace? Indeed no! Here again, it is God who does the baptizing! Note this: "Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but his disciples were.) (John 4:1-2)

It is still like that today. When one accepts the gospel and is baptized by one of the Lord's disciples, it is still Jesus (God) who is making and baptizing the convert.

God qualifies people to be partakes of the inheritance of eternal life by preaching to them, causing them to hear, opening their hearts, thus causing them to believe, revealing Christ through the sacred word, granting them (along with all other Gentiles) repentance unto life, and by baptizing them into Christ! Now, what about that person who simply will not allow God to do all this for him? The simple and obvious answer is that God will disqualify him!

William Hendriksen, *Ibid.*, p. 60 wrote: “It is God who makes worthy those who in themselves are not worthy, and thus enables them to have a share in the inheritance.” God would indeed make all men worthy, if men would permit it; but God having given men the freedom of choice and the freedom of their will, the result is that some men “will believe;” others “will not repent or confess;” and others will not “arise and be baptized.”

“Inheritance of the saints in light . . .” Most commentators find in this an allusion to the allotment of the share of the land of Canaan to each of the tribes of Israel in the Old Testament.

Hendriksen, *Ibid.* wrote: The Lord provided for Israel an earthly inheritance which was distributed to the various tribes and smaller units of national life by lot (Genesis 31:14; Numbers 18:20; Joshua 13:16; 14:2; 16:1); so He had provided for the Colossians an allotment or share in the better inheritance.”

### **Verse 13**

“The domain of darkness . . .” This is the power of Satan, the kingdom of evil, or the realm of the lost. Alfred Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 99 wrote: “The word “transferred” or “translated” is a word properly applied to the transplanting of races.” G. G. Finlay, *Colossians in Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 20, p. 6 said: “Josephus uses it of the deportation of the Israelites by the Assyrian king.”

By the use of the same word here, Paul declared the defeat of the evil kingdom, the vanquishing of its ruler Satan, the release of his captives and the transplanting of them into a wholly new and marvelously better environment, “Out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love!”

### **Verse 14**

“In whom . . .” This is the characteristic Pauline expression focusing all blessings in the Lord Jesus Christ. Out of Christ there is nothing; in Him is eternal life. Out of Christ there is condemnation; in Him is redemption. Out of Christ there is guilt; in Him is forgiveness, pardon and salvation. The holy scriptures repeatedly declare that we are baptized “into Christ” (Romans 6:3); and this truth is repeated here because so many seem to be unaware of it.

## Verse 15

“Image of the invisible God . . .” John B. Nielson, *Colossians in Beacon Bible Commentary*, Vol. IX, p. 379 wrote: “Paul is saying that Jesus Christ is none other than God Himself.” He went even farther and said that “firstborn’ is equivalent to ‘only begotten,’ and is a Jewish technical term meaning “uncreated.”

“Image . . .” God created Adam in His own image (Genesis 1:27); but Adam promptly sinned and fell from that image; but, by these words here, Paul compels us to see in Jesus a second Adam who was indeed God’s image. Christ was (and IS) also God, but the emphasis here is upon His perfect manhood.

“Firstborn of all creation . . .” Of course, his verse was the major platform of Arianism, the great heresy that denied the deity of Christ. From this they alleged that Jesus Christ was only a creature, understanding “firstborn” in the sense of being first in a temporal sequence; but there is overwhelming evidence that Paul did not so use that word in this passage. Donald Guthrie, *New Bible Commentary, Revised*, p. 1144 said: “Firstborn must be understood in the sense of supreme rather than in the temporal sense of born before.” William Barclay *op. cit.*, p.118 affirmed that the time sense in his word is hardly in the Greek word at all, and that here, “It is not used in a time sense at all, but in the sense of special honor. Firstborn is a title of the Messiah.”

J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, p. 981 pointed out that, just as so frequently in the English, words have different meanings, firstborn has two, that of time sequence and that of supremacy over. Obviously it is the latter meaning which Paul meant here.

David Lipscomb, *op. cit.*, p. 70 interpreted the word to mean in this place: “Over all creation, Christ occupies the relation of supremacy such as is accorded the firstborn; and such is preeminently due to the ‘firstborn of all creation.’”

Thus the two words, image and firstborn, stand for Christ’s perfect manhood and perfect deity.



This verse (15) is the beginning of one of the most important paragraphs in the New Testament; and, as William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 70 said: "Before attempting a study of the separate parts, the passage should be seen in its entirety." We are further indebted to Hendriksen for the following arrangement which enables the reader, at a glance, to see the correspondence between the two major sections:

## **THE SUPREMACY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**

### **A. IN CREATION**

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.

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

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

### **B. IN REDEMPTION**

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

19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness, of Deity, to dwell in Him.

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

Before leaving verse 15, one other expression should be noted: "He is . . ." not "Who was." Three times in these verses (15, 17 and 18), this imperative "IS," is used with reference to Christ.

### **Verse 16**

If indeed, as generally supposed, the Colossians were being drawn away into various philosophies and speculations involving the worship of angels, spirits, demons, and the supposition that certain emanations from God were

responsible for the creation itself, this verse was the divine thunderbolt that cleared the atmosphere and let the light of God shine in.

This verse affirms the deity of Christ as effectually as any in the New Testament. As the Creator of all things, how could He be anything less? G. G. Findlay, *op. cit.*, p. 9 wrote: “By this the apostle declares that the invisible beings of the world above us, however lofty their names or mighty their powers are Christ’s creatures as much as the lowliest objects within our sight.”

Charles B. Hodge, *Angels*, p. 4, declared flatly that: “Angels are a distinct creation being neither God, human nor animal;” and with this view, full agreement is felt.

### **Verse 17**

Here again is an astounding coincidence of thought with that of the author of Hebrews. Not only did Jesus Christ create the universe; He sustains, upholds, and supports it.

There is a glimpse here of the same thought of Hebrews 13:8, regarding him who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

### **Verse 18**

Here begins the second phase of his grand statement of the preeminence of Christ, the first pertaining to all creation, and this pertaining to the new spiritual creation, that is, the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“He is also head of the body, the church . . .” Some expositors like to take the view that Paul’s idea of the corporate Christ, the spiritual body of believers with Christ as its head, was a late blooming idea with the apostle; but such is totally incorrect.

William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 76 wrote: “It cannot be truthfully maintained that the proposition “Christ is the head of the church” was absolutely foreign to Paul’s thinking prior to the time of the Prison Epistles.”

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that there is “one body” (12:20), and is not a body supposed to have a head? When Paul wrote that the head of “every man”

is Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3), is this not absolutely equivalent to saying that Christ is the head of the church?

169 times where Paul used “in Christ” or the equivalent “in Him,” it is proper to read it “in the spiritual body of Christ” that being the only way that any man on earth was ever in Christ at all.

“The beginning . . .” Christ as the “beginning” actually begins. He brings into being a new creation, the church, His body. G. G. Findlay, op. cit., p. 11 wrote: “His body the church begins in Him, dating and deriving from Him is all in all.”

“First-born from the dead . . .” “The word “firstborn” brings over with it into this verse the glory which surrounds it in verse 15,” as G. G. Findlay, op. cit., p. 11 said, “The divine firstborn who is before and over all things, wins His title a second time for His earthly brethren’s sake (Hebrews 2:10-15).”

### **Verse 19**

John B. Nielson, op. cit., p. 382 wrote: “This verse should be understood in the light of 2:9. It is the fullness of Deity, the ‘fullness of the godhead bodily’ that is pleased to dwell in the Son.”

Ernest G. Ashby, op. cit., p. 485 also agreed with his analysis of the verse, adding that by thus stressing Christ’s deity, Paul effectively undermined the whole argument of the gnostics. He said: “It is peculiarly fitting that Paul should thus describe the Savior. It is God’s pleasure that all fullness, the full essence of deity, should reside in Christ.”

### **Verse 20**

William Hendriksen, op. cit., p. 82 suggested the probable meaning of this verse to be: “Sin ruined the universe. It destroyed the harmony between all creatures, and their God. Through the blood of the cross, however, sin in principle has been conquered . . . the law satisfied . . . the curse borne . . . harmony restored . . . peace made.”

Agreement is felt with the paraphrase, except in the matter of its application to the lower creation. While admitting that something like this may indeed be

true, this student of the scriptures has never been able to find such premises firmly established in the sacred word.

“Things on earth . . .” This we interpret to mean human beings, leaving the animal creation out of sight altogether.

“Things in heaven . . .” The only things in heaven which may be said to be out of harmony with God are “Satan’s angels,” and yet they have already been cast down and reserved in chains of darkness.

“Heavens . . .” See under verse 5, above, for the use of the plural “heavens.”

### **Verse 21**

In one of the most perceptive statements read in many a day, William Hendriksen, *Ibid.*, p. 83, observed that: “This state of estrangement, moreover, was not due to ignorance or innocence. There are no innocent heathen! On the contrary, they were estranged and hostile in disposition. It was their own fault that they had been and had remained for so long a time “far off,” for they had actually hated God!”

Here in the sparkling words of an apostle is revealed that truth about “natural man” or the “noble pagan.” Paul described him as the end-result of falling downward from the prior state of having known God and then having fallen away from it.

### **Verse 22**

The thought of this is similar to that of verse 28, but here the emphasis is upon the body of His flesh, that is, Jesus’ physical body and the death upon Calvary. In verse 28, the emphasis is upon the spiritual body, the corporate Jesus, which is the church. Both are absolutely necessary, because the spiritual body could never have existed, without the actual death of Christ on the cross.

The second half of this verse refers to the judgment and the appearance at that time of all the redeemed before the Lord.

### Verse 23

“If indeed you continue . . .” Salvation is conditional, both for the alien sinner and for the sanctified Christian. God has written that chilling word “IF” over against every name inscribed in the Lamb’s Book of Life. If men truly hope to receive eternal life, let them behold the condition stated here: “If indeed you continue in the faith.” In short, that means if they do not quit the church! “Faith” in this passage is not subjective, but objective, meaning the Christian religion.”

“Which was proclaimed in all creation . . .” Paul loved to speak of Christians as “the new creation;” and thus, by contrast, “creation,” as used here, meant the unregenerated part of humanity.

David Lipscomb, *op. cit.*, p. 265 wrote: “It seems strange that the gospel had been preached among all the nations; but, if we consider the earnest character of the Christians, who gloried in persecutions and death for Christ’s sake, it will not seem so strange. The greatest hindrance to the gospel in our day is lukewarm and indifferent character of professed Christians.”

“Paul . . . a minister . . .” William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 85 defined a minister thus: “A minister of the gospel is one who knows the gospel, has been saved by the Christ of the gospel, and with joy of heart proclaims the gospel to others. Thus he serves the cause of the gospel.”

### Verse 24

In this verse Paul, dwelling upon the metaphor of the “body of Christ,” thinks of it as being actually Christ, and therefore, like Christ, called to suffer tribulations, hardship and persecutions, thus viewing it as a necessity that just as Christ suffered, so also should Christians. (Romans 8:17; 2 Timothy 2:11-12)

God’s imperial “must” is written upon the sufferings of Christians: “Through many tribulations, we must enter into the kingdom of God.” Acts 14:22)

### **Verse 25**

Macknight understood this verse as saying that Paul had been made a minister on behalf of the Colossians, which presupposes that Paul had surely preached to them.

### **Verse 26**

“The mystery . . .” A mystery in the New Testament frame of reference is not something hidden, but something which was once hidden but now revealed. The conviction of this writer is also to the effect that there are elements of amazement and awe in the scriptural mystery which can never be removed, and that, in some unknown sense, the mystery of God is not even finished yet. (Revelation 10:7)

### **Verse 27**

“Christ in you . . .” This is the essence of the “mystery” as Paul expounded it here; but a comparison with other Pauline writings on the subject reveals the mystery to be somewhat complex. There are eight expressions in the New Testament, all eight of which refer to a single state namely, the saved state; these are: (1) Christ is in you; (2) you are in Christ; (3) God is in you; (4) you are in God; (5) the Holy Spirit is in you; (6) you are in the Holy Spirit; (7) the mind of Christ is in you; (8) the word of Christ is in you.

It is mandatory of course, to see all of these various designations as reference to one condition only, that of the redeemed in Christ.

### **Verse 28**

The great goal of Christianity shines in this, namely, that of presenting every man “perfect in Christ.” This writer has no patience with the translations and “authorities” that scale down the meaning of “perfect” in this passage, equating it with “completeness” or “maturity.” Christ used this word of God Himself (Matthew 5:48), and one would hardly speak of God’s being mature! NO! This verse is the quintessence of the entire system of Christianity.

## **Verse 29**

The statement here is that Paul was striving and laboring with all of his strength to unite men in Christ, that the working of Christ Himself was present in Paul mightily during those labors. In this significant verse, Paul acknowledged that the overwhelming success of his remarkable life was due not to himself alone, but to the mighty power of Christ Jesus.

## **CHAPTER 2**

This chapter deals with Paul's refutation of false doctrine, in which the emphasis by the apostle lies squarely upon the eternal power and Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This chapter also exposes to some degree the nature of the false teachings Paul was refuting. It is perfectly clear that a strong Judaistic character marked the Colossians errors; but they were colored by pagan misconceptions also. That there may have been traces of incipient gnosticism at Colossae is likely; but the notion that Colossians is principally a response gnosticism should be ejected. The peculiar characteristics of the Colossian error most visible in the epistle are Jewish, not gnostic.

## **Verse 1**

"Have not personally seen my face . . ." Alfred Barry, Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. VIII, p. 105 wrote: "This description doubtless indicates Hierapolis;" but despite this, he accepted on other grounds the thesis that Paul had not seen the Colossians. There are certain circumstances in this reference that almost demand a differentiation between the status at Colossae and Laodicea on the one hand, and Hierapolis on the other. Those towns were all three sister cities, tri-cities as they would be called today. It is inconceivable that Paul would have named two of them, omitting the other, without some good reason for the distinction.

What was that distinction? There existed churches at all three places (4:13); Paul addressed letters to Colossae and Laodicea (4:16) but apparently did not

address a letter to Hierapolis. This can be logically explained only on the premise that Paul was well acquainted in two of these cities and unacquainted in Hierapolis. If Paul did not know the Colossians, why would he have been writing them a letter? Like most people in all ages, Paul wrote to people whom he knew and loved.

There is something sad about those tri-cities. The only mention of any of them in scripture outside this letter is in Revelation 3:14-22, where Laodicea stands in perpetual infamy as the Church of the Lukewarm. Today there is no trace of Colossae, not even any ruins, with its very location unknown. The other two cities, according to Alfred Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 105: “Played an important part in the subsequent history of Christianity in Asia Minor . . . leaving behind magnificent ruins.”

### **Verses 2-3**

An unusually incisive and penetrating analysis of the whole paragraph which began at 1:24 and ends with these verses was written by G. Campbell Morgan, *op. cit.*, p. 496 who wrote: “We find reference to a threefold mystery: (1) the church which is the body of Christ; (2) the secret of life in the individual believer, “Christ in you, the hope of glory;” and (3) the deepest mystery of all, “the mystery of God even Christ.”

As frequently pointed out, the “mystery” of the New Testament is exceedingly large and extensive, no less than three facets of it appearing in the single paragraph before us; and yet, strangely enough, all parts of this mystery are wrapped, entwined and fitted together in the most amazing unity.

“In whom, are written all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge . . .” John B. Nielson, *op. cit.*, p. 396 read the meaning of this to be: “In Jesus Christ are hid all the attributes of Deity.” Nielson, *Ibid*, said: “The word hidden is construed as meaning, “Contained, waiting to be revealed in their time.”

George A. Buttrick, *Christ and Man’s Dilemma*, p. 29ff concluded with the grand proposition that for mankind the legitimate answer is not a mathematical formula, an intricate scientific gadget, nor some startling new discovery—it is a Person; that Person is Christ!



## Verse 4

“Delude . . . persuasive argument . . .” These are two of the 34 words peculiar to Colossians, as mentioned in the introduction; several others appear in this chapter.

Alfred Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 105 wrote: “To beguile” (delude) here is “to reason into error;” enticing words are “words of persuasion” rather than of reason or revelation. It would be difficult to describe more accurately the marvelous fabrics of Gnostic speculation, each step claiming to be based on some fancied probability or metaphysical propriety, but the whole as artificial as the cycles and epicycles of the old Ptolemaic astronomy.”

“No one . . .” This is the springboard from which some speculators identify the Colossian heresy as advocated by one man, called “the false teacher” by many writers; but as Donald Guthrie, *New Bible Commentary, Revised*, p. 1146 said: “It is more likely that Paul is using the term generally in the sense of anyone.” It is of significance that in this verse it appears that the error at Colossae arose from false speech, rather than from immoral or false practice.

## Verse 5

“In the spirit . . .” By not capitalizing Spirit, the translators indicate that the “Holy Spirit” is not referred to here.

“Good discipline . . . stability . . .” Here are two more of the unusual words Paul used in Colossians; and most scholars declare them to be military words. William Barclay, *Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, p. 131 said: “These two words present a vivid picture, for they are both military words.”

“Good discipline . . .” means soldier discipline; and a church should stand against all enemies with the solidity of a military phalanx.

The ideas of order, or discipline, and steadfastness, however, are vital to all spiritual development. Paul’s statement here that he was “beholding” such qualities among the Colossians appears to be a reference to the good report of them which Paul had received from Epaphras (1:7).

“Your faith in Christ . . .” Again, it is evident in context that Paul has no reference here to the merely subjective act of “believing,” in the manner of current usage of the term “faith.” It is the sphere in which that faith is working which lends importance to it, that being “in Christ,” as attested in the next verse, as well as being implicit in this one.

### **Verses 6-7**

“So walk in Him . . . in Him . . . in your faith.” These are all references to the Christian’s fidelity “in Christ Jesus,” that, as bona fide members of His church, fully identified as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him . . .” Alfred Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 106 pointed out a significant change of tense: “Having been rooted in Him once for all, and being built up continually on that foundation.”

Donald Guthrie, *op. cit.*, p. 1146 analyzed these two verses saying: “To receive Christ is but the beginning. The follow-up is to live in Him, which is described as involving for aspects, the first three are very similar: (1) rooted, (2) built up, and (3) established . . . from a building metaphor . . . the fourth aspect is abounding in thanksgiving, which echoes the apostle’s own enthusiasm to give thanks.”

”Overflowing . . .” This was one of Paul’s favorite words. As William Hendriksen *op. cit.*, p. 108 said: “Paul does not pray that the Colossians may begin to be thankful but rather that the ocean of their gratitude may constantly overflow its perimeter. Paul is never satisfied with anything short of perfection. Hence, he loves to use this word overflow or abound.”

### **Verse 8**

“Through philosophy and empty deception . . .” It appears that the translators have softened Paul’s words in his verse by the insertion of the pronoun “his” thus avoiding a blanket condemnation of philosophy and limiting the warning in particular philosophy advocated at Colossae.

Interlinear Greek Testaments have the following: “Take care that no one make a prey of you through philosophy and empty deceit.” (The Emphatic

Diaglott (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Track Society, p. 677) “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit.” (Alfred Marshall, the Interlinear Greek-English Testament, The Nestle Greek Text, p. 794)

“According to the tradition of men . . .” In this, Paul is in perfect consonance with the repeated denunciations of the Lord Jesus Christ against the Pharisaical keepers of tradition during his ministry.

A vast portion of present-day Christianity is not based upon the New Testament at all, but upon human tradition, supported, of course, by vain and empty speculations exactly like that Paul condemned here.

“According to the elementary principles of the world . . .” Foy E. Wallace, Jr., pointed out: “The same terminology in Galatians 4:3 refers to the rudiments of Judaism, as the connection of chapter 3:24-29 very clearly shows . . . so here “after the rudiments of the world” refers to the rudiments of heathenism.”

“Rather than according to Christ . . .” This is the summary of all Paul was saying against the evil teachings and evil teachers of that generation. Whatever human system of thought, religion, politics, or anything else that is not held in reference to the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ and in full conformity to His revealed will, must be classified as secondary in the affections of Christians.

### **Verse 9**

“Deity dwells . . .” E. Earle Ellis, Wycliffe New Testament Commentary, p. 791 wrote: “The Greek word for deity or Godhead is the abstract noun for God and includes not only the divine attributes, but also the divine nature.”

Alfred Barry, op. cit., p. 106 declared that: “Almost every word of this verse is emphatic.” Thus the meaning is intense: “All the fullness of the Godhead . . . not a mere emanation from the Supreme Being . . . Dwells and remains forever . . . not descending on him for a time and then leaving again . . . Bodily . . . that is, as incarnate in his humanity.”

Donald Guthrie, op. cit., p. 1147 stated: “The word deity (*theotetos*) occurs here only in the New Testament and denotes the divine essence.”

“Bodily. . . This is viewed as a reference to the incarnation of our Lord, His becoming a man and dwelling on earth as a human being.

### **Verse 10**

This is a further elaboration of the power and godhead of Jesus Christ. Paul unequivocally presented Christ as “the head of all principality and power,” with the words of Matthew’s Great Commission in the background of his thought, namely , “That all authority in heaven and upon earth” was in the hands of Jesus Christ. The angels are all servants of Christ, doing service for the followers of Christ (Hebrews 1:1-14); and angels, like Christians worship Him.

“In Him you have been made complete. . .” A. S. Peake, *op. cit.*, p. 524 has a most interesting observation on his clause. Quoting Oltramare, he translates this verse, “In Him you are made perfect,” which in the light of 1:28 is probably the correct rendition.

### **Verse 11**

“Circumcision made without hands . . .” The reference to baptism in the next verse has sent some of the commentators into orbit, alleging all kinds of wild speculations designed to eliminate Christian baptism as the gateway to all “spiritual blessings in Christ.” It is refreshing to find E. Earl Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 792, cutting the bud out of such notions with the following: “There is no direct analogy between Christian baptism and the “old age” rite of circumcision. Circumcision is here is the death of Christ (clearly a metaphorical reference, by which He wrought severance from the old age, cleansing of sin, and reconciliation to God.)

If circumcision should be made a type of baptism, then only men could be baptized; it would have to take place on the eighth day of their lives; there could be no prior conditions such as faith, repentance, or confession; and it could be received only by those already in covenant relationship with the Lord; and how could that be applied to an eight-day-old infant?

The obvious reference to the death of Christ (which was metaphorical circumcision referred to in this verse) naturally raised the question in Paul’s

thought of just how men are enabled to participate in the death of Christ, share its benefits, and receive its blessings. That prompted the immediate reference to baptism.

### **Verse 12**

“Buried with Him in baptism . . .” Note that nothing is said here of baptism being accomplished without human hands, the same being an obvious impossibility. Note too that is here the plainest reference to immersion as the action recognized by the apostles as being required in the baptism commanded by Christ.

### **Verse 13**

“Trespases and the uncircumcision of your flesh . . .” The deadness indicated by this denotes the pre-conversion, or unregenerated state of Christians before they became followers of Christ. Such deadness was often spoken of by the apostles in reference to the unbaptized. Such deadness, however, upon their conversion, was followed by the new life in Christ.

“He made you alive . . .” When does the new life come to the Christian? Fortunately, we do not need to rely upon human opinion regarding so important a question as this. Note the following:

“Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4)

“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) Before leaving these three verses, it is proper to note certain widespread, persistent and stridently vocal errors regarding what the New Testament says concerning Christian baptism, or rather, what it does not say! Nowhere in the New Testament is it declared that:

Baptism is a symbol.

Baptism is a token.

Baptism is a type.

Baptism is a figure.

Baptism is a sign.

Baptism is an outward sign.

Baptism is optional.

Baptism is unessential

Baptism is unnecessary.

Baptism is a physical action alone.

The old cliché that “Baptism is the outward sign of an inward grace,” if encountered once, has been encountered a hundred times; but it is not, in any sense, true.

It is a gross error to suppose that baptism in any true sense whatever is accomplished without the existence of the prior conditions of faith, repentance and confession. Without faith, no one was ever baptized, although of course he might have been wet. Although it is correct to say that “Immersion avails nothing without faith,” which is presumably what Lipscomb meant, the distinction should be made clear to all. It is feared that many have misunderstood the true teaching on this question, which in no sense whatever would substitute immersion for faith as a prior condition of membership in Christ’s kingdom, but which requires of all who would be saved that they “believe, repent, and be baptized” in order to be saved. This is what Christ commanded when He said, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.”

Baptism as compliance with the prior conditions of redemption “in Christ” is never accomplished except with the prior conditions of faith and repentance having already appeared in the candidate’s heart before he is immersed, that is, before he can be baptized.

“Having forgiven us all our transgressions . . .” This is a reference to the forgiveness of all the old sins of which the believer was guilty at the time of his conversion. (2 Peter 1:9) Sins committed after one has become a Christian are forgiven upon the conditions of repentance and prayer of the Christian.

## Verse 14

“Having cancelled out the certificate of debt . . .” This is a reference to the Ten Commandments and to the entire Law of Moses. Widespread denial of this is ill-founded and inaccurate. A. S. Peake, *op. cit.*, p. 527 gave us a skilled exegesis on this question which is pertinent: “Distinction between the moral and ceremonial Law has no meaning in Paul. The Law is a unity and is done away as a whole.

For Paul, the hostile character of the Law is peculiarly associated with the moral side of it. The Law which slew him is represented by the 10th commandment, and the ministry of death was engraved on tablets of stone.”

“Certificate of debt. . .” signifies the tables of stone inscribed by the finger of God. As Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 449 pointed out, it is deplorable that: “By the omission of ‘handwriting of ordinances’ the revisionists break this connection.” The words certainly belong as a sure testimony that the Ten Commandments is here indicated.

“Taken it out of the way . . . having nailed it to the cross . . .” These terms indicate the absolute cancellation and abrogation of the Law of Moses. Also, the fact should not be lost sight of that the heresy in Colossae was deeply involved with the Law of Moses, practically all of this chapter being particularly applicable to it.

Sabbatarian’s make two profound mistakes: (1) in their understanding of their Sabbath day commandment as in any sense a part of the moral law, and (2) in their insistence that the moral portion of the Law of Moses is still in effect; whereas nothing could be more emphatic than the New Testament declarations that the Law, not part of it, but all of it has been changed, abrogated, taken away, nailed to the cross.

## Verse 15

”The rulers and authorities . . .” These are understood to be the ranking members of Jewish hierarchy in Jerusalem, and also inclusive perhaps of the

Roman procurator who in Paul's time had already come to receive the eternal infamy of the lines, "Suffered under Pontius Pilate."

A. S. Peake, *op. cit.*, p. 528 noted that, "Almost every word of this verse is disputed by scholars."

John B. Nielson, *op. cit.*, p. 404 wrote: "On the identification of 'principalities and powers,' he thought they were demonic forces."

J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 983 was sure that: "They were angels who gave the Law."

Donald Guthrie, *op. cit.*, p. 1147 thought they, "Were spiritual enemies."

Jesus Christ took up the great moral commandments of the Ten Commandments, one at a time, quoted each one, opposed His own authority against it, showing that one could indeed keep every command in the Ten commandments and yet remain a scoundrel and a rogue; if there was ever a case of Jesus triumphing over the Pharisees in the Law of Moses, that has to be the time.

They repeatedly accused Him of Sabbath-breaking; but Jesus destroyed their Sabbath regulations by showing that they were of men and not of the Father; and by the time of the confrontation before Pilate, the Pharisees no longer even alleged that Jesus broke the Sabbath.

## **Verse 16**

Paul continues to speak of Jewish things. "Meat . . . drink . . . feast day . . . new moon . . . Sabbath day . . ." All of these refer to Jewish observances. James Macknight, *op. cit.*, p. 538 said: "Some of these were enjoined in the Law and others by private authority."

Paul was resisting the Judaizers who insisted on legalistic Sabbath observance. F. F. Bruce, *Answers to Questions*, p. 109 expressed it: "It is as plain as many may well be that Paul is warning his readers against those who were trying to impose the observance of the Jewish Sabbath upon them." The Sabbath observance is here placed upon the same footing as the other things abolished.



A. S. Peake, op. cit., p. 531 wrote: "Thus Paul commits himself to the principle that a Christian is not to be censured for its non-observance."

## **SABBATH ABOLISHED**

There is no Sabbath commandment in Genesis. There is not even any indication that Adam knew anything about God resting on the Sabbath day (Genesis 3:2). In Genesis, Moses was merely stating, generations and millenniums after the fact, what God had done in the remote ages long before Moses wrote Genesis. Historically, the very first revelation of any such thing as the Sabbath came not to Adam, but to Moses. (Nehemiah 9:13-14)

The reason God assigned for requiring Israel to keep the Sabbath was not prior existence of the institution but their deliverance from bondage. (Deuteronomy 5:15)

The Sabbath is said to be a sign, not between God and all men, but between God and the Jews. "it is a sign between Me (God) and the sons of Israel." (Exodus 31:17)

"God took it away nailing it to His cross." In what sense did God nail the Sabbath to the cross of Christ? The words of course are highly figurative and symbolical. A day could not actually be nailed to anything. Still, there is a marvelous connection. Many centuries before Christ, some tradesmen who resented keeping the Sabbath day came to Amos and demanded to know: "When will the new moon be over, so that we may buy grain, and the Sabbath, that we may open the wheat market?(Amos 8:5)

The prophet answered this question with words which to the prophet might have seemed to say that the Sabbath would never be removed; but here is the word that God actually put into the mouth of Amos: "And it will come about in that day, declares the Lord God, that I will make the sun go down at noon, and make the earth dark in broad daylight." (Amos 8:9)

These scriptures teach that the Sabbath day was to be abolished when God darkened the earth in clear day and the sun went down at noon. This of course

happened when Jesus was crucified, thus the Sabbath day was nailed to His cross.

### **Verse 17**

“A mere shadow of what is to come . . .” Again we are confronted with an amazing coincidence of thought with that of the author of Hebrews who devoted the entire chapters (9 and 10) to many things in the institution of Moses which were designed to foretell and illuminate the realities in the New Covenant.

“The substance (body) belongs to Christ . . .” means that the substance, as contrasted with the shadows, pertains to the institution of Christ and His church.

### **Verses 18-19**

This passage is another admittedly difficult one, the rendition of various words and clauses being obviously advocated by such technical disputations lie without the perimeter of this work; and we shall content ourselves by undertaking an exegesis of the text as it stands in this version.

The prize is eternal life: and the promise of it is jeopardized for everyone who turns from the worship of the one and only Savior to worship angels, or any other creatures.

“By delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels . . .” Peak, *Ibid.*, p. 532 said: “Their humility found expression in angel worship. It is therefore that lowliness that causes a man to think himself unworthy to come into fellowship with God, and therefore prompts to the worship of angels. Such humility was perverted.”

“Taking his stand on visions he has seen . . .” Paul made a sharp distinction between the things “that are seen” and things “that are unseen,” that is between the visible and the invisible, the latter being permanent, the other transient, mortal and ephemeral.

The error at Colossae was founded upon the visible, as contrasted with the invisible. This of course resulted in their being vainly puffed up in the fleshly mind.

“No holding fast to the Head . . .” The Head is Christ; and any consideration, of any kind whatsoever, that results in the severance of the Christian from his perfect union with Christ, the same results immediately in his spiritual death. J. R. Dummelow *op. cit.*, p. 83 wrote: “Severance from the Head cuts off the supply of spiritual life.”

### **Verse 20**

“Elementary principles of the world . . .” has reference to the forms, shadows and ceremonial ordinances of Judaism.

“As if you were living in the world . . .” A Christian is committed to a different life-style, in which the value judgments of the world are rejected; and for a Christian to undertake all the ceremonies of Judaism such would be diametrically opposed to his new life in Christ.

“Why . . . submit . . . to decrees . . .” The decrees here have no reference whatever to the great decrees of the Christian religion, such as baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the obligation to keep which lies squarely upon all who ever hope to be saved. The decrees which the Colossians are admonished to leave off were the Jewish decrees like those mentioned in verse 16. The blindness, or perversity, or both which leads some commentators to read this verse as applicable to the Christian decrees is most deplorable, and traceable, as to its cause, to the great Reformation heresy of salvation by faith alone. May God open the eyes of the Bible students. An example of the kind of decrees Paul meant was immediately given in the next verse.

### **Verses 21-22**

In the Gospel of Matthew, where the Savior equated human traditions with the precepts of men saying, In vain do they worship Me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.” (Matthew 15:9) Paul was confronted at Colossae with human traditions as that which marked the conduct of the Pharisees and

drew from the Savior Himself the denunciation just quoted. It is futile to inquire just what traditions Paul referred to. We do not know. His words apply to all “precepts and doctrines of men,” including those which are being received, preached and practiced in our times. All alike are condemned. Worshipers indulging such things are worshiping “in vain,” according to the Lord Himself.

### **Verse 23**

Some things are startlingly clear in this passage and are so often disputed. Note these conclusions:

Whatever human precepts and ordinances may exhibit as to their “wisdom,” it is a delusion, for “they are not of any value.”

Will worship was the kind of actions engaged in because they please the worshiper, and not because they were commanded by the Lord.

Humility is a fine thing, if it is true humility; but a false humility pretending to be too God-fearing to approach God as God has directed, and then seeking to approach through some angel, or human mediator, or through some deceased saint, such so-called humility is actually spiritual arrogance.

### **THE WORSHIPING OF ANGELS**

This is condemned in the New Testament, not merely in this chapter, but throughout. Even the apostle John “fell down before the feet of an angel to worship him,” (Revelation 19:10), but was forbidden to do so, then later, the apostle made a distinction between “falling down to worship the angel” and falling down in the presence of the angel to worship God, only to be ordered not to do either one! (Revelation 22:8-9) Thus it is established the principle that a Christian may neither worship such a being as an angel, and certainly no any such thing as an image, and that it is also sinful to bow down before either in the pretext that we are not worshiping the angel (or the image) but are worshiping God!

The angel worship Paul was combating in this chapter was the Jewish apostasy from the worship of God supported by the same specious reasoning by

which the medieval church sought to justify the adoration of images in Christian worship.

Since the Law had been given through the ministration of angels, it was held that angels might be worshiped, probably with the same subtle distinction with which we are familiar in the ordinary pleas for the veneration of saints.

### CHAPTER 3

G. G. Findlay, *Colossians in Pulpit Commentary*, p. 147 outlined this section of the epistle as follows:

- a. The Colossians urged to maintain a lofty spiritual life. (Verses 1-4)
- b. They were to put off old vices. (Verses 5-8)
- c. They were to put on new Christian virtues. (Verses 9-14)
- d. The sovereignty of Christ was to rule them. (Verses 15-17)
- e. Instructions regarding reciprocal relationships. (Verses 18-4:1)
  1. Wives and husbands. (Verses 18-20)
  2. Parents and children. (Verse 21)
  3. Servants and masters. (Verses 22-4:1)

The “practical teachings,” as usual in Paul’s letters, comes after the doctrinal part of the letter; and a number of deductions from this fact are important:

(1) It is not ethics which produces doctrine, but the doctrine which produces ethics. All Christian morality, ethics and philosophy are grounded in the historical fact of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2) In putting the doctrine first, Paul followed the usual pattern visible in the New Testament.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Basis of Christian Unity*, p. 50 wrote: “The New Testament everywhere insists upon true doctrine . . . the whole tendency (today) is to discourse talk about doctrine and to urge that we work together, etc . . . the

fact is that there is no unity apart from truth and doctrine; and it is departure from this that causes division and breaks unity.”

(3) Then, should not doctrine be emphasized today? It may be well to note the words of C. Peter Wagner and Arthur Johnson, “A Pragmatic Concern for Christian Growth in Christianity Today, Vol. 21, No. 7 p. 14 (382) who developed an analysis of why some churches grow and others do not; and they determined that: “What really determines growth is the intensity of belief that any group has in the particular doctrine it holds . . . What we have seen occurring from the time of Constantine in the fourth century has been a general watering down of our belief in our views of salvation and of the church.”

Christ strongly emphasized the true doctrine, declaring that those who taught “as their doctrines the precepts of men” were worshiping God in vain. (Matthew 15:9)

### **PAUL’S TEACHING ON DOCTRINE**

The trouble Paul sought to correct with this very letter was that of the Colossians following human doctrine. (Chapter 2:22)

Paul classified everything that was “contrary to sound doctrine” as being sinful in the same degree as fornication, falsehood and murder. (1Timothy 1:10) “The words of faith and of good doctrine” were to be proclaimed by Timothy in order for him to be “a good minister of Christ Jesus.” (1Timothy 4:6) Note also: Paul commanded him to give heed and attendance to doctrine: I Timothy 4:13, 16) and ordered him to hold in “double honor: those who were laboring “in the word and in the teaching.” (1Timothy 5:17)

The apostasy itself was to come about through the sins of churches that “could not endure the sound doctrine,” but who would cater to their “itching ears” by supplying false teachers. (2 Timothy 4:3)

Therefore, either churches or ministers who neglect to teach the “sound doctrine” of the word of God, or seek to downgrade it in any way, are guilty of forsaking the “faith once for all delivered to the saints.”

## Verse 1

John B. Nielson, *Colossians in Beacon Bible Commentary*, Vol. IX, p. 410 said: "If then you were raised up with Christ" parallels if you have died with Christ in verse 20. Both, of course, refer to Christian baptism.

James Macknight, *Apostolic Epistles with Commentary*, Vol. III, p. 549 affirmed that the meaning here is, "Since then you have been raised with Christ in baptism."

William Barclay, *Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, p. 147 elaborated it thus: "The point Paul is making here is this. In baptism the Christian dies and rises again. As the waters close over him, it is as if he was buried in death; as he emerges from the waters, it is like being resurrected to a new life. . . . We have seen repeatedly that the early Christians regarded baptism as a dying and rising. When a man is buried, the Greeks commonly spoke of him as being hidden in the earth; but the Christian had died a spiritual death in baptism, and he is not hidden in the earth but hidden in Christ (verse 3).

## HOW ONE DIES WITH CHRIST IN BAPTISM

There are two different aspects of one's death with Christ in baptism, these being (1) the firm and irrevocable resolution and intention of renouncing sin forever (this is the spiritual aspect of it), very appropriately referred to as dying with Christ, since as far as the Christian is concerned his body (in his intention) is no more to be given over to the indulgence of fleshly lusts and sins, any more than if he had physically died, and (2) the legal aspect of dying in the person of Christ. Christ died on Calvary; therefore, all who are in Christ area also said to have died "in Him." Every Christian can say, "I have already paid the penalty of sin, which is death; for I died on the cross in the Person of my Redeemer," this being exactly parallel to Paul's statement that we are "dead to the Law by the body of Christ." (Romans 7:4)

It should be observed in this connection that one's having died with Christ unto sin has reference only to the imperative and all-important change of the will (repentance) when one becomes a Christian. There is nothing here of God's

taking away all temptations. Even Christ was tempted in all points like as we are tempted. This death to sin is suggested by the burial of the convert in the act of baptism.

## Verse 2

“Keep seeking the things above . . .” “Seek . . .” is stressed by many as a word indicating the most careful and persistent pursuit of the goal indicated.

“The things that are above . . .” “The things above” are the things that are of greater importance, the more exalted principles, and spiritual rather than carnal.

This is a dramatic fourfold reference to “Christ” in these first four verses; and Alfred Barry, Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, Vol. VIII, p. 111 wrote that “The name, four times repeated, has in all cases the article prefixed to it. Evidently it is used emphatically to refer to our Lord as our Mediator—our Prophet, Priest and King.”

## Verses 3-4

“You have died . . . your life is hidden . . .” “Who is our life . . .” Significantly, the consummation of all the Christian’s hope shall be achieved, Arthur W. Pink, Gleanings from Paul, p. 334 said: “At the coming of Christ, which will be a personal and visible appearing of Himself.”

Another wonderful thought on being “hid with Christ” was also given by F. F. Bruce, Answers to Questions, p. 109 in reply to a question, “How is our life hid with Christ in God? He wrote: Here is J. B. Lightfoot’s answer: “The apostle’s argument is this: “When you sank under the baptismal water, you disappeared forever to the world. You rose again, it is true, but you rose only to God. The world henceforth knows nothing of your life, and (as a consequence) your new life must know nothing of the world.” Since Christians live “in Christ,” and Christ indeed is their true life, it is inevitable that their life should be securely preserved where He is.”

“Revealed. . .” The Greek word here is *phaneroo*. One of the major New Testament doctrines is that of the Second Advent of Christ. It is usually understood as the occasion when the dead shall all be raised, the general



judgment of all men shall occur, and every person shall be assigned his eternal reward.

### Verse 5

“Consider . . . your earthly body as dead . . .” William Hendriksen, Colossians, p. 143 wrote: “You died” (verse 3) . . . Put to death your members (verse 5) . . . On the one hand Paul is saying that the Colossians have already died; yet, on the other hand, he is telling them that they must put themselves to death. How can that be true?

Hendriksen answered by pointing out that the state and condition of Christians do not wholly coincide; but the answer presented here is to the effect that it is not “themselves” which the Christians are to “put to death,” but that they are to put to death those evil propensities within themselves, belonging to their carnal nature.

Alfred Barry, op. cit., p. 113 made an interesting comment saying: “Members” is perhaps suggested by our Lord’s command to “cut off” right hand or “pluck out” right eye, if they cause offense. (Matthew 5:29-30)

James Macknight op. cit., p. 549 elaborated this interpretation thus: “The apostle having represented the vicious appetites and passions of the human heart, under the idea of a body (2:17), because they have their seat in the body, he, in this passage, calls the sinful actions to which these bad affections prompt men, the members of that body or the old man.”

William Barclay, op. cit., p. 150 made a little different statement of what is meant here writing: “What Paul is saying is, ‘Put to death every part of yourself which is against God and keeps you from fulfilling His will.’”

“Immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed...” Here, all five of these things are sexually orientated and “greed” would seem to apply to all of them greed being “the desire for more.”

“Which amounts to idolatry . . .” The pagan temples throughout the world of that era were a constant temptation to Christians to indulge the impure and unmentionable rites suggested by this word-list.

“Greed . . .” One is a little surprised to find this word included along with the others in this list, thus identifying the love of money and the inordinate desire for it as being, on a level with the grossest of sins. The Christian should especially heed this in the question of determining how much of his money or income he should devote to the purpose of advancing Christianity in the world.

### **Verse 6**

“Wrath of God . . .” When the most extravagant claims are being made with regard to God’s love, it is wise to take into account scriptures such as this where the other side of the divine nature is in view. As E. E. Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 797 said: “Far from negating God’s love His wrath confirms it. For without justice, mercy loses its meaning.”

The New Testament is full of teaching to the effect that God has a score to settle with evil and that one day He will settle it.

Some early manuscripts add the phrase, “Upon the sons of disobedience . . .” Special attention should be focused upon the object of God’s wrath. Both here and in 2 Thessalonians 1:8, it is the “disobedient” that shall bear the full weight of the wrath of God. Theologies which seek to eliminate “obedience” as being in any way connected with salvation should be rejected. Regardless of how vigorously one may protest that he has “faith in Christ,” unless there is on his part at least some movement to obey the teachings of the New Testament, his doom is certain. Until he has, in his Christian baptism, been buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life, as had these Colossians, he cannot even belong to the company recognized in the New Testament as the family of God.

Note: Donald Guthrie, *op. cit.*, p. 1149 wrote: “Wrath must not be confused with a vindictive reaction. It is rather the negative side of holiness, the revulsion of righteousness toward all unrighteousness.”

### **Verses 7-8**

Whereas the list of sins in verse 5 concerned sexual wickedness, the list here pertains to “tongue-wickedness,” both lying in the center of man’s body, as well

as in the center of his nature. E. E. Ellis, op. cit., p. 797 said: “The words ‘out of your mouth’ may refer to all the sins listed,” the view here being that they do.

“Abusive speech . . .” These come from a Greek word meaning “to speak against” either God or man; but blasphemy in English refers to speaking against God.

As William Hendriksen, op. cit., p. 148 said: “In the present instance, as the context indicates, ‘speaking against man is meant . . . slander, defamation, detraction.’”

### **Verse 9**

“Do not lie to one another . . .” John B. Nielson, op. cit., p. 414 said, “Literally, ‘lie not to yourself,’ and suggests that one who lies may come to believe his own falsehoods.”

“Since you laid aside the old self . . .” He had been speaking of “putting to death,” but here he changed to “put off.” The new figure being that of stripping off old clothes, a metaphor that often occurs in the New Testament. In Galatians 3:27, Paul wrote, “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Beginning in verse 12 Paul will outline what is meant, partially, by putting on Christ.

### **Verse 10**

“Have put on the new self . . .” James Macknight, op. cit., p. 552 referred this to “the very temper and virtues of Christ;” but, of course, more than this is meant. The Christian puts on the name of Christ, clothes himself in the spiritual body of Christ, and will appear in glory clothed with the total righteousness of the Lord Himself. That is exactly what Jesus meant by the admonition: “I advise you to buy from Me . . .white garments that you may clothe yourself and that the nakedness of yourself may not be revealed.” (Revelation 3:18)

### **Verse 11**

All the distinctions stressed by such divisions as these are transcended; and, as E. E. Ellis, op. cit., p. 797 said: “At the foot of the cross, the ground is level . . .

not a uniformity of status in the present world order, but a change in attitude by which the stigma of being different is loved away.”

“Scythian, according to Alfred Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 113 was “clearly intended to rebuke the pride of intellect, contemptuous of the unlearned, which lay at the root of Gnosticism.” The word “Scythian” hardly means anything at all to modern readers; but as William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 153 pointed out: “In the seventh century before Christ, these Scythians, savage and warlike nomads from the northern steppes, had deluged the countries of the Fertile Crescent, including Palestine, and having subsequently been repulsed, had left a memory of dread and horror.”

Summarizing the barriers that were removed in Christ, they were (and are): barriers that come of birth and nationality, those derived from the ceremonial and rituals observed, barriers of race, training, experience, social status or anything else that tends to divide men and lead some look down upon others as inferior to themselves.

“Christ is all, and in all . . .” Here again the absolute supremacy of Christ is affirmed and extolled. Note that Christ is “in” all Christians.

### **Verse 12**

“Chosen . . . holy . . . beloved . . .” E. E. Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 798 pointed out that these titles belonged in the Old Testament, to the physical Israel of God, but that here they are applied “to the church, the true Israel.” “Beloved,” as in so many of Paul’s letters, has reference to the love which he the apostle himself had for the addresses, and that this is an incidental indication that Paul was indeed acquainted at Colossae.

“Heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience . . .” These are the very virtues and attitudes of the Christ Himself, showing that true Christ-likeness is the goal of every Christian. Note too, that in all of these admonitions, Paul does not allow for one moment that anyone might attain to the full stature of Christ in a single act, but that the development of the soul into that which pleases God is a growth process.

This is why Paul here admonishes Christians who had already “put on Christ” to put on kindness, etc., and to put on anything else that might be lacking.

### **Verse 13**

Donald Guthrie, *op. cit.*, p. 1150 wrote: “There is an echo here of Lord’s Prayer in the close link between God’s forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others.”

The Jews believed, and the Pharisees stated it bluntly to Jesus that “Who can forgive sins but One, even God?” (Mark 2:7), receiving no contradiction at all from Christ.

Donald F. Osborne stated in a sermon that there are only three possible reasons for forgiveness: (1) the person forgiven deserved it, (2) the holiness of the person forgiving is sufficient to guarantee it, or (3) Christ also forgave us! It is not hard to locate the true reason.

### **Verse 14**

“Beyond all these things . . .” Alfred Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 114 characterized this verse as “remarkable,” saying that it was apparently: “suggested by the Gnostic teachers.” While it may be true that gnosticism offered so-called perfection by some device or another, it seems more logical to refer this reference to “the bond of perfectness” to what Paul had already declared in 1:28.

“Beyond all . . .” The thought here appears to be not that of adding love as an additional Christian grace, but rather that of making love the cement that holds everything else in place, or as John B. Nelson, *op. cit.*, p.416 put it: “(The love) is viewed as the bond of perfectness, or girdle that bonds together the “clothing” that has just been put on. Both the graces and the Christian persons are bound together by love (agape, divine love).”

### **Verse 15**

“The peace of Christ . . .” according to A. S. Peake, *op. cit.*, p. 541 means the subjective peace within the Christian which has been bestowed upon him through his relationship with Christ. “It is the peace which Christ gives.” Earnest G. Ashby, *op. cit.*, p. 488 noted that it is “peace” in this passage that has

the function of the “girdle,” a function regarded as belonging to “love,” in the parallel in Ephesians.

“And be thankful . . .” It is strange, in a way, that Paul was insistent upon thanksgiving as a grace enthusiastically and constantly exhibited by the Christian. Paul made thanksgiving the ever-present mark of Christian living.

### **Verse 16**

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you . . .” The word of Christ dwelling in a person is equivalent in every way to the Spirit of God dwelling in him. If it be objected that the Spirit is a living Person, then let it be remembered also that the word of God is spoken of as “living and active.” (Hebrews 4:12f)

“Admonishing one another . . .” Alfred Barry, op. cit., p. 115 wrote: “Here again we have general identity and special distinction between two passages. There as here we have the “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,” the “singing in the hearts to the Lord,” and the spirit of “thankfulness.” But there the whole is described as being the consequence of “being filled with the Spirit:” whereas here, it (all) comes from “the word of Christ in the soul.”

The “word of Christ,” “the mind of Christ,” “God,” “Christ,” and “Holy Spirit” are all spoken of in the New Testament as “dwelling in” members of the body of Christ and that all three members of the Godhead are likewise “dwelt in” by Christians, thus giving eight scriptural designations of one and the same phenomenon. They all designate one condition, the saved condition, of the unbeliever baptized into Christ.

“Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs . . .” It would appear that “spiritual” in this verse is the modifier of all that may be properly used in Christian assemblies. By their nature of being in the Old Testament, Psalms are surely spiritual, and “hymns” are by definition; but, as, as for any song so used, it must be spiritual. Significantly not even all singing is permissible in Christian worship.

What is the bearing of this passage on the use of instrumental music in Christian worship? The answer is this: By the apostolic injunction “to sing,” thus commanding a special kind of music, all other kinds are eliminated. It is contrary to the injunction here for congregations to “whistle” or play mechanical instruments, the latter having been associated throughout history with pagan worship. (Daniel 3:4-7) Historically, no mechanical instruments of music were used in Christian worship till the seventh century, despite the fact that such instruments having been known and used throughout the whole world at the time of the beginning of Christianity and for centuries prior to that time.

Arguments from the word *psallo*, to the effect that it refers to playing a harp, fail in the light of the truth that the instrument of God’s praise appears in this passage, not as anything mechanical, but as the human heart itself, “With thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

“The word of Christ . . .” Donald Guthrie, *op. cit.*, p. 1150 interpreted this to mean: “The teaching Christ brought to men,” and as preserved and communicated to us through the holy apostles.

This is one of the most definite passages in the New Testament, which nails down the identification of Christian doctrine as including the message delivered by Christ, thus making even the Old Testament, valuable as it is outside the perimeter of Christian authority in all things pertaining to the church of which Christ is the head.

### **Verse 17**

“Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus . . .” This means to respect the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ in everything. The sectors in which this applies are (1) that of personal morality and conduct, (2) the province of things done in public assemblies of Christians, (3) in the whole area of thought and action (word or deed), and (4) even in the secret purposes of the soul, “do all” in the name of the Lord.

## **Verse 18**

This begins Paul's instructions on certain reciprocal relationships, that of wives and husbands being treated first.

The glorious difference between the Christian concern of duty and that prevalent in the world of Paul's day lies in the fact that obligations, even the sacred obligations in marriage are "reciprocal" obligations. The duty is never all on one side.

In the Roman Empire of Paul's day, there were no recognized rights of women, children or slaves, who were all expected to obey husbands, parents and masters upon penalty of death. Christianity changed all that.

Paul enunciated the great ethic of mutual respect and obligation in these sectors; and this ethic destroyed slavery and other abuses, although, of course, not immediately.

"As is fitting in the Lord . . ." Donald Guthrie, *op. cit.*, p. 1151 said: "This would at once transform current ideas and invest the wife's position with safeguards."

As spelled out fully in Ephesians, husbands were to love their wives, a command to regard the wife as an extension of the husband's own self, having every true claim against him that even pertained to himself.

## **Verse 19**

Paul did not need to spell everything out in each of the epistles, because he specifically instructed that his writings should be passed around and made available to others, beyond those addressed in the salutation. (4:16)

## **Verse 20**

"This is well pleasing to the Lord . . . fitting in the Lord (4:18) . . . fearing the Lord (verse 22) . . . as unto the Lord (verse 23) . . . you serve the Lord Jesus Christ (verse 24) . . ." Notice that all of the persons addressed regarding their personal and domestic duties were continually reminded of being "in the Lord," and therefore as having "put on" the graces and virtues commanded earlier in this chapter. The whole teaching is that a Christian must not get "out of



character” in dealing with everyday relationships and duties. Kindness, meekness, love, gentleness . . . all such virtues must mark the Christian’s life at all times.

### **Verse 21**

This should be read against the stern and tyrannical background of the father’s absolute control over his children, as in the Roman Empire when these words were written. William Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 161 wrote: “A parent could do anything he liked with his child. He could sell him into slavery . . . he even had the right to condemn his child to death and carry out the execution himself.”

In current times, the pendulum has swung the other way; and it is the duty of children to obey their parents that needs emphasis. (Ephesians 6:1-3)

### **Verse 22**

There are a number of exceedingly important deductions to be made from Paul’s handling of the slave problem in the New Testament. Two of these are:

(1) True Christianity does not consist in any kind of attack upon social institutions, even as vicious and deplorable a system as that of slavery. It is leaven and not as dynamite that the religion of Christ works.

(2) Ancient slavery in large exists in the civilized part of the world, but there still exists in the relationship between employers and employees; and John B. Nielson, *op. cit.*, p. 420 was correct in suggesting that these words are applicable to that relationship, no less than to ancient slavery. He wrote: “The master must give a fair and just wage, and the laborer must give a fair and full day’s labor.”

“Not with external service . . . who merely please men . . .” This is a reference to working only when the master is observing. The employee who is careful to appear busy when the boss is looking is guilty of the same attitude here condemned.

### Verse 23

God has His own way of rewarding honorable and faithful work, regardless of the failure of human authorities to do so; and the difference is brought out in the very next verse.

### Verse 24

Alfred Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 115 wrote: “The only peculiarity in this passage (as compared with the parallel in Ephesians) regards the strong emphasis on: “The reward of the inheritance.”

The inheritance is exactly the thing which no slave could receive; only a son could be an heir of God. (Galatians 4:7) Thus the slave on earth is recognized as a son in heaven.

### Verse 25

Some understand this as a warning to slaves not to do wrong; but since the admonition stands as another reason, along with the one in verse 24, directed to the proper motivation of the slave, it is understood here as a reference to God’s judgment of slave-masters if they do wrong.

Note: Perhaps it is wrong to restrict the meaning of “he that does wrong” to either class. Will not God judge and punish all wrongdoers? Commentators have long struggled with this question, arriving at different conclusions, thus:

This has reference solely to the master of the slave. (Ridderbos)

This refers solely to the slave. (Lenski)

William Hendriksen, *op. cit.*, p. 175 wrote: “It seems best to suppose that both are included.”

A. S. Peake, *op. cit.*, p. 543 summarized such opinions thus: “To include both is highly questionable, not only because a double reference is on principle to be avoided in exegesis, but because the connection implies that only one side of the fellowship is being dealt with. It is commonly thought that the verse is an encouragement to the slave, based on the assurance that the master who ill-treats him will receive his recompense in due course.”

The reliance of the Christian, in whatever state of life, upon the eternal justice of God's universe is the real stabilizer of the human heart. Without this reliance, life becomes an idiot's dream where injustice, misery, caprice, chance and luck are supreme. On the other hand, one who learns to trust in the assurance Paul here extended to the slaves of the ancient Roman empire, perhaps the most unfortunate class ever to live on earth—one who learns to trust that assurance has already won rest for his soul. No matter what inequalities, no matter what injustice, no matter how much unfairness, partiality and wickedness may torture one's earthly existence, the eternal reward is absolutely sure. God will make all things right.

## **CHAPTER 4**

The epistle moves quickly to its conclusion in these 18 verses. First, there is the conclusion of the instruction on reciprocal relationships (verse 1), followed by a brief paragraph on prayer and Christian conduct (verses 2-6); next, Paul mentions affairs pertaining to himself and his imprisonment (verses 7-9); then comes the paragraph regarding greetings from and greetings to various persons (verses 10-17); and finally there stands the apostolic autograph, salutation and benediction (verse 19).

### **Verse 1**

Paul did not here dwell very long on the duties of masters, because at the same time he was sending Philemon a personal letter devoted to reconciling the situation with his erstwhile runaway slave, now returned. John B. Nielson *Colossians in Beacon Bible Commentary*, Vol. IX, p. 421 stated that "To give their slaves that which is just and equal is really advice to the master to free his slaves."

To have established a rule of freeing all slaves who became Christians would have precipitated a rush of thousands of slaves into the church, resulting in the degeneration of the whole Christian religion into a political party dedicated to social change; and such a thing as that, true Christianity never was, or never could be.

These very letters planted the seeds of love, kindness, and justice in men's hearts, leading eventually to the total destruction of the whole institution of slavery.

### **Verse 2**

“Devote yourselves to prayer . . .” The meaning here is that the Christian should never stop praying. Prayer was taught by Christ in two of His most beautiful parables, namely, those of the friend at midnight, and of the unjust judge. (Luke 11:5ff; 18:1ff).

“Keeping alert . . .” G. G. Findlay, *Colossians in Pulpit Commentary*, p. 209 wrote: “Keeping alert or “watching” here is that of “wakefulness,” affirming that, “to be awake is to be alive in the fullest since, to have all the powers of perception and action in readiness. The activity of the soul in prayer is to be both energetic and incessant.”

“With an attitude of thanksgiving . . .” Paul, more than any other, stressed the need of thankfulness “in all things.”

### **Verse 3**

“Praying . . . for us . . .” Much as Paul prayed for others, he himself felt the need of the supporting prayers of the brethren in Christ.

“That God may open . . .” John B. Nielson, *op. cit.*, p. 422 reminds us: “This reminds us that even though the spread of the gospel is under divine direction (Acts 16:7), it is also subject to satanic hindrances.” (1 Thessalonians 2:18)

“The mystery of Christ, for which I have also have been imprisoned . . .” One of the salient features of the mystery stressed so often by Paul was that of God's purpose of inclusion of the Gentiles in one body with the Jews as children of God; and specifically, it was for that very conviction that Israel hated Paul and created the mob scene which led directly to his imprisonment. (Acts 22:2ff)

### **Verse 4**

Paul was deeply concerned that his speech should always be effective in making known the mystery of Christ; and, if a preacher of Paul's eloquence and power solicited prayers regarding the manner of his speaking, how much more

should every preacher in all ages be mightily concerned about “how” he ought to speak?

Christian’s speaking “to those without” is also a matter of the most urgent concern; and, in keeping with that consideration, he added the next two verses.

### **Verses 5-6**

“Toward outsiders . . .” The reference here is, “to non-Christians, those without the church.” (A. S. Peake, *op. cit.*, p. 544. )

“Making the most of the opportunity . . .” is somewhat of an idiomatic expression, meaning “buying up the opportunities,” “taking advantage of all occasions for doing good.”

This verse is very similar to Ephesians 5:15 with subtle differences. Alfred Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 116 wrote: “There the “strictness and “wisdom” are to guard against excess or recklessness within; here the “wisdom“ is to watch against external dangers and make full use of external opportunities.”

“Speech . . . with grace . . .” Some think this means divine grace, but A. S. Peake, *op. cit.*, p. 544 is confident that the Greek text denies this, affirming that the meaning is “speech that is pleasant, marked by sweetness and courtesy, that their conversation may impress favorably the heathen.”

“Seasoned with salt . . .” There is perhaps included here some reference to the judicious use of humor, or wit, in the Christian’s speech. Peake, *Ibid.*, p. 545 wrote: “Among the Greek classical writers, “Salt” expressed the wit with which conversation was flavored.”

“How you should respond . . .” the admonition here is most similar to that given by the apostle Peter who commanded: “But SANCTIFY Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” (I Peter 3:15)

### **Verses 7-8**

“All my affairs . . .” Here, through verse 9, Paul added some very personal words, to explain how the messengers with whom he was sending the epistle

would be able to fill in all details regarding how things were going with Paul and to comfort the Christians in Colossae.

“Tychicus . . .” The high praise for this companion of Paul justifies a little further attention to this beloved New Testament character.

## **TYCHICUS**

Tychicus was an Asian, perhaps an Ephesian, who went with Paul to Jerusalem with the collection (Acts 22:4ff; I Corinthians 16:1-40, and was possibly one of those appointed by the various churches to convey the money to the Christians in Jerusalem. He carried the epistle to the Colossians and that of the Ephesians to their destinations, and if, as is often thought, Ephesians was a circular letter, he carried it to other churches as well. (The New Bible Dictionary, 1962, p. 1302)

Herbert Lockyer, *All Men of the Bible*, p. 332 wrote: “Tychicus also had a mission to fulfill; in Crete (2 Timothy 4:12; Titus 3:12.) Paul spoke of this brother in the very highest terms of praise and appreciation.

“For I have sent him to you . . .” The actual meaning of this clause is that “I am sending Tychicus to you, meaning that at the time when the Colossians would be reading this, it would be true that Paul had already sent him.

### **Verse 9**

“Onesimus . . .” This man was the slave of Philemon. He had gone AWOL from his master Philemon’s home in Colossae, but some circumstance had thrown him into association with Paul in Rome, where he became a Christian. It comes to view here that Paul was sending him back, but with a marvelous new status. Now, he is: “The faithful and beloved brother . . .” Furthermore, he enjoys an equal status with Tychicus. As Peake, *Ibid.*, said, “Paul’s word here that Onesimus ‘is one of you’ enables us to infer that Colossae was the home of Philemon.”

### **Verses 10-11**

“Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner. . .”

## ARISTARCHUS

This man, a Jew of Thessalonica, is first mentioned in the New Testament in Acts 19:22, where it is reported that, along with Gaius, he was dragged into the theater at Ephesus. When the riot was over and Paul left Ephesus, Aristarchus went with him (Acts 20:4) appearing again as one of the committee in charge of Paul's collection for Jerusalem. Presumably, Aristarchus remained with Paul continuously; because, after the two year imprisonment at Caesarea, Luke reveals that Aristarchus was "with us" in the long voyage to Rome (Acts 27:2). Alfred Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 116 wrote: "The deduction has been made that, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, Aristarchus really shared Paul's imprisonment, is suggested, or demanded by the words "my fellow-prisoner."

"Barnabas' cousin Mark, if he comes welcome him. . ." David Lipscomb, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles*, Vol. IV, p. 312 said: "This recommendation is somewhat of a church letter," showing that the old breach between Paul and Barnabas regarding Mark had long been healed, Mark appearing in this passage as a definite comfort of the apostle.

"Jesus who is called Justus . . ." Nothing at all is known of this man except what is stated here, there being no other reference to him in the New Testament.

"Who are from the circumcision . . ." This means that Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus were "of the circumcision," that is the Jews.

"These are the only fellow-workers for the kingdom of God . . ." Paul's concern for the salvation of many Jews in the great Roman capital had been frustrated and defeated. Of all the Jews in Rome, "these three . . .!"

As William Hendriksen, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 190 expressed it: "It must not escape our attention that the apostle's statement with reference to these three men as the only Jewish-Christian fellow-workers who had been a comfort to him implies deep disappointment with other people of his own race."

"They have proved to be an encouragement to me . . ." We are indebted to G. G. Findlay, *Colossians in Pulpit Commentary* Vol 19, p. 213 for the amazing

fact that the word here rendered “comfort” comes from a Greek word meaning “soothing relief,” the same Greek word chosen as the name of a widely known medicine for children, “*paregoric*,” (an intestinal sedative used to treat diarrhea.)

### **Verses 12-13**

#### **EPAPHRAS**

All of the comment on these two verses, almost, pertains to this distinguished worker who appears to have been a preacher and teacher for all three of the towns in the tri-cities, mentioned here. Herbert Lockyer, *op. cit.*, p. 110 called him “a giant of prayer,” saying that: “It is in his prayer ministry that Epaphras is conspicuous; he knew how to lay everything before the Lord . . . that the saints might be perfect and complete. He “strove earnestly in his prayers.” He brought to Paul in Rome the report on conditions at Colossae that prompted this epistle. Like Epaphras, all of us should be concerned with the spiritual welfare of others.”

There must have been something extraordinary about the prayers of Epaphras, because as Donald Guthrie, *The New Bible Commentary Revised*, p. 1153 noted: “The word used is agonize, which may be some kind of allusion to the prayers of our Lord in Gethsemane. That kind of praying ranks a man high in spiritual nature.”

“A bondservant of Jesus Christ . . .” Paul must have meant something very high and holy by this. Alfred Barry, *op. cit.*, p. 117 wrote: “It is a title used by James and Jude in their epistles as well as by Paul himself, but given by him only to Timothy (Philippians 1:1), and to Epaphras here.”

### **Verse 14**

Only in this place in the New Testament is Luke referred to as a doctor or a physician.

“Demas . . .” As A. S. Peake, *op. cit.*, p. 546 wrote: “Demas being mentioned last here without commendation is commonly explained as due to a foreboding



of Paul that he would turn out badly, suggested by the reference in 2 Timothy 4:10.”

Demas fell from whatever eminence he enjoyed in these passages, the reference in Timothy revealing that he forsook the apostle, “having loved this present age.”

### **Verse 15**

This reveals, of course, the existence of a church in Laodicea; but it is not known why Paul singled out Nymphas, the name of whom might have been feminine, thus justifying the rendition in some translations as “the church that is in her house.” It is not wise to make anything out of this because, as A. S. Peake, *op. cit.*, p. 546 wrote: “The word may be either masculine or feminine.”

### **Verse 16**

One of the important revelations from this is that Paul’s letters, and presumably those of other sacred writers, were widely circulated and passed around among the churches.

J. R. Dummelow, *op. cit.*, p. 984 and others believe that the epistle to the Laodiceans mentioned here might be our canonical epistle to the Ephesians. He wrote: “Weiss argues that (the epistle to the Laodiceans) cannot be the epistle to the Ephesians, for that was sent at the same time as this, and therefore Paul could not have sent salutations to Laodicea in this epistle. But this is natural if Ephesians was a circular letter (and the absence of salutations is difficult to explain otherwise), and if this letter was to be passed on to Laodicea. The epistle to the Laodiceans is perhaps our Epistle to the Ephesians.”

### **Verse 17**

This verse, establishes the principal that a church is responsible for admonishing and encouraging ministers, nor is it evident here that Archippus was in any way standing in special need of encouragement.

### **Verse 18**

Paul knew the Colossians and that they knew him and his handwriting, else this autograph would not have meant anything.

The brevity of this salutation was probably due to the fact that with a chain on his right hand Paul might have found the writing of even these few words a painful and difficult task. The placement of the utterance, "Remember my bonds," seems even to suggest this thought. How much the Gentiles owe to the patient zeal and labors of this beloved apostle can never be known till the redeemed of all ages shall greet him around the throne of God and of the Lamb.