

The Epistle of Paul the Apostle
to the
Colossians
a study by Dr. Grant C. Richison

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The Epistle to the Colossians

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Grant C. Richison

I. ORIGIN OF THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH

- A. 2:1 indicates the Colossian church had never seen Paul. cf. 1:4,7,8
- B. The biblical historical background to Colossians can be seen in Acts 19:10, 26.
- C. Paul missed Colosse on both of his missionary trips, Acts 16:6; 19:1.
- D. Paul sent Epaphras to preach to them, Col 1:7.
- E. Paul evangelized the churches of the Lychus Valley where Colosse was located. Also Laodicea and Hieropolis were located there.
- F. The Colossian church was mainly Gentile, 1:21,27; 2:11.

II. THE CITY OF COLOSSE

- A. The city lay in the Lychus Valley where is Turkey today.
- B. Mountains surrounded the area. It was about 100 miles inland west from Ephesus.
- C. It was overshadowed in importance by Laodicea and Hieropolis due to changes in the main road. As a result traffic and trade went to her rival cities.
- D. The people of Colosse were mostly Phrygians and Greek colonists.

E. There were a great number of Jews in that section of the country. Antiochus the Great (223-187 B.C.) transplanted 2,000 families of Jews from Mesopotamia and Babylon to Phrygia and Lydia. Many lived in this region at this time.

F. Colosse was situated in the province of Phrygia or the Roman province Asia.

G. The region was subject to earthquakes.

III. OCCASION

During Paul's absence from the Lychus Valley an insidious error crept into the Colossian Church. Epaphras went to Rome to report the inroads of this heresy (1:7,8). The heresy was a combination of Judaism and incipient gnosticism (anything material was sinful).

These errors led to two practical problems:

- 1. Asceticism (2:21-23) -- flee from the world
- 2. License (3:5-17) -- indifferent to the world

IV. PURPOSES:

- A. To set forth Christ as pre-eminent (1:18; 2:9). This is God's answer to error.
- B. Jesus is no angelic being from God; he possesses a real body (cf. 1:16-17). In that body is all the fullness of the Godhead. Angels are subject to him. There is no need for any other mediation than Christ between God and man (1:19-20).
- C. To warn against the false philosophies of tradition, legalism, mysticism and asceticism (2:18-23).

V. THEME

Christ the head of the universal church, 1:18.

VI. KEY VERSE

1:18 -- "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence."

VII. KEY WORD

"All" -- 32 times

VIII. DATE

About A.D. 61 in Rome.

IX. OUTLINE

- A. Preliminary statements, 1:1-2
- B. Pre-eminence of Christ, 1:3-2:3
- C. Polemic against error, 2:4-3:4
- D. Practical exhortations, 3:5-4:6
- E. Personal messages, 4:7-17

X. MISCELLANEOUS MATTER

- A. The book was carried to Colosse by Tychicus, 4:7-9 (compare Ephesians 4:7).
- B. Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon written at the same time.

Colossians is similar to Ephesians

78 of 95 verses bear a resemblance.

- C. Emphasis of Ephesians -- the body of Christ; emphasis of Colossians -- Christ, the head of the body.
- D. Colossians was written by Paul while he was in prison in Rome (1:1; 4:10,18).
- E. The book of Colossians is characterized by repeated emphasis on positional truth (status quo of the believer in God's eyes) (1:24-29; 2:9; 2:20-3:4).
- F. The book is Christocentric (Christ-centered).

Colossians 1

Colossians 1:1

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

The first two verses of the book of Colossians comprise the salutation.

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ"

Paul does not begin his epistles with customary introductions of our day. Salutations of our day are irrelevant. We begin a business letter with the term "Gentlemen" and yet we know that there is not a gentleman in the whole crowd! We write, "Dear Sir," when we know that they are neither "dear" nor "Sir!!" We cannot start a letter with "Hey, you" either!!

The name "Paul" means "little." If there was anyone who could call himself "Mr. big," it was the apostle Paul. He was the greatest missionary of the first century. He was one of the great men of his day. In Judaism he had a promising career. He was a Pharisee. He was the outstanding persecutor of the church. He ran out of victims in Jerusalem so he went to Damascus to capture more Christians, "Then Saul (Paul), still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2). He was on his way to murder the disciples in Damascus.

On that road to Damascus he met the risen Lord and received Jesus Christ as his Savior. As a Christian he spread the gospel to the Gentile Roman world. The Lord Jesus ruined his previous career of killing Christians! One look at Jesus and it changed everything in his life. Jesus' worst enemy became his greatest emissary.

Paul was not one of the 12 original Apostles. One qualification for apostleship was seeing Jesus. He saw the risen Christ (I Cor. 9:1; 15:8-9). God gave him miraculous powers to authenticate his apostleship (II Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4).

The word "apostle" conveys the idea of special commission from God. The apostle was under a divine commission to found the church and write Scripture. This is the highest ranking gift in the Bible. There are no more apostles today. No one has the right to write Scripture. This gift, as all gifts, can only be bestowed by the sovereignty of Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation (I Cor. 12:11,13).

Paul was the human author of Scripture but the Holy Spirit was the divine author, "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (II Pet 1:20). This does not mean that the human author mechanically writes Scripture with little or no input from his person. It means that the Holy Spirit guides every word he writes to accurately convey what God wants to communicate to man.

Paul was Christ's apostle. He was not the church's apostle. He was a special emissary on special divine assignment from Christ (John 17:18). He took his marching orders from Jesus Christ.

PRINCIPLE: When Jesus Christ fills our horizon, we can do nothing else but serve him.

APPLICATION

When we truly meet the Lord Jesus we lose interest in pleasing self. The greatest thing that can happen to a young person is to meet the Lord Jesus young enough that they can give their entire life to the Lord. Boy friends, girl friends, cars, career do not compare with knowing and serving him (Phil. 3:10). When we devote our lives to the Son of God, we live no lives of regret.

Paul makes his commitment clear in I Cor. 9:16,17, "Or if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" He said, "I must preach the gospel whether I want to do it or not. whether it is convenient or not, I have no choice." God is no cruel task master. He is a wonderful master who gives us a sense of satisfaction when we serve him. Paul did not quit. He served to the best of his ability which is all God asks. This kind of commitment gives us direction, point and purpose. We keep our drive no matter what opposition may come our way.

"by the will of God"

Paul is an apostle by the will of God, not by his own self appointment. He did not choose the career of an apostle. He became an apostle because he came into confrontation with the Lord of Glory. He was on his way to arrest Christians when the Lord arrested him and dispatched him to dispense the gospel.

He did not earn nor deserve the right of apostleship. It was clearly within God's domain to place him in this special privilege within Christianity. It is not by his own merit or strength or sufficiency. God's sovereign choice is the basis for his apostleship.

PRINCIPLE: The Christian does what he does "by the will of God."

APPLICATION:

People often rationalize themselves into a course of action and then say, "This is the will of God." When things fall apart they say, "Why did God do this to me? It is God's fault that I am in this situation." Their course of action came from themselves, not God.

Others blame Satan for their difficulties whereas it the problem was self-induced. We make foolish decisions and say foolish things and then blame it on Satan whereas it is not Satan at all.

We all make decisions which have nothing at all to do with the will of God. We blame Satan but is our own foolish mistake. For example, a person may say "I lost my job because of my testimony for Christ." But it was not his testimony at all, he lost his job because he was loafing on the job. He had the attitude that the world owed him a living. He did not view his job as part of his Christian service. Instead of doing his job as unto the Lord, he was a sloppy worker. Satan does not have a thing to do with this. Satan's system does attack Christians but not in this kind of incident.

"and Timothy our brother"

Timothy was a vest-pocket edition of the apostle Paul. He was Paul's companion on many of his travels (II Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; II Thes. 1:1) and his son in the faith (II Tim 2:1). Timothy had a Gentile father (Acts 16:1) but Jewish mother and grandmother (II Tim. 1:5). He learned the Old Testament from a young age from them (II Tim. 3:15).

Paul hand-picked Timothy to serve with him. Timothy joined Paul on his second missionary journey at Lystra where he was reported to be effective in ministry (Acts 16:2). Thereafter they were almost inseparable. Wherever Paul went, he took Timothy. Wherever Paul could not go, he sent Timothy. "Now if Timothy comes, see that he

may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do" (I Cor. 16:10). Paul personally polished him as a leader. He wrote I & II Timothy to this young pastor.

Paul had numerous colleagues and friends but none of them were quite as close as Timothy. Note his view of Timothy in Philippians 2:10-23, "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus [but not Timothy]. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me."

Timothy was a spiritual "brother." He belonged to the family of God. He was not a physical relation to Paul. "Brother" also indicates that he does not share apostleship with Paul. He is a "brother," not an "apostle."

God brought these two men together and they remained together. Their friendship stuck. Their friendship glued together with a divine adhesive. Others forsook Paul. When the going got tough, they quit, "This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes" (II Tim. 1:15). Paul knew what it was like to have some bitter disappointments in his friends and co-workers.

What kept Paul and Timothy together? They had nothing in common. Paul was much older than Timothy (Philemon 9). In I Timothy Paul said, "Let no man despise your youth." Usually, people who have a large age gap do not remain together for very long unless they are relatives. These two were poles apart in their family background. Paul was a pure blood Jew (Phil. 3:5). Timothy was half Jew, half Gentile. His father was a Gentile (Acts 16:3).

They were poles apart in their education. They were not on the same plane. Paul had a graduate degree. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel. There is no record of any formal training of Timothy.

PRINCIPLE: God breaks down natural barriers between people.

APPLICATION:

Even though these men came from radically different backgrounds they served the Lord side by side. Paul mentored Timothy in action. Everything he learned he learned from Paul. Timothy was both loyal and faithful. Jesus Christ compensates for the differences in culture, education, financial background. He annihilates the differences that separate.

Colossians 1:2

"To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

"To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse"

The two phrases "in Christ" and "in Colosse" point to two spheres. "In Colosse" is the location where the saints at Colosse live. This is their earthly address. "Saints" in the Bible are people on earth (I Cor. 14:33; Eph. 4:11,12; 5:3; 6:18; Col. 1:4,12; Heb. 6:10; Jude 3). Here the "saints" locate at Colosse.

The phrase "in Christ" is their spiritual sphere. This is their position (status quo) before God. As God views them, they have the same status quo as Jesus Christ as in God's eyes.

Paul characterizes the Colossians with two descriptions. First, he called them "saints." This means that they are set apart as chosen for God. The Colossians were "saints" because they possessed by God in a distinctive way. The blood of Christ bought and paid for them. God acquired them by the death of Christ. This is not a term of morality. It has nothing to do with how we act. It has more to do with who we are. This is not a term of condition but of position. We belong to God. At our point of belief God claimed us for his own. Therefore, we belong to him. We are saints by virtue of our position in Christ.

Second, Paul calls them "faithful brethren." The Colossian church faced false doctrine. However, Paul describes them as "faithful." They are dependable; God can count on them to remain true to truth. Not all saints are faithful. They have enough faith to receive Christ and that is about all.

The church at Colosse was one of two churches (the other church is Rome) to which Paul wrote

that he never visited. Epaphras founded the church at Colosse.

PRINCIPLE: Grace always precedes peace. Grace is God's provision for the Christian life. Peace is the enjoyment of God's provisions.

APPLICATION:

Peace is orientation to the grace of God. A person experiencing peace is in the process of experiencing God's grace. Why you do not have peace in your life? Is it because you are experiencing God's grace?

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"

This is Paul's customary greeting to churches by Paul. "Grace" is the normal Greek salutation. "Peace" is the normal Hebrew salutation.

This is no perfunctory greeting. Paul conveys his heart for the Colossians here.

This is not saving grace. This is grace for daily living. It is grace for the pilgrim path. Grace enables a believer to maintain his spiritual equilibrium (Rom. 12:3). A believer full of grace will go off on no tangent. Grace makes it possible for us to put a proper estimation upon ourselves (James 4:6; I Pet 5:5). Grace is something that God provides; we cannot earn or deserve it (I Pet. 5:10). God gives enough grace so we can face anything that may come our way (II Cor. 12:9,10).

"Peace" is the other spiritual commodity God gives. This is not peace with God. That peace we receive at the point of salvation. This is peace of God, God's very own peace for everyday life. It does not take much for people to get our goat. We charge into conflict over something insignificant. Paul desires that every believer will know the peace of God in whatever situation they face. This is the ability to call an armistice because the war is over. We no longer need to fight insignificant battles.

PRINCIPLE: Grace is what sustains us in the Christian life. It is God's provision for daily living.

APPLICATION:

The peace of God disappears quite often with Christians. It leaks out somewhere. Peace goes when we lose our temper and speak harshly to

our family. We wound those closest to us. The peace of God enables us to live with a tranquil spirit. In the midst of turbulence with people no one ruffles us. When everyone else is upset we are calm. We can sit down in the inside. Not many of us have that kind of serenity.

It is easy to have peace when everything is going our way. We are on top of the world. When everything comes up roses and everything is brakes for us, we can live the spiritual life. That is not the test of spirituality. The test is when we face trouble. God's peace is dynamic in the middle of trouble.

Colossians 1:3

"We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you"

Verses 3-8 comprise one sentence. This sentence sets forth a three fold thanksgiving. Verses 3-5 give reason for thanksgiving -- the linking of a trio of graces in the Colossians: faith, love, hope. Verses 6-8 present the source for thanksgiving.

Paul gave thanks for the Colossian faith, v3-4a; love; 4b; hope,v5; fruit, v6.

Throughout this passage the impact of the gospel upon them is central. Wherever the gospel is preached, it will do the same thing. Life is in the seed, not in the sower. It is the gospel that saves, not the messenger of the gospel. Always the seed is good but sometimes the ground may be poor. That will affect the harvest.

The first of the three fold thanksgiving is the Colossians faith, v4

"We give thanks"

As is his custom, Paul gives thanks for those to whom he writes, 1:3-8. Paul did not give thanks for the Galatians or the Corinthians (II Corinthians). If he can honestly thank God for the people to whom he writes, he always does so. As soon as the salutation is complete he introduces what he thanks God about them (compare Rom. 1:8). He could not honestly thank God for the Galatians. It is amazing that he could thank God for the Corinthians (I Cor 2:1).

This is a prayer for people Paul never saw. Paul had met two of their members, Epaphras and Philemon. Both may have been converts of Paul in

other areas such as Ephesus. He never saw their face (2:1) yet he thanked God for them. "Everything we heard about you we heard second handed." We thank God for those who are born again because they are a miracle of God's grace.

PRINCIPLE: Thanksgiving ought to be a part of every prayer. Whatever the matter of our rejoicing ought to be the matter of our thanksgiving.

APPLICATION: How much time do you spend giving thanks for other Christians? Are you thankful for the people who are a blessing to your Christian life? Do you thank God for the person who led you to Christ or the person who took an interest in you and helped you through the hard places even though they may be miles away?

"to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"

Paul's prayer is directed to God as Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving must first eye God as the source. The Father is the source of everything that comes our way.

God the Father is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father is the source, the Lord Jesus is the means of blessing.

Make sure you send your requests to the correct Heavenly Department. We pray more effectively when we address our prayers properly. Invariably in the Bible when thanks is expressed it is expressed to God the Father.

Paul acknowledges that God the Father through the Lord Jesus is the cause of what transpired in Colosse. Each thanksgiving in his epistles is an occasion for praise for what God has done. Here he gives thanks for calling the church together in faith and their growth in that faith.

PRINCIPLE: We should direct our prayer to the Father.

APPLICATION: Are you sending your prayers to right Heavenly Department?

"praying always for you"

Paul does not pray for them once and then forget it. Productive prayer is continuous. Sporadic prayer is not in God's design for the believer. It

must go on and on. Prayer takes work. Paul "always" prayed for the Colossians.

I Thessalonians 1: 2 "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, 3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father."

I Thessalonians 2: 3 "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

I Thessalonians 5: 17 "Pray without ceasing."

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to pray continuously.

APPLICATION: Do you pray regularly for others?

Colossians 1:4

"since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints"

Paul gives thanks (v.3) for the Colossians because they operate on fundamental methodologies of the Christian faith.

"since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus"

Note the subject for which Paul gives thanks -- for the work of God in them. God worked three principal graces in their lives: faith, love and hope.

First, God worked faith in their lives. The Colossians were willing to risk their future by their faith in Christ. Faith here is not an act of faith but an attitude of faith. It denotes the idea of firm persuasion and therefore trust. Faith is past oriented. It rests upon facts; it is based on the past. Faith is no leap in the dark.

The emphasis in this context is upon believing in Christ instead of false heresies and philosophies about to be denounced. This is faith anchored in Christ, resting in him. It is the soul's reliance upon him. Our faith should sink into him as the anchor sinks into the floor of the sea.

Of the trio of graces, faith always comes first. Faith must come first. We should never discredit faith in favor of love. Faith is the foundation of virtue. It is no mere feeling. Faith is a fact of ex-

perience that has a worthy object of truth. Christ the object of faith gives faith its value.

If we deposit money in a bank, our money is not safe in relation to the dimension of our faith in the bank. It is safe in relation to the size of the bank's solvency. We are not a Christian because we exercise faith; we are a Christian because we exercise faith in Christ. Faith is not the key; the key is the object of faith (Jesus Christ, Col. 2:5; Acts 20:21;24:24; Gal 2:16; 3:22,26; Phil 3:7-9; II Ti 3:15).

Paul thanked God for two things: one vertical and one horizontal; one horizontal and visible and the other perpendicular and invisible. "Faith in Christ" -- that is perpendicular and invisible. "Love for all the saints" is horizontal and visible. We prove we have faith in Christ when we love the saints. We demonstrate faith when we love the brethren. Faith is for the sake of love. We do not love for the sake of faith.

PRINCIPLE: The value of our faith lies in the object of our faith.

APPLICATION: We may have faith in ourselves, faith in humanity, faith in our physician, wife, husband and the structure of government but none of these faiths are the proper object of a relation with God. We are not right with God until we exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the true object of our faith.

The second area about which Paul gives thanks for the Colossians is their love.

"and of your love for all the saints"

Second, God worked love in them for each other. In spite of differences and weakness, they loved each other.

Love is a corollary truth to faith (v. 4a). True faith produces love. It is easy to love the saints in heaven. They do not have a sin capacity. The difficult part of loving saints on earth is that they sin. We must love them, sin capacity and all. We do not have the spiritual skill to dissect the old capacity from new one. We must love the entire person and take them for what they are. This is the ear-mark, trade mark and hall mark that we belong to Jesus (Jn 13:34,35).

"Love" is in the present tense. Love is the out working of faith (1:4a; Gal. 5:6). Love is not self-

centered or self-surrounded. Love purges us of our selfishness and gives us perspective in our relationships with others.

Love is the greatest characteristic of the Christian faith (I Cor 12:13); the greatest commandment in the Christian faith (John 13:34,35); the greatest constraint in Christian faith (II Cor 5:14); the greatest covering in the Christian faith (I Pet 4:8).

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to love all the saints, not just the popular or pleasant ones.

APPLICATION: We will do well to search our hearts to see if we love God's people. The outstanding, tangible, visible, external evidence that we have faith in Christ is that we love all the saints on earth that we know. That means the ornery ones and the nice ones too. Some of us are right ornery. We can blame our parents or whoever we please, but some of us are just hard to please. We are hard to get along with. We are not as polite as we should be. We are not as thoughtful as we should be. Some non-christians have better manners than we do.

Colossians 1:5

"because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel"

The third area for which Paul gives thanks for the Colossians is their hope. He thanks God that the Colossian faith was not secret, their love was not partial and their hope was not misplaced.

"because of the hope"

Paul links together the Colossian faith and love with their hope.

"Because of" -- because of the glorious anticipation of their future together. Their hope is not the ground of either faith or love but it is the occasion of both faith and love. It is a grand occasion to develop them and call them out to action. Paul gives thanks "because of" their hope in the wonderful prospect of Christ's coming. Because they have such hope, they act more boldly and lovingly.

Hope is no fancied feeling of future bliss but a present experience that gives complexion and composure to every day of life. Hope is the motive

behind faith and love. Hope reaches into the future and brings it back into the present. Hope reaches into heaven and brings it back down to earth.

The third grace God worked in them was hope. The Christian has a future. We look for the blessed hope (Tit. 2:13). The hope of heaven impacts how we live on earth. The more we fix our hope on eternal values the more liberal we will be on earth.

The Greek word for hope has no relation to our English word "I hope so." That is a desire with no assurance of fulfillment in fact, "I hope it will not rain today." I have no guarantee of that. There are clouds on the horizon so I take my umbrella with me. The New Testament word for hope is something that is certain because it does not depend on us. It depends on the word and work of Christ.

PRINCIPLE: Hope anticipates, faith appropriates. Faith accepts what hope expects.

APPLICATION: If you are not a Christian you have a horrible future. Your future is the lake of fire. If all the hope you have is social insurance, God help you. If you are born again you have a wonderful future: the hope laid up in heaven.

Hope for the Christian is also the anchor of the soul. It settles our attitude and gives us tenacity for the tough times. The future is as bright as the promises of God.

Hope is the present object of faith. It is already in existence laid up in heaven.

"which is laid up for you in heaven"

"Which is laid up for you in heaven" -- The word "heaven" is in the plural, "heavens." This is a reference to the invisible spiritual kingdom that surrounds us on all sides right now. There is hope for us right now because it comes from an invisible spiritual kingdom surrounding us presently. This is the good news that right now, as we face trouble, Jesus' presence is available to us. He imparts his strength and enables us to stand against adversity. This is the hope of the gospel that awakens faith.

"Laid up" means to be preserved. Hope is stored up for us like a treasure. God guarantees our salvation in eternity. We can blow it down here but we will not lose eternity there. We can never lose

our salvation because we never did anything to gain it.

The Christian life revolves around our choice. In time we can choose to live on the basis of the divine operating assets or not. In eternity everything depends on God. Jesus is there praying for us to guarantee our salvation (Heb. 7:25). He also prays that we will succeed in our work in time.

"For you" -- No matter what happens in this life, we will live forever. God could take us to heaven the moment we accept Christ but he has a plan for us in time. We are his personal representatives down here. We are ambassadors for Christ. What we do as an ambassador in time will determine our reward in eternity.

Our hope will be revealed in sight at the rapture. Hope produces faith. Faith in turn grows into love. Hope is the foundation.

"of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel"

Hope is awakened by the gospel (I Thes 1:3; 5:8; I Cor 13:13).

Our hope rests in the truth of the gospel. The test of reality is not whether it pleases us or is comfortable but whether it is true.

"Heard" -- Light houses have horns as well as lights. Ship captains cannot see the light in dense fog so they use the fog horn. There are two things involved in the Christian life: walk and talk, life and lip, and they must go together. When people come to Christ the word will get out. Your family will hear about it first thing. God converts our tongue when we receive Christ.

PRINCIPLE: Our hope rests in the truth of the gospel.

APPLICATION: Have both your life and lip been converted?

Colossians 1:6

"which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth"

"which has come to you, as it has also in all the world"

The gospel spread over the Roman empire like an epidemic (1:23; Rom. 1:8). It produced fruit among the Colossians. Their influence spread to their city and communities around them.

This indicates the gospel's authenticity. The gospel is universal in its impact. It was a force among them. The gospel is for the whole world. It is not one message among a pluralism of many; it was a message of singular power.

"and is bringing forth fruit"

God was at work through out the Roman Empire. People are coming to know Christ through out the civilized world.

Growth and fruit-bearing go hand in hand. This phrase refers to the continuing growth of the gospel. The grammar indicates there is an innate energy in the message. It conveys inherent power. The inherent energy of a living organism produces fruit. It is the outward result of effective witnessing. The person who receives the gospel of necessity bears fruit (1 Thes 2:13).

"as it is also among you since the day you heard"

Growth began with the initial reception of the gospel. The gospel triggered new life. The Colossians heard and embraced the gospel. Their lives were transformed. The late coming legalists had no part in that dynamic.

PRINCIPLE: The gospel has inherent power to win people to Christ (Rom. 1:16). We do not win people to Christ by our persuasion but by our gospel.

APPLICATION: Are you afraid to share your faith? Do you lack the confidence to introduce people to Jesus? The argument of this passage says we should not depend upon our persuasive abilities. The Spirit filled believer depends on the dynamic of the gospel. All we need to do is share the message. The message then takes over to win

people to Jesus Christ. The sword will not cut as long as it remains in the scabbard. It must be unsheathed to be effective. If the gospel is preached it will produce fruit.

"and knew the grace of God in truth"

The Colossians should have fully understood the grace of God and should have been immune to the false teaching spreading in their area.

A major characteristic of the true gospel is that it is a gospel of grace. Some preach a gospel of works (Gal.1:6-7). The true gospel is grace plus nothing (Rom. 11:6; Eph 2:8-9).

The heretics of Paul's day were preaching the gospel of legalism. The grace of God in truth is the grace of God without adulteration. It is the grace of God in its simplicity. The message was one of undiluted grace. The gospel came as an act of grace on God's part. It was a message from God, not men. God took the initiative.

PRINCIPLE: Grace and works are mutually exclusive (Rom. 11:6).

APPLICATION: We cannot gain God's favor by merit (Gal. 2:21). Jesus won God's favor by his merit. True Christianity rests in the provision of Christ's death upon the cross. Jesus' death satisfies the just demands of an absolutely holy God. This is true both for becoming a Christian and living the Christian life.

Colossians 1:7

"as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf"

Paul developed people wherever he went. His epistles are replete with references to people into whom he poured his life (Rom. 16).

"as you also learned from Epaphras"

The Colossians learned about the gospel from Epaphras. His name occurs three times in the Bible. The first occurrence is here (1:7). The second occurrence is 4:12 where Colossians indicates he probably established the church at Colosse. The last occurrence is in Philemon 23 where he was under arrest in Rome with Paul.

"our dear fellow servant"

He probably brought faith to Colosse. Paul and Epaphras served the same Master and were busy in the same work. He had made a long hazardous journey to Rome where he became a prisoner with Paul. That is why he was "dear" to Paul. Those who serve Jesus Christ often find a place in their hearts for each other.

The word "servant" here means minister. Paul calls him a "slave of Christ" in 4:12. That is a step beyond a minister. A slave has no rights. Epaphras waved his rights. He relinquished all his rights to Jesus Christ. He was satisfied to do the Savior's bidding.

"who is a faithful minister of Christ"

Others were unfaithful to the truth. Tychicus was another "faithful minister" and "fellow servant" of Paul (Col. 4:7). God entrusted Epaphras with the gospel; he was faithful in discharging it. He was true to the message and to getting the message out. He was a true blue servant of God.

It is one thing to serve the Lord on a missionary tour or in the market place. One can be quite spiritual in that kind of circumstance. It is something else to serve the Lord in the adversity of prison life. The closer we get to people under duress the more we can detect their imperfections. Paul saw the character of Epaphras in distress. He counted him "faithful" in that situation.

"on your behalf"

Epaphras was Paul's personal representative (Phil. 2:25; 4:18). He was not the Colossian minister but the minister of Christ on their behalf. Jesus' appointed him to this work, not the Colossians.

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to multiply ourselves through other people.

APPLICATION: Is there someone in your life into whom you are pouring your life? Are you multiplying yourself in someone else?

Colossians 1:8

"who also declared to us your love in the Spirit."

Epaphras told Paul and his companions that the Colossians loved them.

"in the Spirit"

This is the only place in Colossians that mentions the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the author of Colossians but he mentions himself only once.

Romans 15:30 declares that believers can love by the love that the Spirit imparts, "Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me." It is the Holy Spirit who enabled them to love Paul.

Two other similar expressions about how New Testament believers loved shed light on how we are to love.

Tit 3:15, "All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen."

II Jn 1:1, "To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all those who have known the truth."

This is spiritual love. They loved Paul in the things of Christ. New Testament believers loved through the Holy Spirit, loved in the faith and loved in the truth.

The trinity is revealed in verses 6-8: "God" (v.6), "Christ" (v7), "Spirit" (v8).

PRINCIPLE: The Holy Spirit can enable us to love those we would not otherwise love.

APPLICATION: Are you facing a difficult person in your life? Do you depend upon the Holy Spirit to enable you to love that person?

Colossians 1:9

"For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"

This verse begins the body of the epistle. Paul begins with a prayer for the Colossians that touches all the bases of their need. This is one of the greatest prayers of the Bible.

Paul first begins with intercession for the Colossians and then moves to thanks for what God has already done for them. It is ironic that Christians ask God to do things for them he has already done. We ask God to forgive us for our sins when we already have forgiven us in Christ (v. 14). We

ask God to allow us to enter his kingdom, when he has already done that as well (v.13). It is more proper to thank God for these things than to ask him for them.

"For this reason we also"

"This reason" is their original reception of the gospel (vv. 3-8). Paul prays for them (vv. 9-14) because of their reception to the gospel and love for all the saints.

"since the day we heard it"

They heard it from Epaphras. The news of their response to the gospel led to a prayer request. This prayer answers to their faith.

"do not cease to pray for you"

This is one of the remarkable prayers of the apostle Paul. Other prayers of Paul can be found in Ephesians 1, 3, Philippians 1, II Thessalonians 1. When we read his prayers we are at a high water mark of spirituality in the New Testament. We ought to be at our best in prayer. When we pray we enter the presence of God. The white heat of that presence should melt away spiritual superficiality and sham. Pretension dissolves in God's presence.

This is incessant prayer but it does not mean that Paul prayed for them perpetually. It simply means that he prayed for them on a regular basis. We should pray for people regularly (Acts 20:31; Eph. 1:16; I Thes. 1:2; 5:17). Many people do not cease because they do not start.

PRINCIPLE: Dead earnestness is essential to true prayer.

APPLICATION: We need to seize every opportunity to pray. Prayer is the place where we fight spiritual battles. Do you have a spirit of prayer? Do you seize every opportunity to pray for people you may influence? Are we dead earnest about prayer? We believe in prayer but we do not pray very much. We subscribe to the idea of prayer but when we announce a prayer meeting a minimum number of people come. We believe in prayer if an emergency lands into our lives. Otherwise, we show little interest in prayer. We are eloquent in prayer if it involves our family or our person. If it

involves someone else we are quite casual about prayer.

In the prayers of the New Testament we detect the deficiencies of the saints. Paul prays for things they lacked in their spiritual life. Paul's prayers pinpoint the primary and paramount needs of the saints.

This prayer falls into two halves. The first half are petitions for the Colossians and the second half is thanksgiving for the prerogatives God gave them in Christ.

"and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will"

This is the first of two requests Paul prays for the Colossians. The first petition for which Paul asked was that the Colossians might be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

This is the outcome of a great desire. The word "ask" means to implore. It denotes earnestness. This is a request of great earnestness.

"That" is the purpose of the prayer request.

The word "knowledge" means to go beyond the surface of the facts. It sees the truth in the facts. It finds experience in the truth. This is a full knowledge gained from the experience of concentrating on the subject. The operating principle here is the will of God is contained in the Word of God. We cannot know the will of God apart from the Word of God. God has not revealed his special will in nature, in trees and flowers. God's will never contradicts his Word. God's will never transcends the principles of his Word.

The word "filled" suggests filling to the top or brim. Paul prays that they will be satisfied with nothing less than the limit of the knowledge of God's will. He wants them to obtain an entire insight into the will of God. "Filled" means to be controlled to the tiniest detail. We need to know the will of God not only in major decisions of life but in the little decisions as well. It is to pervade our purpose, plans and thoughts.

Most of us are satisfied with being half-filled with everything except food. We do not stop eating until we are full. We are not that way when it comes to spiritual food. We are satisfied with a starvation diet in spiritual things. We snack on spiritual junk

food and run off to the spiritual race only to run with very little spiritual energy. It is God's will that we be filled with spiritual food. Most of us are not even half full. God wants us to be chock-block full of the knowledge of the will of God. God wants us to be experts in the will of God. If God answers this prayer we will know all the implications of his will for our lives.

PRINCIPLE: Unless we are speaking terms with the will of God we will have little wisdom and understanding in the spiritual battle we face.

APPLICATION: If we have little spiritual discernment we will get caught up in every spiritual disease that comes along. We will be susceptible to unsound teaching. Dr. Harry Ironside used to say, "If it's new, it's not true. If it's true, it's not new." We need to take care before we embrace anything that is different or new. If it deviates from the Bible we need to be cautious.

The first thing Paul prays for the Colossians is that they will be filled with the knowledge of God's will. The will of God is a great theme in Scripture.

"and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will"

Note the number of passages dealing with the will of God:

John 7:17, "If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority."

We must be willing to do his will, sight unseen. We must be willing to do his will before we even know what it is. We say, "Well, I will consider whether the will of God fits my personality, then I will do it." No, God wants us to be willing to do his will no matter the cost.

God will leave us in the dark about his will if we are not willing to do it. God is willing to reveal his will to us if we are willing to ascertain it. We dare not say to God, "I would like a free, 30 day trial, of your will. If I like it, I will do it." We will never know the will of God in that case.

We cannot dictate to God the terms on which we will condescend to do his will. God does not have to make a deal with us. He does not need us; we need him. We do not bankrupt the will of God

when we do not do it; we bankrupt ourselves. We cannot blackmail God.

Eph 5:17, "Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

It is not enough to know the will of God, we need to understand it. We do not need a Ph.D from our local university to understand it either.

Rom 12:1,2, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

We cannot prove the will of God until we "present" or yield our bodies to God for his use. We cannot prove the will of God until we are free from the gravitational tug of the world.

Many other verses speak to the will of God: Mt 7:21;12:50; Acts 21:14;

II Cor 8:5;Heb 10:36;13:20,21;I Pet 3:17; 2:15; 4:1,2 ;I Jn 2:17

Col 4:12 " Epaphras, who is one of you, a bond-servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

Epaphras was completely in the will of God. He was not on the edge of it. He was dead center in the will of God. He was not on the periphery of God's will.

Acts 13:32 "For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption."

David fulfilled all of God's will. We feel that if we fulfill three quarters of God's will we do fine. "That is a good average. Why should God ask for anything more?" What percentage of obedience do we want from our children?

Jesus did the will of God: John 4:34; 6:38-40; Mt 26:39

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to do his will unre-servedly.

APPLICATION: Are you willing to do whatever God asks of you?

"with the knowledge of His will"

The word "knowledge" indicates a full understanding of God's will. This word is a key word in the book of Colossians (1:9, 10; 2:2; 3:10).

God makes his will known through the Holy Spirit's teaching ministry in the Word of God. The false teachers at Colosse claimed a super knowledge to the Word of God. Paul prays that the Colossians will receive their super knowledge from God's Word (Colossians). Paul's desire is that they may have a thorough knowledge of God's will. The Colossian renegades offered a false knowledge. To counteract this Paul prayed for a deeper knowledge of God's will on their part.

The will of God here is the whole purpose of God in Christ. This is the will of God in the complete sense, not simply the will of God for salvation or his general decree. This is the will of God both in belief and behavior. The most important thing in the life of a child of God is the will of God. If we are going to please God, we need to find out what his will is and do it. If I want the smile of God, I need to find his will.

"in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"

The Holy Spirit uses the word "wisdom" six times in Colossians (Col. 1:9, 28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5). Wisdom is the application of truth to experience. It is the ability to apply truth to life that comes only from God (James 1:5; 3:15). Wisdom is insight into the true nature of things. It is the faculty of judging and acting aright. "Full knowledge" is not the end; it is the means. The end is the wisdom to apply truth to experience.

False teachers submitted only the "appearance" of wisdom" (2:23). Their "wisdom" trapped the Colossians in legalism. So the "wisdom" for which Paul prays for them is prudence. It is the ability to look at actions in terms of their results.

When we apply truth to experience we end up with "spiritual understanding." This is the ability to categorize and relate a principle to a problem. "Understanding" (Col. 2:2) is perspicacity or discernment. This is the ability to pierce into a problem and work it to an adequate solution. Understanding is critical knowledge that can apply the knowledge of the first principles of Christianity to

any situation. This is the ability to live the Christian life effectively.

There is emphasis on "spiritual" in the original language. This is knowledge from the Holy Spirit, not from the Gnostic Judaizers. The false teacher's wisdom was all show (2:8,18,23). The most clever human philosophy can never understand this apart from divine revelation. This revelation comes by the Bible. No matter how erudite and brilliant people may be, they cannot get "full-knowledge" without God disclosing divine information to them.

Note the word "all." This is a key word in Colossians. The word occurs no fewer than 32 times in this one little letter of four chapters. This word applies to both "wisdom" and "understanding." We need "all" wisdom and "all" understanding.

PRINCIPLE: It is one thing to have knowledge; it is another thing to use that knowledge properly.

APPLICATION: Are you the type of person who loves to acquire knowledge about Christianity but care little about living it? The words "wisdom" and "understanding" are crucial to you. Those words will enable you to live out the Christian life. That is why Paul prayed that the Colossians would have "all" "wisdom" and "understanding." Do you have the courage to pray that God will give you those graces to live the Christian life? If you are frustrated with your Christian life, these two qualities may be the answer to your problem.

Colossians 1:10

"that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God"

Paul's purpose in this passage is that the Colossians would live a life pleasing to God.

"that you may walk "

"Walk" means to live a course of life as a philosophy of life (Co. 2:6; 3:7; 4:4). We must not divorce our position in Christ from our daily course of life. The standing of the believer must relate to the state of his life. The first two chapters of Colossians set forth our status quo before God; it is perfect in Christ. Although our position is right before God, we must ring the changes on our walk if our position is going to be effective on a daily ba-

sis. If we walk a carnal life, it will not affect the status of our standing before God. However, God is interested in our walk.

Paul holds up a high ideal that we "walk worthy of the Lord." Paul never separated doctrine from life or theology from experience. The word "walk" unites what we believe with how we live. H.C.G. Moule says we are to "beware of an untheological devotion." That kind of devotion will ultimately evaporate and disintegrate.

Paul is afraid that alien philosophy will invade Christian truth. He wants the Colossians both to know what they believe and live out what they believe. Many people believe that they can live a healthy spiritual life with a minimum of Bible. However warm and fuzzy this thinking may be, it is dangerous to the very foundation of Christianity. There is no "last" to it. Fashions of thought and attractive personalities cannot sustain the Christian life.

"worthy of the Lord"

The word "worthy" means of equal value. The adverb "worthily" means suitably, in a becoming manner; in a manner of equal value with the thing (in our case -- person) referred to. We are to walk according to the equal value of the Lord. Our lives are to be commensurate with who our Lord is. Our lives should reflect the person we know so intimately. The way we live should mirror our Lord and what he did for us. Is our life consistent with the character of Christ (Compare I Th 2:12; Ro 16:2; Eph 4:1; Phil 1:27)? Creed and conduct are inseparable.

None of us is worthy. Our goal is to walk in such a way that it will reflect on the Lord of glory in a positive way.

PRINCIPLE: Walking worthy of the Lord presupposes that we know who and what the Lord is and has done so that we can match our life with his provision for us.

APPLICATION: Are we praying for each other in these days of doctrinal erosion? Is your life suited or fitted for the Lord you serve? Do you have a case of arrested spiritual development? Are you eating right? Maybe spiritual paralysis has set in? You may not be totally paralyzed, just immobilized. We may be impotent in the Christian life.

Are we operating at 50% of our peak potential? We could be a 50% better Christian if we "walked worthy" of the Lord.

Our walk is our testimony. The Christian's testimony (II Cor. 1:12) is like a young woman's reputation. It takes a long time to build but a very short time to lose it. Once we lose our testimony it takes a long time to build confidence in us again. The attitude of many people is "They did it once, they'll do it again. They will revert to type."

When we walk a life that corresponds to the who and what the Lord is, we will "please Him."

"fully pleasing Him"

Literally, this phrase means "unto all pleasing." Paul wants us to give pleasure to the Lord. "Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God" (I Th 4:1). This also infers that a true Christian may have God's displeasure.

This word "pleasing" was used originally in the negative sense of a "yes-man" in extra biblical Greek. This person is willing to do anything to please a benefactor. The Bible does not use this word in the sense of a cringing attitude. "Pleasing" implies anticipation to meet the desires of God.. It is the willingness to do any wish the Lord may please. It is the desire to fulfill what is eternally due to God.

We think of the Lord's desires in association with affection. We love him, how can we please him? We try to please the Lord beyond the explicit statements of Scripture. Just as a devoted son seeks to please a parent, we seek to please God. We seek to anticipate God's wishes, "Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him" (II Cor 5:9).

People need prayer that they will please God over men. There is a great temptation to live our lives around what men think as over against what God thinks. God condemns pleasing men (Col 3:22; I Th 2:4; Gal 1:10).

Four results come from pleasing God with our lives:

1. "being fruitful in every good work" (v. 10)

2. "increasing in the knowledge of God" (v 10)
3. "strengthened with all might" (v. 11)
4. "giving thanks to the Father" (v. 12)

PRINCIPLE: It is possible to please God.

APPLICATION: Are you seeking to correspond your life with God's provisions for you? Are you, therefore, pleasing God? Are you interested in giving God pleasure? We cannot please everyone so we might as well please the Lord and let the chips fall where they may. Would you like God to be proud of your life? When your children make a good play in baseball we are proud: "That's my boy/girl!" On the other hand, when our children embarrass us by their behavior when we have company, we want to disown them or make out like they belong to our neighbors. God is not ashamed to call us "brothers" (Heb. 2:11). Are you walking in such a way as to warrant the smile of heaven? Are you living with a great amount of spiritual aberration? God is not happy with erratic spiritual walk. Everything we do reflects on God.

"being fruitful in every good work"

The words "being fruitful" and "increasing" were also used in verse six. This phrase directs attention to the life within. Knowledge without appropriation of knowledge is vain.

Christ is the source and energy to produce the fruit. The Christian should produce fruit drawn from Christ. Present tense = the Christian life is to constantly bear fruit, not simply on occasion. To be fruitful means to be productive (John 15:1-5).

"In every good work" is active goodness of any kind (Eph 2:10; Gal 5:5; Titus 1:16; 2:7,14; 3:8,15). Works are not the foundation of a right relationship to God but the outcome of that relationship. "Work" here is any kind of activity undertaken on behalf of Christ. Everything done for this reason is a mode of fruitfulness.

Note that it says we are to be fruitful in "every" good work. There are many good works in the Christian life. The Christian should work on every one of them.

We cannot come into eternal life by good works (Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8,9). If a person tries to curry brownie points with God to placate an angry God

he has missed the point of Christianity. The message of Christianity is that God IS placated by the death of Christ. Good works is the FRUIT, not the ROOT of salvation (Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14; 3:8). God expects us to demonstrate to others that we have a personal relationship with him. Are you willing to serve God on earth (Joshua 24:15; Dan. 6:20; Rom. 1:9; 14:18; I Thes 1:9,10)?

Are you involved in the things of Christ? It will be a rude awakening for some of God's people when they stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. Our generation is inflected with the erroneous idea that pervades Christianity that we hire a pastor and staff to do all the work while the congregation sits, observes and criticizes. When we stand at the Judgment Seat we will be accountable for the gifts and abilities God has given us. God does not have two standards, one for the pulpit and one for the pew. There is not one brand of Christianity for the plumber and one for the preacher. God expects all Christians to do ministry (Eph 4:11,12).

PRINCIPLE: God has a plan for ministry for every believer.

APPLICATION: Do you have ministry? Your ministry may not be public, but do you have a ministry? If you have come to Christ, you should have some ministry whereby you demonstrate that you have come to know God. It need not be spectacular or sensational ministry but it needs to be real. We bring what we have to God's service. God does not expect us to serve him beyond our ability. All he expects of us is to do what we can with what we have. Bring whatever you have and say, "Lord, I would like you to use me. I may not be brilliant but here I am. I would like to be used by you."

God did not design the Christian life to be static. If we stand still in our spiritual growth, we will become static.

Today, we come to the second spiritual fruit of pleasing God: increased knowledge of God.

"and increasing in the knowledge of God"

The word "increasing" indicates that the Christian life is progressive. We never arrive at a complete knowledge of God. We can always learn more about him.

The more we know of God the more we will grow in our faith (I Pet 2:2; II Pet 1:5-7; 3:18; Jude 20). The Christian life is activated by a crisis know as new birth. That crisis triggers a life-long process of knowing more about God. As we "increase" our knowledge of God we move through spiritual babyhood, childhood, adolescence and, if all things are equal, we eventually become mature spiritual adults.

There are peculiar temptations to each phase of our spiritual journey of maturity (I John 2:12-14). If we do not advance in our Christian life it may be because we have not grown in our knowledge of God. We may have a case of arrested spiritual development. We are dwarfed and have become a spiritual pygmy. Our knowledge of God should be greater than it was last year.

This knowledge is no mere abstract knowledge but knowledge of a person (Hosea 6:3; John 17:13). We must cultivate an appetite for knowing God. If we continue to be spoon-fed in spiritual things we will remain a baby. We must learn to feed ourselves. If we do so, we will increase in the knowledge of God. There is no way to increase in the knowledge of God without increasing in the knowledge of the Word of God.

PRINCIPLE: Our idea of God should grow larger as we grow as Christians.

APPLICATION: Is your idea of God greater today than the day you came to know Christ? The ultimate purpose of creation is to glorify God. How can we glorify God if we do not sufficiently know who he is?

Colossians 1:11

"strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy"

The third result of pleasing God is spiritual strength. This verse has three words for strength: "strengthened," "might" and "power." Paul's prayers significantly emphasize power because power transforms saints.

"strengthened with all might"

The first word for spiritual strength is the word "strengthened." The word "might" is spiritual vitality.

There is a play on words in this phrase, "empowered with all power." The Colossian saints will need "all might" to meet the situation in Colosse. Is this a tautology? The point is that we might be strengthened with the strength of another. The power lies with God, not us. We cannot obtain God's power via a conference in the Rockies or by a seminar on personality development.

If we are strengthened with "all" might, does that mean we are almighty?!! No, this is sufficient strength for whatever situation we might face. We generally water down biblical terms. We usually translate this word "all" to mean "some" strength. "God will give me 'almost all' strength I need to live the Christian life!"

The word "might" is inherent ability or the ability to perform anything. God has given us the inherent ability to perform his service. The word "strengthened" is the term for endowed strength. This is not a strength of our own. It is a strength that God gives.

God provides the energy, the fuel or dynamo for the Christian life. When we draw upon this Divine dynamo we harness God's power for everyday life. If we are inept in our Christian life, the fault lies with us. We do not use the power God provides. There is no short-supply on God's side.

There are many promises of God whereby he gives his power to those in need:

Joshua 1:9; I Kings 2:2; Isaiah 40:29,31; Romans 4:20; I Corinthians 16:13; II Corinthians 12:9,10; II Timothy 4:16,17; I Peter 5:10

III John 2 "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." John wants them to be as strong spiritually as they are physically. If some of us were as strong physically as we are spiritually we would be confined to a bed.

PRINCIPLE: For every requirement God makes, he makes the power available to do what he wants of us.

APPLICATION: No matter how difficult the demand for Christian service may be, no matter how difficult the task, God always makes available his resources to match the need.

The second phrase for power in this verse is "according to His glorious power."

"according to His glorious power"

"Power" is the word for overcoming resistance. This word is only used of God in the New Testament. Of the number of words for "power" in the New Testament, this word means manifested power. This power is measured by the might of God. God's "glorious power" speaks of the manifestation of his essential being. This is the power that God declares to us when he reveals himself to us.

The words "according to" express the measure of the supply of power. God proportions this power to the believer, not merely according to his need, but according to the supply of God.

"His glorious power" is the power of his glory (Eph. 1:18-23; 3:16; 6:10). This may mean according to his grace. God does not give according to our weakness but according to his glorious power.

We have patience and longsuffering according to the might of his glory (literally). God's glory will manifest what he can do about endurance of problems and our temper with people. God himself will fortify us against the attacks of Satan. Not only does the power of God help us but his "glorious" power enables us to live the Christian life. Spiritual life needs spiritual strength. We need more than spiritual support.

There is much talk about power in evangelical circles today. The biblical emphasis is upon power for "endurance" and "longsuffering." We are strengthened with "all power" and "according to his glorious power." It takes God's power to endure circumstances and to be longsuffering with people. Our natural proclivity is to become easily upset at our fate or at people. God's power is important for this tendency.

PRINCIPLE: God provides divine enablement for any issue of life. God makes us powerful with his might.

APPLICATION: When a spiritual crisis rages about your life, do you draw upon God's power? The strength of your spiritual life will be tested when life becomes grim with tragedy, sickness, surgery or death.

Paul prays that the Christian will have power for "all patience and longsuffering with joy."

"for all patience"

God's power is designed for "patience" and "longsuffering with joy."

This is not sour resignation to the acceptance of God's will. It is not the passive acceptance of the inevitable. "Endurance" is the pro-active action to move ahead no matter the difficulty. Strength comes from the power inherent in God himself. It is the ability to put our faith in the strength that God gives us.

"Patience" is far more than the ability to bear circumstances. It is the ability to turn adversity into a glory of God. "Patience" does not yield to adversity in life. It faces trouble head on. No circumstance in life can defeat a person who draws upon the power of God. No set back can vanquish this kind of person. This person triumphs over anything life may hand out.

The Greek word is not the same as puny English word "patience." We say, "I wish I was more patience with my wife." This is not the passive acceptance of the inevitable. It is unrelenting effort even in the face of difficulty and trial.

The word in the original means tenacity or endurance. It is that capacity of bull dog stick-to-it-tiveness. This person says, "It is too soon to quit. I am not going to give up." A president of a college that I attended preached a sermon every year, "Don't Quit Too Soon." If we have God's strength strengthening us in our daily life, we will not throw in the towel. God's power will enable us to bear through the problem.

There is a difference between "endurance" and "longsuffering." "Endurance" relates to adverse circumstances. "Longsuffering" relates to difficult people primarily.

"Patience" is the word "endurance" (James 1:3; 5:11). This word is used of an athlete in Hebrews 12:1 who runs with dogged persistence the entire course.

PRINCIPLE: "Patience" means to remain under. It does not easily succumb to problems.

APPLICATION: A lack of patience leads to discouragement. Are you developing a hide like a rhinoceros? The real issue is can you bear it. Are you tempted to quit? Do you have the virtue of persistence?

Patience relates to events and circumstances while "longsuffering" relates to people.

"and longsuffering"

Patience and longsuffering are often placed together in Scripture (II Co 6:4,6; II Ti 3:10; James 5:10-11).

"Longsuffering" is virtue in the face of provocation from people. Our natural instinct is to retaliate whether by act or attitude. This is virtue in the face of provocation (I Co 13:4).

"Longsuffering" means long-temper (Gal. 5:22,23; Col 3:12). A longsuffering person will not rashly retaliate. Can you draw out your temper to a great length? Longsuffering is the capacity to suffer a long time. Are you a veteran servant of Christ. Have you been tested and tried so that you can take the heat? Can you take it?

Whereas a lack of "patience" leads to discouragement, a lack of "longsuffering" leads to retaliation or revenge (Prov 15:18; 16:32). "Endurance" means to sustain under pressure of trial and relates to hope while "longsuffering" means to slow to anger and relates to mercy.

PRINCIPLE: "Longsuffering" is patience with people.

APPLICATION: A man is as big as the people that annoy him. When criticism comes your way, do you cave in? An occupational hazard of Christian work is criticism. If you cannot take it you might as well make your reservation for the first flight to the moon!! There is no such thing as life on earth without criticism.

"with joy"

Fortitude and longsuffering are not morose qualities but should be accompanied by joy (inner animation; John 15:11; 16:24; II Cor 8:1,2; I Th 1:6; I Pet 1:6,8; I Jn 1:4).

The devil wants to rob us of our joy. God wants us to have inner animation of the soul even in bad circumstances and with difficult people.

PRINCIPLE: God gives us the power to have inner animation (joy) even in the midst of difficult circumstances and problem people.

APPLICATION: We say, "I have the right to be sour, bitter and critical of others. I have been deeply hurt by what they said about me." God's design for us is that we will have "joy" in any circumstance and with any person. Do you resign yourself to the will of God or do you rejoice in the will of God?

Colossians 1:12

"giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light."

This verse begins another phase of Paul's prayer. First Paul prays that God would intervene for the Colossians, now he demonstrates his appreciation for what they already have in Christ. There is a great distinction between what we need and what we have in Christ. It is a great pity if we do not understand this distinction.

"giving thanks to the Father"

Thankfulness is the fourth effect of entering God's will (1 Thes. 5:18; Phil. 4:6). Note the other times Paul asks the Colossians to be thankful (3:15-17; 4:2).

We give thanks to the Father because he is the source of our privileges in Christ. God's grace is already provided for every believer by Christ. The word "grace" is at the root of the Greek word for "thanks." If we enjoy the benefits of the inheritance, God should receive the glory for supplying it.

Gratitude is appreciation for God's provisions. Thanksgiving is a trait of a believer alive to God's grace. Thanksgiving is a process. God does not want us to give thanks once and then cease. We are to give thanks at all times (I Thes 5:18).

Note that thanksgiving is directed to the Father. The Son and the Spirit are mediators. Thanksgiving is never directed to them. If we know which department to place our requisition we will receive our answer sooner. If we know who to address we will get an answer sooner. We pray to the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.

PRINCIPLE: If we orient to the grace of God (God's provisions) we can give thanks in every heartache or adverse circumstance.

APPLICATION: Thanks in difficulty and trial means we are oriented to the plan of God for our lives. This means we orient to the eternal and not the temporal.

Biblical thanksgiving always has a sufficient reason or content for the thanks. It is more than an emotional outburst.

"who has qualified us"

There are two reasons why we are to give thanks:

1. We were made sufficient for our eternal inheritance.
2. We were delivered from the Satanic realm (v.13).

The first content of thanks is that God qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints. We are not fit in and of ourselves for heaven. We are "qualified" because God qualified us in Christ at the moment of salvation. This qualification comes from our status quo with Christ (positional truth). We qualify because we are one with Christ. Note that God is the one doing the qualifying. The reason we give thanks is that God made us sufficient, not deserving (II Cor 2:16; 3:6)

II Tim. 2:21, "Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work."

We are fit positionally before God eternally by our salvation in Christ, however, we may not be fit for the master's use even though we are fit for heaven. We are fit for heaven because the blood of Christ cleansed us from sin but we may not be clean vessels. God will by-pass the unclean saint and use someone with less training, giftedness or skill.

PRINCIPLE: We are eternally fit for heaven the moment we receive Christ but we are not necessarily fit for service.

APPLICATION: We are as eternally fit for heaven one second after we receive Christ as we ever will be. No amount of spirituality or witnessing will make us any more fit for heaven. Fitness for heaven depends upon the finished work of Christ,

not on our work for Christ. Because of the incomparable work of Christ on the cross, the believing sinner stands perfect in the sight of God (Eph. 1:6; II Cor 5:21). God puts into the believer, the split second he comes to know Christ, God's own righteousness. We cannot add to or subtract from our exalted, eternal, unalterable position in Christ. This is true of every born again believer no matter the quality of his life.

"to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light"

The word "partakers" means to share. Christians are partners with Christ. Christ is the heir of God (Heb. 1:2). Heirship is based on sonship (Rom. 8:16,17). All those who unite with Christ share his inheritance (Eph. 1:11). We are accepted in the Beloved One (Eph. 1:6). Salvation qualifies us to inherit God's kingdom.

We are joint-heirs with Christ, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Rom. 8:16,17). What does it mean to possess a joint-heirship with Christ? When a couple opens a joint account in the bank, they both have access to the entire account. In the human account it is whoever gets there first gets the money! In the divine account both access the account equally. This does not mean that half of it is the Lord's and half mine.

We share in the inheritance of the saints. A "saint" is a person who has entered into union with Christ eternally. This is a person set apart unto God forever. The moment we are born again we become a saint. It will take time to take on the characteristics of a saint. We need to be taught how to grow spiritually. It takes times to grow in grace. We may not be very saintly, but we are a saint. As we grow, we become more saintly.

The "light" is the spiritual sphere into which the Lord transformed us from the authority of darkness (Eph 6:12). God took us out from under the authority of Satan and his rebel kingdom and placed us under the sovereignty of King Jesus. "Light" refers to God's presence in heaven. God's glory is his manifest presence (I Tim. 6:16).

PRINCIPLE: We share in the heirship of Christ.

APPLICATION: Do you realize how rich you are spiritually? The more we examine our spiritual inheritance the more we realize how rich we are. We may live in a spiritual slum district whereas we could live in a spiritually in the best part of town. What a pity to live beneath our spiritual privileges! We live like a pauper when we are a millionaire.

Faith makes tangible what is invisible to the naked eye.

Colossians 1:13

"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love"

Having given thanks for the inheritance for which the Father qualified believers, Paul now moves his thanks toward the believer's rescue from the satanic realm.

"He has delivered us from the power of darkness"

The words "delivered" and "conveyed" relate to the themes of the Old Testament.

We were delivered from Satan's kingdom, a kingdom of darkness (Eph 6:12) by placing our faith in the cross. God calls Satan's kingdom utter darkness (Mt. 25:30) We are called out of darkness (I Pet. 2:9). "Darkness" is more than the absence of light; it is the opposite of light. Darkness is not only without God; it is against God. We have been delivered from rebellion against God.

The word "delivered" means we were delivered at a point in the past -- our conversion. This deliverance is absolutely finished. There is no progress in this rescue. It is an event. This is a spiritual rescue greater than the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

The word "power" is authoritative power. God rescues us from the authority of Satan. We are no longer under his evil rule. Darkness has no more authority over us. Satan's authority has been broken. We do not have to obey him any longer. The world is becoming more vicious and cruel every day. "Power" here probably means jurisdiction. We are no longer under the jurisdiction of Satan. We are out from under the tyranny of Satan.

PRINCIPLE: The believer is rescued from the kingdom of Satan and placed into "the kingdom of the Son of His love" permanently.

APPLICATION: We need to be reminded that we cannot become dislodged from the kingdom of Christ. We can also forget that we belong to another kingdom than this world system. All the power of Satan cannot remove us from that kingdom. We irrevocably belong to God's kingdom. We have been permanently transferred from Satan's kingdom to Christ's kingdom. We are under a brand new authority. The only thing left for Satan is to try to fool us that we belong to his kingdom. It is easy to get our eyes off what God has done for us in Christ. We subjectively get our eyes on people or other things and not on the objectivity of truth.

Paul presents the negative side of who rules us in the first half of the verse now he turns to the positive side.

There is no middle ground between the diabolical kingdom of Satan and the divine kingdom of God. We are either in one kingdom or the other. There is no progression between the two kingdoms. God conveys us into his kingdom instantaneously and immediately.

"and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love"

The word "conveyed" means to move a large body of people into another dominion. It was the custom of a victorious army to move a defeated population to another country. Israel was moved to the Mesopotamian valley in the Babylonian captivity. Here Christ moves people from the dominion of Satan to his own dominion. The believer not only is dislocated from Satan's kingdom but put into an entirely new kingdom.

God is not trying to convey us into his kingdom; he has already done it. We have been apprehended by Christ.

The phrase "the kingdom of the Son of His love" is unique in the New Testament. The normal expression relates the kingdom to the Father. This is not the millennial kingdom of Christ but the kingdom of which the Father has entrusted to him until his millennial kingdom. In the end Jesus will

give the kingdom to the Father in any case (I Cor 15:24-28).

Jesus took us out of one sphere and placed us into another. He put us into a new status quo before God. We are now members of the universal church. We are now light in the Lord (Eph. 5:8). We have been called out of darkness into his marvelous light (I Pet 2:9). There is no one big enough, no Devil or demon, who can eject us from that kingdom. We have been conveyed into God's kingdom.

Many of us labor under the delusion that no one loves us. That is because we have not come to the understanding that God loves us unconditionally, just as we are.

PRINCIPLE: We need to know how rich we are before we know what kind of accommodations we can afford.

APPLICATION: Why should we drive a Chevrolet when we can afford a Cadillac? If we do not know what we are worth, we live below God's provisions for us. We assume that all cars drive like a Chevy. We live our Christian life on a bumpy road rather than on the smooth road of God's grace. Once we ride a Cadillac we know the difference. Once we live in grace we will know the difference. We will think that they repaired all the roads!

It is important to examine our spiritual bank book. Many never look at their spiritual account by examining the Word of God. If God has put wealth to our account, it will dishonor him if we do not use it.

Colossians 1:14

"in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sin."

This verse expresses one of our eternal positions before God. Our salvation consists of two things in this passage: redemption and forgiveness. Sin sold us out and therefore enslaved us. If we are to be redeemed, we must be redeemed from sin. God does this by forgiveness through the blood of Christ.

"in whom we have redemption"

"Redemption" means to rescue by ransom. This is the strongest word for redemption in the Bible. This particular word for redemption means to buy back as a slave from captivity. Figuratively, it means to release from sin by payment of a ransom (Eph. 1:7,14; 4:30; Rom. 8:23; Heb 9:15; Lk. 21:28). God procures our liberty by payment of a ransom. That ransom was the blood of Christ.

Because this term for redemption is intensive (redeem from), it indicates the completeness of our redemption. No subsequent slavery can follow.

We use the word redeem in association with pawn brokers. If we pawn our ring then later want it back, we must redeem it from the broker. To redeem the ring we must pay a price with interest. In the case of our salvation it was Jesus who paid the price (Mark 10:45; Acts 20:28; I Cor. 6:20; I Tim. 2:5,6; II Pet. 2:1).

"through His blood"

Ephesians 1:7 sets forth the same truth although it adds "through His blood." Some manuscripts add that phrase here as well.

Redemption is not through moral teaching, ethics or right living. It is through the sacrificial death of Christ. We are not redeemed by the laws of the Old Testament but by the shedding of the blood of Christ (Rev. 5:9).

"the forgiveness of sin"

"Forgiveness" means "remission" by Christ who paid the price on the cross (Rom. 3:24-26). God has remitted the price to be paid because of our sin.

The word "forgiveness" means release from captivity. God releases us from the bondage of the penalty of sin. We are pardoned; our sin is canceled by the death of Christ. Our sin will not be mentioned against us anymore. Our sin is dismissed and discharged. We are set free.

PRINCIPLE: We were held in the grip of the penalty of sin but Jesus released us from our sin by his shed blood.

APPLICATION: Most people do not realize that God forgives sins once for all. For those who place their faith in the blood of Christ their sins are gone forever. They stand forgiven eternally. All our

sins, whether past, present or future are forever forgiven. The slate is wiped clean (Matt. 26:28; Acts 5:31; 10:43; 13:38,39; I Jn. 2:1,2).

Have you come to realize that Jesus Christ can separate you from your sins forever? His death paid personally for your sin (Heb. 1:3). If you accept that fact for yourself by faith, your sins are eternally forgiven in God's eyes (Rom. 4:8).

Colossians 1:15

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."

We come to a grand and lofty section of Colossians. The Holy Spirit presents the Son of God in all his towering preeminence.

Verses 15-20 presents the glory of Christ. Jesus is unique in seven distinct ways. These distinctives qualify him to have the supremacy (v.18). In seven strokes the Holy Spirit sets forth the imposing superiority of the Son of God:

1. The image of God
2. The Firstborn over all creation
3. Creator of the universe
4. Head of the church
5. Firstborn from the dead
6. The fullness of God
7. The Reconciler of all things

This is why he is King Jesus, the sovereign King of the world.

"He is the image of the invisible God"

First, Christ is the image of the invisible God. "Image" means more than that Jesus is like God; he is the representative and manifestation of God. "Image" denotes not only the image but pattern, the original which sets forth likeness or resemblance of God.

Jesus represents the Father like picture of a president on a dollar bill (Heb. 1:3). If we have seen Jesus, we have seen the Father (John 1:14;14:9). He is not made in the image of God as man is made in the image of God. He is the "express image" of God (Heb 1:3). Since he is God he reflects all that God is.

The "Son" is the exact image, not the derived image of God. He does not merely resemble but represents God (Rom 8:29; I Cor. 15:29). He has all the essence of deity. He is sovereign, eternal life, omniscience, omnipotence, immutability, etc. He is God himself (II Cor. 4:4). The Son is essentially and eternally the image of God. We see God best in the person of Christ. He is the highest form of special revelation. We see God in Christ like we see images from the rays of light. The Son is the revealer of God.

His image is that of the "invisible God." The Son is the only person of the trinity that is manifest to man (John 1:18; 6:46; I Tim 6:16; I John 4:12). He is the revealer of the trinity. God is perfectly seen in Christ.

"Image" implies a prototype of which it is a copy. As a Son to the Father he is an exact derived reproduction of God (Heb 1:3; Phil 2:6). The next verse demonstrates that Paul is speaking of the Son as prior to all creation.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus is all of God that we will ever see (John 10:30; 14:9; Col. 2:9).

APPLICATION: The Lord Jesus is the great, grand and glorious theme of Scripture. He is both the center and circumference of the Word of God. The Old Testament predicted his coming, the gospels announced that he came, the remaining Scriptures predict his coming again. Delete the Lord Jesus from the Bible and you have a theme without a plot, music without harmony and a car without a motor. In this passage Jesus is set forth in all his towering superiority.

Jesus stands set apart from David, Solomon, John, Peter and Paul. He is incomparable to any human being. He is far removed from a simple human being. To put Jesus on the same level with men infuriates God, "And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Mark 9:7). Peter, James and John had just made a comparison of Jesus with Moses and Elijah. The Son is absolutely unique and shares his glory with no man.

Are you beginning to realize how wonderful the Lord is?

The second description of Christ in this verse is his relationship to creation -- he is the "Firstborn over all creation."

"the firstborn over all creation"

This is not a statement about the creation of Jesus Christ because he cannot create himself. He is not a creature. He created all things (John 1:3; Heb. 1:2,3). He came from eternity. He is everlasting (Prov. 8:23-26). "Firstborn" indicates his dominion over all things. The firstborn in Israel had the right to rule. Jesus has the right to rule because of his rank over all creation. He is the sovereign God of creation.

The word "firstborn" has nothing to do with the first Christmas. Nowhere does the Bible teach that Jesus began at Bethlehem. His physical being began there but not his person. The Bible does teach that he was from everlasting (Micah 5:2; Isa. 9:2). The child is born but the Son is given. He existed before creation (John 1:1-3,14). This passage is not talking about his birth as a creature but his existence as God himself.

"Firstborn" means he is first in priority over creation. Since he preceded creation, he is sovereign over it. There is implied sovereignty in this word. The Old Testament used "firstborn" to designate the Messiah (Ps. 89:27). Jesus is both prior to creation (time) and sovereign over all creation (rank).

The eternal relationship of the Son with the Father is in view here. Jesus is first in priority (preeminent over creation) and he is also produced creation.

Five times the Lord is called "the firstborn" (1:15,18; Rom. 8:29; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 1:5). In 1:18 he is the "firstborn" from the dead; this is his resurrection. He was the first to rise from the dead. He is the firstborn of a brand new creation. Because he rose from the dead all those who put their trust in him will rise from the dead as well. His resurrection launched a brand new society; a new breed of people began with his resurrection.

Note that word "all" again. There is nothing that the Son is not sovereign over in all creation.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus has no rivals; he is unchallenged in preeminence and priority.

APPLICATION: Do you acknowledge the preeminence and priority of Jesus Christ in your every day decisions?

Colossians 1:16

"For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him."

The third distinctive of the glory of Christ is that he created all things; all creation is designed for him, in him and creation is preserved by him. Christ not only created all things but all things continue to subsist because of him.

"For by Him all things were created"

John 1:3 says that Christ created the world. Hebrews 1:2 says the Son made the universe. The Father is the originating cause (source) and the Son is the means by which the world came into being (Rev. 3:14).

The extent of the Son's creation is "all" things. This includes the entire universe whether material or immaterial, heaven or earth.

"that are in heaven and that are on earth visible and invisible"

This phrase refers to the material universe, visible and invisible, space and the physical universe. He made everything that we can see and cannot see.

"whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers"

The words "thrones," "powers," "rulers" and "authorities" probably refer to angelic beings and human government. In part, this refers to the hierarchy of angels. The Colossians worshipped angels (Col 2:18). Christ reigns sovereign over angels (cf. Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:12; Phil. 2:9-10; Col. 2:10, 15). All angelic organizations, whether good or evil, are under the control and power of Jesus Christ. The angles are a highly organized hierarchy over which Christ sovereignly reigns..

"All things were created through Him and for Him"

The first phrase says that all things were created "by" him. That is, Jesus is the cause of creation. He designed creation.

In this phrase all things were created "through" him. He is the instrument of creation. Jesus Christ is the agent whereby the universe was created. He is the creator.

Finally, creation is designed "for him." This is a term of purpose. Creation is designed for the glory of Christ. He is the goal of creation. Christ will be glorified in creation. In summary, Christ is the author, the means and the end of creation. The universe finds its goal and perfection in Christ.

PRINCIPLE: The universe holds no ultimate horror for the Christian.

APPLICATION: The hands of the sovereign Son of God spun into existence everything that exists. He made the constellations of stars. Why should we worry about having a job next week? He is able to deal with our problems. Why should the Christian worry about an uncertain, uncontrolled, run away world? Jesus Christ is sovereign over it all. He will be glorified in the end.

Colossians 1:17

"And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."

The fourth of seven distinctives of the sovereign Son of God is that he is "before all things."

"And He is before all things"

The Son of God existed before the world was created. He lived before the beginning of time, from all eternity (John 1:1). Jesus Christ came from eternity (Mic. 5:2; Isa. 9:6; John 1:1-3; 8:58; Eph. 1:4; Rev. 1:11).

This can be in the sense of prior existence (cf. Jn 8:58) or in the sense of rank or importance (Jam. 5:12; 1 Pet 4:8) or both. Here it is both.

Jesus Christ antedated everything and anyone. Since he is prior in time to anything and anyone, he has priority of place in the universe. Jesus existed before Abraham, "Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I

AM"" (John 8:58). Jesus Christ existed before Abraham was born. Abraham lived 2000 years before Christ.

He predates Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." He is the un-begun beginning, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3). Our Lord did not become the Son of God at Bethlehem. He existed in preincarnate form for ever.

PRINCIPLE: We worship an eternally living Christ.

APPLICATION: Jesus Christ is no super-charged Mahatma Gandhi or eight cylinder Buddha. He is no glorified man. He is man but he is more than man. He is the eternal God. If he is less than God then the Bible is a fairy tale.

Do you have a high view of Jesus Christ? Do you worship him as such?

Astronomers tell us that there are billions of stars in space. These stars are of immense size and move at great rates of speed with mathematical precision, yet Jesus Christ personally governs them. This is the fifth description of Jesus Christ.

"and in Him all things consist"

Not only do all things come into being by him but he holds them together (Heb. 3:1). The Lord Jesus Christ manages every atom of the universe. He manages the universe in such a way that he keeps it from chaos and confusion.

The word "consist" means to hold together, stand together. The Greek tense means that they were held together at one point in the past and they remain held together. Since they came together, Jesus Christ holds all of the atoms of the universe in their traffic pattern.

The universe has order because Jesus Christ is managing it out of his omnipotence (limitless power). In one sense, scientific laws do not exist. They are not laws of science because science has no way of enforcing them in the global sense. A scientific law may be formulated but it cannot be controlled. We may legislate a law, but if it cannot be enforced it is of little good. Since science cannot

guarantee that laws of so called science will continue, they are not laws of science but laws outside of science. Science bases laws on statistical assumptions that the universe which operates according to fixed norms will continue to do so. Science cannot guarantee this.

The Bible declares that the universe will not always exist (II Peter 3:10-12; Rev. 20:11). Known scientific laws depend entirely upon the omnipotence and immutability of God the Son. Every scientific text book (objective science) is a testimony to the trustworthiness of Jesus Christ to care for the universe.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus Christ personally sustains the universe, therefore, he can govern any problem we face. He maintains everything he manufactures. If Jesus Christ can manage the whirling constellations he can take care of us and our little family.

APPLICATION: The Holy Spirit takes the confused Colossian believers and shows them the magnitude and glory of the person of Christ. He is far more than the carpenter of Nazareth! We need to take our eyes off ourselves and take a good look at the greatness of Jesus Christ. Christians today are confused by many aberrant teachings. When we go to the true person of Christ our ears will not itch for strange doctrines (II Tim. 4:2-4).

Why does Jesus Christ hold the universe together? He does so to bring man sons to glory, "For it was fitting for Him for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:10). Jesus sustains the universe for as long as it is necessary to allow his grace to run its full course. Scientific laws simply define the faithfulness of Jesus Christ in time. He will only sustain this universe so long as his purpose is not fulfilled.

The philosopher can find the principle of coherence in Jesus Christ if he would allow God to show him. He can find a unity which will bring all diversity into one unified purpose. The scientific age breaks us down into a conglomeration of parts. The world does not believe in a unified purpose to creation. People live in disintegration; their lives are falling apart. We divide by nations but by persons and in our persons. We need

wholeness and cohesiveness. A painting is made up of little strokes but when they are organized into harmony, the symmetry makes a beautiful painting. Jesus Christ can give person wholeness because he not only sustains the universe but he can put the parts together of individuals.

Do you worry about whether your job will be there next year? Do you worry about your health? Are you exercised about some relationship? Nothing can happen to us without Jesus Christ initiating it. He OKs everything that happens to us. Our Lord has not taken his hand off the steering wheel of the universe.

Colossians 1:18

"And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

The sixth distinctive of Jesus Christ is that he is the head of the body, the church. Not only is Jesus Christ the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe but he is also the Lord of the church. That is news to a great segment of Christians!

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

The church here is the universal church. This is the church into which Christ places everyone who has come to trust Christ as their personal Savior (I Cor. 12:13). This church began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:102; 11:15-16). When a person places their trust in the death of Christ to forgive their sins, Jesus puts them into the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13). The Holy Spirit of God fastens them to Christ eternally.

Jesus Christ is the sovereign head of the universal church. Anyone who has ever come to trust the cross of Christ whatever the church may be has Jesus Christ as their Lord and Master.

The church is often described as "the body." The body has action and function. It also produces results. The body is designed to respond to the head. The body of Christ is designed to respond to Jesus Christ, the head. The church can make an impact for Jesus Christ. This is the issue at Colosse -- his supremacy over the church.

Jesus is described as the "head" of the body. The brain ("head") produces motion, co-ordination and

function of the body in physical terms. Jesus Christ sets up the policy and power for the body to function. When the body functions healthfully, then God is glorified.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus Christ should hold the supreme rank in our lives because he is the head of the body, the church.

APPLICATION: Because Jesus Christ fastened us to his body (the church) at salvation, we should glorify his eternal work for us. If we are not aware of our position in the body of Christ, we will have a low view of Christ and what he has done for us. We belong to Jesus Christ and we are a part of him. We can live without our gall bladder, legs and eyes but we cannot live without our head. Jesus Christ is the head (Eph. 1:22,23; 4:15) of the church. As the head, Jesus Christ calls the plays for our lives.

The seventh depiction of Christ in this list shows he is the originator of the church and the first to rise from the dead.

"who is the beginning "

"Beginning" indicates origin. Christ is the originator of the church through his death, burial and resurrection. He was the first to rise from physical death to immortality. Others were raised from the dead to die again. That kind of resurrection is resuscitation or revivification. That is not a sufficient resurrection. That kind of resurrection is not for me. I want the kind that when I rise from the dead I will never die again! The death, burial and resurrection describe the gospel. The gospel is the foundation of the church.

In the last chapter of the Bible Jesus Christ is said to be the "beginning," "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last" (Rev. 22: 13).

PRINCIPLE: Since Jesus Christ is our originator, he has the right to the focus of our thoughts.

APPLICATION: We need to fix our eyes on Jesus Christ. If our eyes are on other people, we are miserable. We are almost as miserable as when we put our eyes on ourselves. These two focuses often run together. If we have our eyes on ourselves we will have our eyes on people. We walk around, not leading our with chin, but leading with our

sleeve! Our feelings get in the way. Our sensitivity level is so high people find it intolerable being around us. We are so very, very sensitive about what other people think or say about us. Sometimes we are sensitive about how they say it. Consequently, we are miserable, utterly miserable.

We should not confuse Pollyanna love with biblical love. There is a place for romantic love but it is not the love the Bible expects of us when we love God. Bible love is not emotionalism. Emotionalism may result from biblical love, but it is not biblical love per se. We cannot love Jesus Christ until we know Jesus Christ.

To know Jesus Christ we have to think about him. "We love him because he first loved us" (I John 4:19). He first loved us by his death on the cross. That is a substantive reason to love someone. That love does not need to be manufactured in the emotions. The emotions will come from that love. It is amazing how many people talk about loving Jesus Christ and do not know anything about true biblical love.

It is impossible to both love Jesus Christ and to feel sorry for yourself. Ask yourself a very important question -- "Do I feel sorry about myself?" "Tonight the young people are going to a party and I cannot go. They didn't invite me." "Another year has passed and I am still not married." "I am getting nowhere in my job." "The ladies Rose society didn't even vote for me." If we feel sorry for ourselves, we know that we are not focused on the person of Christ, the one who gives perspective and the basis for orientation to life.

It is amazing how easy it is to feel sorry for ourselves. "Jane Doe at church did not speak to me. Everywhere I go, people are unfriendly." We need to take a good look at this. It is simply self pity.

Why should we feel sorry for ourselves when we are a child of God and an ambassador for Christ? God has a purpose for us. He has kept us alive to fulfill that purpose.

People who feel sorry for themselves think that no one else is going through the problems they face in life. Yet people they know have gone through it or worse except they focus on Christ. They do not complain or broadcast their problems about how terrible life is to them.

The second part of the seventh description of Christ is that he is the first to rise from the dead.

"the firstborn from the dead"

"Firstborn" indicates that he rose never to die again. All those who trust his cross to pay for their sin will rise never to die again (I Cor. 15:20).

"Firstborn" may allude to the double portion of the Old Testament. The firstborn male received a double portion because he fell heir to the leadership of his family. By the resurrection Jesus Christ became the first to rise from the dead. Leadership of the church fell to him. He has the sovereign right to rule the church. He will guarantee that the rule will continue to exist (Matt. 16:18).

Jesus' resurrection marks a new order of immortality (I Cor. 15:20). His resurrection also signals the triumph over death (Heb 2:14; I John 3:8).

PRINCIPLE: Since Jesus rose from the dead he deserves our worship and focus.

APPLICATION: The principle we miss in life is focus on Jesus Christ rather than ourselves. God has a purpose for us. This purpose includes the above principle. Some people are very subjective and cannot look at life objectively at all. Consequently, they feel sorry for themselves.

Then there are people who are always upset with people. Do people upset you? Here is an acid test. How do you handle traffic? Are you a wonderful person except when you get into an automobile? Do you have a dual personality when you drive? Why are we this way? Because we have our eyes on people, not Jesus Christ. The world is filled with terrible drivers. Why should we revolve our orientation to live around them?

Some of us get our eyes on people at work. At times we can handle people in our social life but we cannot at the business. With some, they can handle business but not social life. Others cannot get along with people at church. It depends on the circumstances we face.

Another category of self pity is things. Some people want things, oh, how they want things. Someone has something they do not have. They violate the principle of focus on Christ. They get their eyes off the Lord and put them on things. There is an experience that stops Satan in his tracks -- the

experience of putting Jesus Christ in the place of preeminence in our lives. Unless Jesus Christ is preeminent, we will never, never orient to life.

Some people think that having a great deal of money, or even a moderate amount of money will give them happiness. This is a standard of the world. As a Christian we can never be happy with money. As a matter of fact, we cannot be happy without money. Money simply is not an issue in the orientation of a Christian! Can you be happy with or without money? Business success can never make us happy. Whether we are successful or not has no bearing on our orientation to life. We can never achieve happiness through human standards. Orientation to life comes through focus on Jesus Christ and how it relates to us. It never depends on any human factor in life.

There is always something "just around the corner." "Something will make me happy." Many people will say, "If the republicans are elected, I will be happy." Sure, you will be happy, for about five hours! It makes no difference who runs the country; our orientation to life depends on our focus upon Christ. Our orientation to life depends entirely on our relationship to the Lord.

Some look to marriage as a panacea. Marriage brings a whole new set of problems and does not solve anything. Most people who believe this will not release this idea until they get married! Marriage cannot solve everything. Do not misunderstand me, marriage can be a blissful experience but it is not based on marriage itself.

Some look to retirement. Once they get to retirement they become bitter about life. They begin to doubt whether there is a God in heaven yet it is simply self pity carried to the place of being mentally ill by disorientation to life.

Others wish for the day they can get out of their marriage. They might as well stop looking because happiness is not right around the corner. We need to look to the wonder of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit draws a line under the seven descriptions of Christ and adds them up. Here is the total -- "that in all things He may have the preeminence."

"that in all things He may have the preeminence"

Jesus Christ is exalted over all creation because of this list of five superiorities (Phil. 2:9).

The seventh statement climaxes the list of the superiority of Jesus Christ. Since he is the first six statements, he should "have the preeminence." "Preeminence" means to have first place. The word means to be first, hold the first place or highest dignity. Because of his uniqueness (the first six distinctives) he should hold the highest dignity to our minds. Jesus Christ should hold the supreme rank, the supreme authority in our lives.

This word is used twice in the Bible, here and III John 9, "Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence." Big shot Diotrephes loved to be first. He wanted to be number one in the local church. It is either Christ or Diotrephes, Christ or any other leader in the local church. It cannot be both. Christ must be first.

Jesus Christ will not play second fiddle to anyone. He will not be second in any church or family. He will remove any rival.

This term was used of athletes who won their events at the Olympic and Pythian games. The athlete who won first place held the preeminence.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus Christ should hold the preeminent place in our hearts.

APPLICATION: Jesus Christ's preeminence does not depend upon whether we hold him as such in our hearts. He is preeminent whether we honor him or not. Do you give him first place in your hearts (I Pet. 3:15)? Does he come before our business, husband, wife or children? The Bible holds him as preeminent. Whether we hold him as such in our hearts depends on how much we occupy him in our hearts. The Christian who does not hold him in first place is a miserable person. We are miserable when we hold ourselves as first. There is no way to break that misery until we place Jesus Christ as preeminent in our hearts.

Jesus Christ wants absolute capitulation; we must get off the throne of our lives. Jesus must be King of the hill. He will not share that position with anyone. He must be number one on our list of priorities. This may explain why some of us have difficulty in our Christian lives. He must be the absolute authority in our lives. He did not die

merely to get us to heaven. He wants to take us to heaven first class. Most people go to heaven second class. This is the key to the abundant life.

We will never have a moment's peace until we get our eyes off self and people and put them upon the preeminence of Jesus Christ. We cannot love and appreciate Jesus Christ until we know something about the six areas that precede the statement about his preeminence. First, we know who he is then we love him. Unless we understand his greatness we cannot give him the dignity and honor he deserves. Loving him is the result of knowing him. Otherwise it is sheer emotional pap without substance. Emotional love is up one minute and down the next. Love based on truth is solid and lasting.

Colossians 1:19

"For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell."

From seven strokes of an exalted lyric about the person of Christ (1:15-18), the Holy Spirit moves to a discussion about the work of Christ (1:19-2:3). The treatment of his work parallels the handling of his person.

"For it pleased the Father"

Whenever we read in the Bible that something pleases God, we ought to take note of it and do it. We want to bask in the sunshine of his smile. Our well being depends on whether God is pleased with our lives.

The word "for" introduces a reason why the Son is "preeminent" (v.18). The Son of God is supreme by distinction of his work of "reconciliation."

God freely resolved that it is a good thing that all God's fullness dwells in Christ's work of reconciliation (v.20). What gives pleasure to God? Is it our righteousness and goodness? No, his pleasure is found in his Son. God is pleased with us because of his Son. Our orientation to life depends upon God's pleasure with his Son.

"that in Him all the fullness should dwell"

First, God's pleasure is in the work of Christ. God is pleased that "all the fullness" of God resides in Christ's work of reconciliation (v.20).

A key word to the argument of the book of Colossians is the word "fullness." (The verb "fullness" is used in 1:9, 25; 2:10; and 4:17). "Fullness" was a word used by the Gnostics who infiltrated the Lychnus Valley where the city of Colossians lay. "Fullness" was their word for heaven.

The Holy Spirit here hits the Colossians with a principle. Jesus Christ is the true fullness. He is not heaven itself; he is more than that. He is fullness for the believer's life. Jesus Christ is substance, not shadow; fullness, not foretaste. He is the fullness of God's saving plan.

The key word in Colossians is the word "all." This is an all inclusive word. When combined with "fullness," which is another comprehensive word, we have a very powerful statement about Christ. The half has never been told about Christ. It is not enough that the Lord Jesus Christ be eminent; he must be pre-eminent. This is a message we need in this generation if Christians are going to live the quality of life God gives.

The word "dwell" means to reside permanently in a place. It was used in the sense of the permanent residence of a town or village. "All the fullness" of God's work settles in Christ permanently. All saving power dwells in him (Acts 5:31; 17:31).

The effects of the "fullness" is available to the believer. There is no reason why a believer should not orient to any circumstance of life. Circumstances will ebb and flow in the life of a Christian. At times we may have a measure of success at other times we may fail. Under these varying circumstances of life we draw upon the fullness of Christ. Our orientation to life does not depend upon the usual status symbols. Our joy depends upon the work of Jesus Christ.

Positionally, we can draw upon the fullness of Christ. Experientially, it depends upon our application of the principle to life. Regardless whatever may happen to us, God has provided a person who will meet us in our need. The circumstances of life will not be easy. Life will not go on in bliss. On a date a girl says, "I wish this moment could go on forever." But this life does not sustain uninterrupted happiness. Life never remains the same. All of us, before we depart from this life, will have our share of pain and pleasure. However, our lives do not dependent upon the flow of life; they

depend upon Jesus Christ. This frees us from the chains of life.

PRINCIPLE: The person and work of Christ is preeminent in every aspect of our lives.

APPLICATION: This is a message that broken-hearted parents need. "What ever happened? Where did I make a mistake? We took them to church but our children no longer walk with the Lord. They are no longer interested in the Word." This is a bitterness parents face. It is good to know that Christ is in control. He will do for the parent what the parent cannot do for himself.

In us, there is an absence of power and other qualities. In the flesh there "dwells no good thing." The human nature is a desert, empty and a waste, inhabited by the dragon of sin. God never asks us to make up the difference between us and himself. All is laid upon Christ. He makes up all that God requires of man.

Colossians 1:20

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

Colossians one presents the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ. First the Holy Spirit presents his preeminence (1:15-18). Now he sets forth Jesus' unique work. The Lord Jesus reconciles "all things" to himself.

"and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself"

"Reconcile" means to bring back to a former state of harmony. Reconciliation forms a unity that has its goal in Christ. A friendship has been restored between God and man. All enmity has been removed so as to leave no impediment to unity and peace.

God reconciles all things to himself. God does not need reconciliation (II Cor 5:19). The Bible never says that God is reconciled. The enmity alone is ours. It is we who need to be reconciled.

God's requirement is that his perfect righteousness must be satisfied (propitiation). Christ's death satisfied God's holy demands. The whole world is savable by Christ's death (II Cor 5. 18-20).

Therefore, God IS reconciled already. It is man who needs to respond to God.

"by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven"

Jesus brought the whole universe into reconciliation, except rebellious angels and unbelieving man, into full accord with the mind of God (Eph. 1:10). Things under the earth are subdued, not reconciled (Phil. 2:10).

All nature is under the curse of Genesis 3. Nature sings in the minor key. All of that will be removed when he comes back (Rom 8:19-22). This world is handicapped by the curse of God. That is why weeds grow faster than flowers. One day God will lift the curse. That is one of the effects of the death of Jesus upon the cross. In that day we will no longer need dentures, glasses or artificial limbs. In that day there will be no crop failure.

PRINCIPLE: God is already reconciled; we do not have to plead with him to reconcile with us.

APPLICATION: We have all heard the phrase "Make your peace with God." Some people say, "I can remember when I made my peace with God." We all understand what people mean by these expressions but they are not biblically accurate. We cannot make peace with God because we have nothing with which to make peace. We cannot barter with God. We have nothing God wants or needs. We have nothing to trade God for our salvation. Our personal relative morality is not good enough for an absolute God.

Jesus is the only person who has the wherewithal to meet God's demands. "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Cor. 6:19,20). The commodity that Jesus used to pay for our sins in the last phrase "having made peace through he blood of his cross." Jesus is the only way to acceptance with God (Acts 4:12).

"having made peace through the blood of His cross"

"Made peace" means to establish harmony. Jesus put an end to the disturbed relations between God

and man. He restored due relations between man and God. Before we came to trust Christ we were God's enemies because of sin. Jesus destroyed the enmity between God and man by his work on the cross.

It is the work of Christ on the cross that "pleases God" (v.19). At the payment for sin, resurrection and ascension "all the fullness" (v.19) dwelt in him.

God's enemies will become God's friends by faith in Christ. Jesus is the mediator of reconciliation. He brings the believer into the peace of God and into his favor. All creatures, whether men or angels, will be brought into subjection under his rule. They will be placed in subjection to Christ. He will bring them under one head. When we place our faith in Christ we enter into his "fullness." His life becomes our life. We enter into union with him. He is the heir of God; we become joint-heir with him. We enter into his priesthood, destiny and kingdom. We share with him all these things.

The precious blood of Christ was of sufficient magnitude and of such eternal value to God that he could forgive sin for all eternity. This was done in a manner consistent with his holiness. "He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself," (Heb. 9:26). God does not hurl us into a Christless eternity because we sin but because we reject the one who paid for sin, "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God," (John 3:18).

The "blood" means the cross. The cross means the death of Christ. He did not make peace through the Golden Rule or the greatest truths concocted by man. The blood-death of Christ is the only sufficient payment for our sins (Eph. 2:13; Heb. 10:19; I Pet. 1:2; Rev. 7:14).

PRINCIPLE: The person and work of Jesus Christ as the God-man reconciling the world to God flies in the face of pluralism.

APPLICATION: The Lord Jesus Christ differs from all other members of the human race. He is

true man and undiminished deity. He is the Creator of the universe and he in his humanity gave his life for the sins of the world. His primary work is to reconcile man to God. Jesus made it possible for man to fellowship with God.

The cross eliminates human merit, personal worth, morality, character and religion as the hope of salvation. If we depend on our merit, works or religion we will be bitterly disappointed when we face God one day. Peace is made through the blood of Christ. The state of hostility between man and God cannot break down by the relative righteousness of man. Man is naturally estranged from God, "The wicked are estranged from the womb; They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies" (Ps. 58:3). Man does not have the inclination or bent to find God.

God is very narrow-minded about the way to himself. It is only through salvation in Christ (Acts 4:12). He will not accept us if we try another way. The armistice was signed in blood by the cross. No longer is there a barrier between a person who wants a relationship with God. All we need to do is trust Christ's death on the cross as sufficient payment for our sin. Any one, no matter the color of their skin, can come to God through the death of Christ.

Colossians 1:21

"And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled."

Having dealt with reconciliation in the previous verse, Paul here shows how reconciliation impacts the Colossians themselves. He turns from "pure" theology to "applied" theology. In verse 20 creation was reconciled to God; in this verse individuals are reconciled to God. Both the universe and people need reconciliation.

"And you, who once were alienated "

"Alienated" means estranged. At one time we were shut out from fellowship and intimacy with God. In the secular world in biblical times this term was used of those who lost their citizenship. The Colossians were without the citizenship of heaven.

The reason there is a need for reconciliation is that people are alienated (enemies) from the life of God (Eph 2:12; 4:18). An automobile can knock out the physical life we received from our mother or father. However, the "life of God" is eternal.

"and enemies in your mind by wicked works "

They were enemies in their "mind." This is an attitude of rebellion and persistent enmity. They were in a state of enmity against God. Man hates God because God hates man's sin (Rom. 1:28; 8:7,8).

People are at odds with God both in their minds and behavior. They are enemies to God both from within and from without. Sin begins in the mind and works its way into deeds.

"yet now He has reconciled"

The word "reconcile" in verse 20 extends to the curse, the reconciliation of things, here it means the reconciliation of people. The word here is more intense in the Greek; it means to reconcile thoroughly. A total, radical, revolutionary change takes place in the heart of the person who trusts Christ's death to forgive sin.

The word "reconcile" here is more intense than the word "reconcile" in verse 20. Here it means to reconcile absolutely, altogether. God through Christ absolutely reconciled us to God.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus' cross put away all enmity so that amity can exist between man and God. No impediment remains to block intimacy with God except our acceptance by faith of the work of Christ.

APPLICATION: Reconciliation is an act of God. He provided for our reconciliation by Jesus' death upon the cross. It was an act of love and grace. That is sure different than trying to measure up to an absolutely holy God. That is different from trying to live by the Golden Rule.

Are you personally reconciled to God? Do you know that your reconciliation to God is not based on your morality? God gives reconciliation to us because Christ paid for our sin (II Cor. 5:17-21). Will you at this moment trust Christ's death to reconcile you to God? If you do, at that moment you will have become a Christian.

Colossians 1:22

"in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—"

Jesus reconciles us to God by the death of his physical body. The heretics against whom Paul is writing rejects the true humanity and deity of Christ. They taught that Jesus only suffered and died in appearance.

"in the body of His flesh through death"

The "body" here is the literal, physical body of Christ while he was on earth.

There is no reconciliation without the death of Christ (Heb. 9:22). There can be no true death unless Jesus is truly human (Heb. 2:17; 10:10; 1 Pet. 2:24).

"to present you holy"

Jesus presents us positionally perfect before God by his death. The Lord Jesus will "present" us to God in a way that is acceptable to him. Our status before God will be eternal, infallible, unalterable. It will be the same status that Jesus holds before God.

The word "holy" means set part. Jesus sets us apart unto God as uniquely his.

"and blameless,"

Jesus will present us "blameless," not flawless or sinless. No Christian is without fault. The term "blameless" means not subject to judgment, unchargeable, unimpeachable (Eph. 1:4; 5:27; Phil 2:15; Jude 24). This is more than mere acquittal. No charge will ever be brought to the child of God. God will not pick flaws and faults in us because of Christ.

"and above reproach in His sight"

"Above reproach" is used five times in the New Testament Greek (1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Tim. 3:10; Tit. 1:6-7). It is a legal term meaning unaccused and therefore free from all charges. Satan accuses Christians (Rev. 12:10) but Jesus is our Defense Attorney (1 John 2:1) before the Father. Because of the death of Christ the believer is free from any charge that Satan may lay against him (Rom. 8:33). Satan cannot lay a charge against us. Even though we may

deserve blame, Christ's death makes us undeserving of blame.

Neither Satan nor God will impeach the believer because the believer is unimpeachable by the death of Christ. There is no possibility of a charge being laid against the Christian (1 Cor. 1:8; 1 Tim. 3:10; Tit 1:6,7).

"In His sight" means the penetrating gaze of God. Jesus is going to present us with the above three privileges to God. When we face God we will be set apart specially for God (holy), without blame and no charge will be laid against us in his presence.

PRINCIPLE: At the moment of trust in the blood of Christ to forgive us, our status and standing before God is perfect forever.

APPLICATION: The perfect work of Jesus Christ is the genius of the gospel of grace. Religion does not do that for us. Automatically and instantaneously we are holy, without blame and without charge before God forever. What moment we come to trust Christ as our Savior, God puts to our account all the exhaustless wealth of the Lord Jesus. We spend the rest of our Christian life learning of the wonder of what happened when we received Christ. We learn what we are worth. The split second we come to Christ God puts to our spiritual bank account all that Jesus is before him.

Colossians 1:23

"if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister."

Instability in the faith is a core problem in Christianity at this time. Christians make experience the determiner of what they believe rather than the Word of God.

"if indeed you continue in the faith"

Does this "if" indicate that our salvation depends upon us? What if our faith fails? If faith fails then it is an indication that it was not a valid saving faith (1 John 2:19). The genuine believer will persevere by the reality of God in his life. It is the perseverance of the Savior that preserves the perseverance of the saints!

In the Greek, the "if" indicates an assumption of truth. Paul assumes that the Colossians will continue in the faith. This is not an "if" of the future; it is an "if" of the past. The word can be translated "since." "Since indeed you continue in the faith." Our reconciliation is an accomplished fact. Continuance is a test of reality. There is no uncertainty of the believer's reconciliation. The believer will be uncharged and without blemish when he stands before God (v. 22). Salvation was an accomplished event at the moment of faith.

The word "continue" means to persist in or adhere to the faith. The Colossians heretics were trying to dislodge them from their faith. They wanted them to get involved with asceticism.

PRINCIPLE: Christians are preserved by the perseverance of the Savior.

APPLICATION: Some Christians are so conscious of their defects that they are never quite sure they are a Christian. Sometimes they feel they are and other times they feel they are not a Christian. God does not give us eternal life and say "Oh, I meant that it was only temporary, that is, until you sinned enough to lose it." He does not give you eternal life this year and take it away next year.

Having said that, it does not mean that we are to ignore this verse which is a flashing red light of warning. Continuance is the proof of conversion. If a person says, "I am a Christian" and shows no change in their life, they may not be a Christian. Well, we will wait and see if it is real. We can say that we are Alexander the Great, too. That does not mean that it is real. A true Christian is preserved by the perseverance of the Savior.

The true Christian is characterized by two metaphors. He is both "grounded and steadfast" in his faith.

"grounded and steadfast"

The word "grounded" suggests a secure foundation as a building that sits upon a rock. The believer lays a foundation of stability when he comes to trust Christ. Their foundations were dug deep and solid. The foundation is Jesus Christ (I Cor. 3:11). The Greek indicates that they were placed on that foundation at one point with permanent results.

The word "steadfast" is literally "settled." It depicts a steady and firm resolve (I Cor. 15:58; Heb 10:23). This is a metaphor for spiritual stability. While "grounded" suggests a solid foundation this term suggests the strength of the building. The Lycus Valley was noted for its earthquakes. They must not be like a house that shakes in an earthquake. They must resist efforts to shake them loose from their foundation, Jesus Christ.

The sub-structure supports the super-structure. The believer stands before God in an unchangeable, unalterable, infallible, eternal state. Our condition may vary. We sin in our current condition. There will be a day when our condition lines up with our position before God in Christ.

PRINCIPLE: It is imperative that a believer have both a sub-structure and a super-structure, a sure foundation and solid structure, which will keep his faith solid.

APPLICATION: Do you erect upon the sub-structure (Jesus Christ) a little shanty, lean-to or pup tent? What a pity that some Christians have such weak structure to their faith. That is like building a foundation for a skyscraper and erecting a one story wood building upon it. Yet that is exactly what most Christians do. We have the greatest foundation anyone can secure, the work of Jesus Christ. Look at the skinny little life that we perch upon that foundation!

Contrary belief systems constantly try to move us away from the "hope of the gospel." Stability in the gospel is essential for solid Christian living.

"and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel"

The "hope of the gospel" (1:5) is our ultimate salvation where all aspects of salvation will become complete (Tit. 1:2; 3:7; Heb. 6:19; I Pet 1:3).

"Moved away" means to change location. Some people are chronically unstable. Any wind of doctrine blows them away. They shift from one doctrine to another like the wind (Eph. 4:14). The Colossian heresy taught that their salvation needed to be supplemented by further spirituality if they were to be saved.

PRINCIPLE: Stability in the gospel is a core Christian value.

APPLICATION: We move away from the gospel when it no longer grips our hearts. When our hearts grow cold we are in serious trouble. Once we lose interest in the Bible there is not much that can touch the hardened heart. Everything that God does for us comes either directly or indirectly from the Bible. There is no substitute for the Bible in our personal growth.

It is easy to drift when we row a boat or paddle a canoe. It is hard work to make progress especially if we are going against the stream. The only thing we have to do to drift is to do nothing. If we take a little rest we will go back. We will drift from the things of God. When the church is popular the church is weak. The church popular has always been the church polluted. The church persecuted has always been the church powerful.

Paul concludes this verse with three statements about why we are to remain true to the gospel.

"which you heard"

The first statement is "which you heard." This is the message initially preached to them by Epaphras. The Colossians personally experienced what the gospel can do in their lives. They should remain loyal to that message.

"which was preached to every creature under heaven"

The second statement says something about the universality of the gospel. The gospel excludes no one who do not exclude themselves. The universality of the gospel indicates its authenticity. This statement is a hyperbole which probably means over the entire Roman Empire (Rom. 1:8; 16:19). Because the gospel has an impact on people all over the Roman Empire, this shows its universal appeal.

"of which I, Paul, became a minister"

Paul holds his office as a minister highly (Rom. 11:13). He is a servant to the gospel. His apostleship is the third proof of the validity of the gospel.

PRINCIPLE: We remain true to the gospel because it is real.

APPLICATION: We become a Christian by the preaching of the gospel; we become established in our faith by the teaching of the Word of God. We

cannot become a strong in our faith if all we hear is the gospel. We need a solid foundation.

We preach the gospel to those without Christ; we teach the Bible to the saints. There is no end to that two-fold ministry. To neglect one for the other is to get out of balance. If we have one without the other we have half a ministry.

Colossians 1:24

"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church"

Paul's presents his ministry from verse 24 to the end of the chapter. Paul viewed ministry with joy.

"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you"

Paul suffered for the church at Colosse. When he brought the gospel to them, many rejected him. He viewed this suffering in presenting the gospel as a joy. He sat in jail because of the gospel. It was an honor to suffer for his Savior.

PRINCIPLE: Inner orientation to God enables us to orient to suffering.

APPLICATION: There are occupational hazards when we serve Jesus Christ. One of the greatest of those hazards is people. We face confused people, bullying people, sneaky people and gossip behind the back types.

Many people let people get them down. We think that we need a rhinoceros hide to serve in the local church. Each time we go into ministry we must slip into our rhinoceros suit and never take it off until we get home! We say, "Everyone who serves Jesus Christ must have a thick hide." Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. There is no such thing as a person with rhinoceros hide in ministry. All of us are human. We all have areas of sensitivity. No matter how some seem to roll with the punch, whenever people malign or ridicule them, they still feel it. It is not that they roll with the punch. They have discovered a principle: No matter what problems there may come from people, they can still "rejoice" in suffering for the gospel.

This has nothing to do with masochism where we love to hit ourselves over the head and say, "That

it feels good when I stop!" This is not self-hypnosis. In the ministry we must walk in the Spirit. When we do, the result will be joy (Gal. 5:22). Joy is an inner orientation to life that throws a protective covering around us. In doing so, God keeps us from bitterness. No instability can come from criticism, persecution or slander when we orient to God's plan. Any other attitude than joy will torpedo our orientation to God. No one can stay in ministry unless he/she lives the Spirit filled life. All the money or approbation in the world is not worth it.

Paul's joy transcended his personal interests. His joy came in serving others even though he paid a price for it.

"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you"

Paul did not rejoice in suffering itself. He rejoiced that his suffering brought the gospel to the Colossians.

PRINCIPLE: God has a purpose in suffering that goes beyond our own personal ends.

APPLICATION: There is a ministry of suffering that does something for your soul. Suffering develops character. It enables us to grow in grace (II Cor. 12:9,10). We grow into spiritual maturity more rapidly when we suffer if we orient to the grace of God. We are not nearly so quick to criticize others if we have been hurt by criticism. We think twice before we criticize someone else because we remember the scars that we received from the sharp tongue of someone else. Suffering mellows us as Christians. Eventually we become a veteran Christian, tested and approved.

Paul wrote, "I am exceedingly joyful in all our tribulation" (II Cor. 7:4). He learned the blessed benefits of suffering. Paul knew the best is yet ahead. We will not suffer in eternity. We will receive a body free from pain and suffering. One day there will be no more death, sorrow, crying or pain (Rev. 21:4). Brush away the tears. Fix your eyes on the suffering Savior, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

What is your suffering today? Some suffering is chronic and some is acute. Some suffering is sur-

face and other suffering is so deep that you cannot share it with another human being. We can only cry out to God. We cannot allow suffering sour us. We cannot let it make us mean and grumpy. We cannot let it curdle our spirit. We need to get the blessing out of suffering. We have enrolled in the College of Christ and he sets up the curriculum. We learn the lesson so that we will not have to take the course again.

God wants us to finish the ministry where Christ left off. However, this will involve affliction.

"and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ"

Paul wanted to "fill up" in his physical body the afflictions Jesus did not finish. This has nothing to do with the salvation suffering of Christ (Heb. 2:9; I Peter 1:11; 5:1). It has to do with the suffering of service for Christ. Christ's suffering for sin lacked nothing. He finished all the suffering necessary for our sin. The suffering of Christ upon the cross was totally sufficient for salvation. God's justice was completely satisfied in Christ's death for our sin (Rom. 5:1).

However, God allows the believer to enter into the suffering for Christ (II Tim. 3:11; I Peter 1:6-8; 4:11,12; 5:9). The phrase "fill up" is a very strong term in the Greek. The word means to fill up in turn. We are to fill up in turn the deficiencies of the sufferings of Christ.

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to fill in the place of Christ's sufferings during his life before the cross. We need to face whatever is necessary to advance the cause of Christ.

APPLICATION: God wants us to take our turn at bat. Jesus came up first. Now it is our turn.

The more Christians suffer here the more glory they will receive hereafter, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17). Christians will differ in heaven. Christians who suffer more here will receive more glory there. They will have more coming over yonder unless their suffering is due to sin. That is another category of suffering -- chastening. Every time a Christian suffers does not mean that he has sinned. We may never know why we suffer until we get to glory.

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29). One of God's gifts to us is suffering. When we go through a particular siege of suffering and look back upon it, we say, "I would not want to go through that again, but I thank God for the experience." Maybe we endure a siege of sickness or surgery. Or, maybe face a financial or career crisis. It could be a crisis with one of our children.

You may have prayed, "Oh God, don't let her marry that young man" but she did anyway. Then there is the suffering of fear of old age. They wonder whether their children will care for them. Will they end up in a nursing home? There is the haunting fear of senility and decrepitude. There is the suffering of young folks. Will they ever make anything of themselves? They are not skillful, brilliant or strong. They hide their suffering by the way they dress and act. They hide suffering by rebellion. All suffering is in God's divine design.

Will you willingly step up to bat and fill in the gap for Christ in our generation? The Christian life is not easy. We will pay a price. God wants us to do it for the sake of others.

Some Christians feel that they should be immune from suffering. This verse says that we are to enter the "afflictions of Christ."

"and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ"

The New Testament never uses the word "afflictions" of Christ's death. No one can duplicate the sufferings of Christ on the cross. No one can duplicate his suffering for our sin.

"Afflictions" means "pressure," or "distress." Paul had plenty of that (II Cor 11:23-29). This is the ordinary trials of life. When we suffer for the gospel we share the afflictions of Christ (I Pet. 1:11; 2:20,21; 4:1, 12,13; 5:8-10; Phil 3:10).

We are to fill up the afflictions of Christ that he had before his cross and death. His afflictions came from many sources. Many rejected him and his message. The Scribes, Sadducees and Pharisees all maligned him. Religion persecuted him. Now it is Paul's turn at bat. He is in jail for preaching the gospel. He had to look at a bean ball. Now it is our

turn at bat. It has been someone else's turn to face trial ever since the church started.

PRINCIPLE: It is axiomatic that no one will be exempt from suffering. The issue lies in how we suffer. God doles every Christian a quota of suffering. Suffering here means glory hereafter.

APPLICATION: We cannot get through life without weeping and suffering. The Christian is not immune to trial, disease, relationship problems or accident. It is not easy to learn the lesson of how to suffer. Most of us endure suffering.

If we accept the fact that God doles out a quota of suffering for every Christian, we can accept our plight better. We can view it as his divine design.

Some suffer more than others. God's doctrine is the doctrine of individuality; the world's doctrine is the doctrine of uniformity. This age wants everyone to be alike. They want everyone to like the same things. They stamp out everyone on an assembly line. Everything with God varies; every fingerprint is different, every snowflake, every personality. God does not want us to be alike. God wants unique individual personalities. Because no two people are exactly alike, even twins, God designs each individual believer's suffering uniquely for him. None of us will suffer the same quantity or the same quality. There are many kinds of suffering, physical, mental, financial and spiritual. We all face suffering differently.

If we grow in grace at a corresponding rate of our suffering, we will be able to cope with the magnitude of our problems.

If the cause of Christ is going to advance, it will cost something. God wants us to pay a price in the service of the local church.

"for the sake of His body, which is the church"

The Bible depicts the church with the analogy of the "body" (cf. v18). The head (Christ) gives direction to the body. The body takes orders from the head.

The completion of Christ's sufferings closely connects to the preaching of the gospel (vv. 23, 25). Paul paid a price for preaching the gospel especially where Christ was not named (Rom. 15:15-21). When a preacher or person goes against the pluralism of society and preaches with conviction

and confidence, they will be labeled a bigot or dogmatic. The gospel challenges people to face themselves. They may not like what they see.

PRINCIPLE: The gospel is an offense to the world. The person who preaches it will pay a price.

APPLICATION: Are you afraid to go against the tide of public opinion? Are you more concerned about what the world thinks of you than the mission God has given you? Has the culture of pluralism intimidated you so that it mutes your testimony?

If we accept rejection for preaching the gospel, we will go a long way toward spiritual maturity. As long as we feel we must be acceptable to a Christless world, our ministry will be ineffective. We need to dare to be a Daniel, "Dare to stand alone."

Colossians 1:25

"Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God."

From 1:25 to the end of the chapter, Paul presents his ministry. After stating his two conflicting emotions of "suffering" and "rejoicing," he gives his purpose of ministry.

"Of which"

This phrase points back to the church in verse 24. Paul became a minister to care for the church. The "of which" of verse 23 refers to the gospel. First he was a minister of the gospel. Now he is a minister of the church.

Some people simply minister the gospel but not minister to the church. To minister the gospel is indispensable but that is only a start. He was an expert in the gospel (Rom. 1:1; 15:16). He would never step down from preaching the gospel to some secondary issue. He never postpones the preaching of the gospel to deal with secondary, incidental issues. He understood the difference between the good and the best.

Not only is he a minister of the gospel but he is a minister to the church. This will separate the men from the boys.

PRINCIPLE: Ministry has a double barrel shotgun: to the lost and to the Christian.

APPLICATION: A church that ministers to those without Christ exclusively has only half a ministry. A balanced ministry ministers to both.

"I became a minister"

The New Testament often translates the word "minister" as "servant." Sometimes it translates the word "deacon."

Before he became a Christian Paul was the head of a goon squad on their way to Damascus to murder Christians (Acts 9:1). At the entrance of the city he met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face and became a Christian. Jesus made him a "minister" (I Tim. 1:12,13). God found the worst sinner he could find and revealed his Son in him (Gal. 1:15,16; I Tim. 1:15,16). He made him a minister of the gospel and a minister of the church. The church here is not the local church. It is the universal church, the mystical body of Christ, made up of anyone who has come to trust in the cross to save them from sin. His ministry was not to a local church but to the entire body of Christ.

Paul's ministry was not to a local church. The longest he spent in any one place was Ephesus (3 years). He was a pioneer missionary. Missionaries are ministers. A missionary is no second rate minister who could not make the grade at home. We do not learn that from the Bible! This intrepid minister was the primary minister of the first century. He had a wider ministry than even Peter.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus can use anyone to preach the gospel, even a murderer.

APPLICATION: Has God called you into the ministry? What are your ambitions? Would you like to be a minister? You may feel that you are not qualified to serve Jesus Christ. Neither was the mighty missionary Paul. If God could use him he can use you.

If you say, "There is not much future in it; there is not much security in it; there is not much money in it" then the ministry is not for you. But there is no work on earth that is more gratifying. Why not at least open yourself to the possibility that God may want you in the ministry? Have you ever given one moment's consideration of the ministry? God only knows what he might do with your life.

You may say, "I don't feel that I have the ability." That feeling is not justified unless a person has examined his giftedness and tested those gifts. I never felt that I had the gifts to become a minister when I first became a Christian. That comes after a test.

"according to the stewardship from God"

The word "stewardship" means dispensation. Paul became a minister by the dispensation of God. "But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts" (I Thes 2:4). God had a stake in him. God made a deposit with him. I Corinthians 2 says the same thing, "Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful." We need not be famous, simply faithful.

"For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! 17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship" (I Cor. 9:16,17). God entrusts the gospel with human beings. He will reward us in eternity for faithful service.

PRINCIPLE: God has a stake in our ministry.

APPLICATION: Are you faithful to the "stewardship" God has given you? God has never asked us to become great. He only asks that we be faithful with the ministry he has given us.

God entrusted Paul with the truth. His responsibility was to be faithful in delivering it to others.

"which was given to me for you"

Paul clearly understood his ministry was from God. It was a ministry from God for the Colossians.

"to fulfill the word of God"

The Colossian heresy crowed about their special "fullness" that was possible exclusively through their secret rituals. Paul says that he is a God-ordained servant of the fullness of the Word of God (1:9; 2:9). God wants Paul to give full scope to

or fill full the Word of God. God wants him to give as wide an audience as possible to his Word.

God put Paul in a special place of ministry. Paul wrote half of the New Testament. Matthew wrote one book; Mark wrote one; Luke wrote the gospel of Luke and Acts; John wrote five books; Peter wrote two; James wrote one; Jude wrote one; the Hebrews author is unknown but it could have been Paul; Paul wrote thirteen books, possibly fourteen of the 27 books of the New Testament. Only Matthew, Peter and John were of the original twelve apostles. There are subjects in the writings of Paul that are found nowhere else in the Bible. God gave him a great ministry.

PRINCIPLE: God has a special place for each of us in his service.

APPLICATION: Have you taken time to find out what special place God has for you in his service? Are fully discharging your responsibility for getting the gospel out?

Colossians 1:26

"The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints."

This verse demonstrates that the believer has a new standing before God with privileges.

"The mystery"

"Mystery" in the Bible is not something spooky as it is in the English. It is not mysterious or abstruse. Mystery is something formerly concealed and then later revealed (Eph. 3:8,9). It is a sacred secret. Paul contrasts this with the Colossian heresy that a mystery was a secret known only to the initiated.

"which has been hidden from ages and from generations"

The mystery is the introduction of the church into God's economy. The church was not disclosed in the Old Testament. Abraham or Moses did not know of the church. God revealed it initially in a doctrinal sense to Paul (Ephesians 3). Jesus said the church was still a future institution in Matthew 16:16-18.

"but now has been revealed to His saints"

The birth of the church took place when the followers of Christ were placed into the body of Christ (Acts 1:5; chapter 2; I Cor. 12:13).

The mystery was not that Gentiles would become Christians. It was that the Gentiles would be placed at the same status quo with Jews into one body (Eph. 3:1ff). There would be no middle wall of partition between them (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:12-14).

The Old Testament believers knew about the first coming of Christ and his second arrival. They knew that he was going to be crucified (Psalm 22; Isa. 53). However, they knew nothing about the church. The church was revealed to the saints of the economy of the church.

PRINCIPLE: The New Testament believer has a status quo equivalent to Jesus Christ's status quo before God.

APPLICATION: You would think that we would be better Christians than the Old Testament believers because we have so much more revelation than they. Also, our prerogatives are much greater than Old Testament believers. You would think that we would live up to them.

Colossians 1:27

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

Paul here introduces the idea Jesus comes to indwell each person who places their faith in the death of Christ for the forgiveness of their sin.

"To them"

The antecedent is the "saints" of verse 26.

"God willed to make known"

God chose to make known the mystery (v.26) to the saints. From eternity God determined to make known this mystery.

"what are the riches of the glory of this mystery "

God's glory is the shining forth of his attributes and character. The disclosure of this mystery breaks out of the glory of God. It must have been a

shock to these Gentiles that they would possess these prerogatives.

The word "riches" means the abundance of God's wealth that he gives to his people.

"among the Gentiles:"

Previously God made his revelation to a theocracy, the nation Israel. Now God brings the Gentiles into his program by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13).

"which is Christ in you"

Christ now indwells both Gentiles and Jews. They are "in Christ" and Christ is in them (Rom. 8:10; II Cor 13:5) The "you" here is the Gentiles.

"the hope of glory"

Those without Christ are "without hope and without God" (Eph. 2:12). Now believers anticipate a share in the glory of Christ (Col. 3:4; Gal. 5:5; I Pet. 5:10). This hope is the guarantee that we will be in glory and glorified. It is as good as done.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus has come to live inside us as a Divine Guest.

APPLICATION: We cannot live the Christian life until we have the Christian life to live it. We cannot live the Christian life without Christ. Until we receive Christ by trust in his death to forgive our sins Christ is not in us (John 1:12). Have you come to the that place in your life where you have done that?

The Christian has Christ living in him. He or she has a Heavenly Guest inside. If we invite company to our house we try are on our best behavior. The more important the company the more we are sure to have clean towels in the bathroom. We warn the kids to wash down in the basement! We caution the children, "Don't wear your food on your clothes! The boss is coming for dinner." When the company arrives, the children do not know what to make of it! Daddy is so polite! He is so considerate of everyone. Mother puts out clothe napkins instead of paper napkins. The children say, "What are these, Mom?" The kids are six and eight years of age and they have never seen them before!! When we have Christ living inside us as a Divine Guest, we should be on our best behavior.

Colossians 1:28

"Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus."

Paul now describes the purpose of his ministry.

"Him we preach"

Every thing centers on the Lord Jesus Christ. Christianity is person oriented (Acts 8:5, 35; 9:20; Gal. 1:16; I Cor. 1:23,24; 2:2; II Cor. 1:19; 4:5). It is far more than dead doctrine. It is living doctrine because it revolves around a person.

The word "preach" here is not the ordinary word for "preach." It means to announce or declare publicly a message under a given standard. The standard is the Word of God. If it lines up with the Word we preach it. If it is contrary to the Word we expose it.

"warning every man"

A warning is necessary because of the heresy in the Lycus Valley. "Every man" is every Christian person. Paul wanted to correct by warning. The word "warning" means to put something in the mind, admonish. It is an unpleasant task to flag people down. Many do not know that they are in danger but they run pell-mell toward a deep precipice. Many preachers today are reluctant to warn others of dangerous doctrine lest others view them as narrow minded or bigoted.

The doctor must both diagnose and cure. This is the diagnosis side of his task. If the church does not diagnose the sickness that pervades her, she may have contracted a very serious illness which will ultimately destroy her.

PRINCIPLE: If Christianity does not expose false teaching it will disappear in the mush of pluralism and relativism.

APPLICATION: Josh MacDowell's book *Right From Wrong* warns both young people and their parents that 57% of evangelical youth no longer affirm that an objective standard for right and wrong even exists. A national survey of evangelical youth uncovered some appalling trends:

66 % lied to their parents within the past three months

36 % cheated within the past three months

23% tried to hurt someone within the same period

55 % engaged in sexual activity by age 18

Evangelical Christianity has declined so far that it devalues those who warn against such decline. We view those who hold standards as bigoted and narrow. Tolerance is the central truth about which everything else revolves. Today the average Christian would impeach Paul for violating their belief of tolerance. They would indict Luke for saying, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). They would have to do the same with the Lord Jesus Christ because he said that he was the "only way" (John 14:6).

If we buy into tolerance we will become indifferent to share the gospel with others. We will no longer love and care for people for that places us above them. The Bible does not place tolerance as the central value of God's thinking. It places the truth of Christ central.

Three modes of communication are important for the advancement of Christianity: preaching, warning and teaching. Now we come to "teaching."

"and teaching every man"

"Warning" is the negative side; "teaching" is the positive side. Preaching, warning and teaching must go together. It is not enough to tell people that they should reject certain teaching without teaching them what will strengthen their lives. We preach the gospel to those without Christ and teach the Bible to those who do know him. We should not to mix the two. We cannot teach the Bible to those without Christ (I Cor. 2:14).

The word "teach" means to systematically present truth so that people can understand it coherently (2:6,7; Acts 5:41,42; Mt. 28:18-20). Any pastor worthy of his title will teach as well as preach. Teaching will help individuals grow at a normal spiritual pace. If they grow, they will not come down with a case of arrested spiritual development. God's people need not remain spiritual pygmies all their lives. It is a gratifying thing to watch Christians grow and develop. To make progress in

the things of God makes the individual believer and the entire Christian community stronger.

PRINCIPLE: Spiritual growth comes from systematic presentation of the truth of God's Word.

APPLICATION: The threefold ministry of preaching, warning and teaching keeps the church from becoming sidetracked. When the church stops these three functions she gets off track. No other organization will give the gospel other than the church and her paramission ministries. Public schools, universities, political institutions, fraternities or lodges will not do it. God does not want us to duplicate what other institutions can do better.

A preacher is not to become a psychiatrist or psychologist. His role is to preach, warn and teach. He should not trade in his pulpit for a couch. The trend in our day is for preachers to become amateur psychologists. God's primary commission for them is to preach Christ. Their first call is not to fight the social ills of society. We expose error by preaching the truth. The church loses its message by dabbling in politics. The greatest hope for society is a maximum number of people turning to Jesus Christ.

"in all wisdom"

It takes "wisdom" to handle false teaching. Some people emotionally attach themselves to false doctrine. Each person views truth from their individual grid. He did not propel them into the opposite camp by unnecessarily violating their viewpoints. However, on the other hand, it also does not mean that we sacrifice truth for feelings. Spiritual surgery requires delicate precision.

"Wisdom" is the ability to apply what we know to our personal experience. It is the application of knowledge. It is one thing to preach, warn and teach; it is another thing to do it with "wisdom."

PRINCIPLE: Wisdom is the ability to apply divine truth to a situation.

APPLICATION: How do you handle delicate doctrinal situations? Do you attack it with a sledge hammer? God does not want us to polarize those Christians to fall into error. He wants us to help them out of it by using wisdom.

"that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus"

"Perfect" is a term of maturity (Heb. 5:11-14). The word "perfect" means someone who has reached the end God intends for them. It does not lack the end for which it was intended. This believer is spiritually fully grown (I Cor. 2:6; 14:20; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:15; 4:12; Heb. 5:14).

New Christians and believers who grow very little are spiritual babes (I Pet. 2:2; I Cor. 3:1-2). Paul's interest is in believers not remaining spiritual babies (cf. 1 Cor. 3:1-2) but in their becoming spiritually mature (cf. Heb. 5:11-14).

The word "present" means to stand before God. Paul wanted to present people under his charge to figuratively stand before God mature in their daily walk. He consecrated them to God to become mature. A person reaches spiritual maturity when they can independently apply the truth of God's Word to meet any spiritual battle they might face.

PRINCIPLE: Spiritual maturity is the ability to independently apply truth to experience.

APPLICATION: A spiritually mature believer can discern whether something is from the Lord or from the flesh. He can detect the working of the flesh and judges it immediately. He refuses to allow it to get a grip on him. An immature Christian will not recognize the flesh when it presents itself. He is not aware of the spiritual equipment God provides to combat the flesh. As he grows in grace he will be able to identify the dangers that lurk in his life and know the principles which will deal with them. If he does not know the dangers he is in serious trouble. If he does not know God's principles for dealing with them he is in trouble.

Have you reached the end for which God intended you?

Colossians 1:29

"To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily."

Paul labored and so does God. Because God gave Paul power, this does not mean that he would not labored to the point of exhaustion.

"To this end"

The word "end" refers to "maturity" in verse 28. Paul made one of his personal goals in life to develop mature believers.

"I also labor"

The word "labor" means to work to the point of exhaustion. Paul expended his strength to make believers mature in Christ. He knew something about how to work hard.

"striving according to His working"

Paul's labors involved "striving" or struggling (2:1; 4:12). This word means to agonize like an athlete in the heat of competition (I Cor 9:25; I Tim. 6:12). He viewed ministry like an athletic contest that required great exertion. He strove like a marathon runner who sprints to the finish line with great agony. It means to compete with every ounce of energy we possess. Paul contended with many difficulties in his work.

"which works in me mightily"

God works in the apostle "mightily" to enable him to facilitate the maturity of believers. If we are to mature believers in ministry it will require the power of God. God will have to provide the operating power. Paul did not use his own natural power in ministry. It was not his talent, gift, education (considerable though it may have been) or his methodology (he was a master strategist). His power lay in drawing upon God's strength.

Note these passages where God works in people:

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (I Cor. 15:10).

"For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:20,21).

"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlast-

ing covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20,21).

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to work hard but not in our own strength. We are thereby not susceptible to burnout.

APPLICATION: God does not call upon us to use our own puny power. The robust words "labor" and "striving" require God's "working" and that "mightily." Paul gave himself to a ministry whereby he put his trust in God's power. So many authors today would claim that Paul was a workaholic. Here is a man who did not spare himself. He never reached a point of burn out because he rested on the power of God. The more we labor for the Lord the greater measure of help God gives us. We can expect it from him (Eph. 3:7).

Colossians 2**Colossians 2:1**

"For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh"

A great danger threatened the church in the Lycus Valley. A false doctrine known as gnosticism invaded the churches there. This doctrine violated the person of Christ holding him as a phantom and not a real person. Other doctrines of concern were legalism and carnal asceticism. All of these ideas threaten Christianity and vital Christian living. It was a great counter attack by Satan to violate the church of the Valley.

Evidently this attack made some "in roads" into Christianity. Believers in Colosse and Laodicea succumbed to this attack. Gnosticism took many spiritual prisoners. Many doubted their salvation. They fell victim to the Satanic counterattack. Those more mature became discouraged, disoriented, depressed and scattered because of it.

In this chapter Paul argues that Christ supersedes all these false doctrines. He is totally adequate for anything we might face.

"For I want you to know"

Whenever Paul uses this phrase it indicates a statement of importance. Invariably, the thing that we should know is the very thing that we do not know.

Here Paul wants the church to know how much he cared for them, "I want you to know that I care about you." Although he was an author, missionary, church planter, evangelist and teacher, he had a pastor's heart. "But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. 8 So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us" (I Thes. 2:7,8).

"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (II Cor. 5:14,15). The motivation for others-orientation is the love that Jesus has toward us.

PRINCIPLE: A great value to God is for Christians to live for others.

APPLICATION: By nature people love themselves. We naturally turn inward. When a person comes to Christ he acquires a new heart for people. God commences a great outward orientation toward others when we begin the Christian life. We love others because Christ first loved us.

"what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea"

The church in Colosse and Laodicea routed by false doctrine caused a "great conflict" in the person of Paul. Their distortion of truth caused him personal anguish. His care for the church went to the extent of agony to his person. His agony was over their comporting with apostasy.

The word "conflict" means the contest for a prize at the great Greek national games. Generally the word portrays any struggle or trial that may involve peril. Paul indicates that his agony for them is "great." He wants them to know how much he cares. In the next verse he gives the purpose for telling them how much he cares -- that their hearts might be "comforted." Evidently this invasion into

the church greatly hurt the church in the Lycus Valley as well.

"For" in the phrase "for you" is a term of substitution. Paul was in agony and conflict on the behalf of the Colossians and the Laodiceans. Whenever a church reverts into false doctrine it renders great pain to leadership. Instability in truth leads to an unsteady Christian life.

Laodicea, like Colosse, lay in the Lycus Valley on the Lycus River. The city situated on a trade route enjoyed prosperity. There is no book of the Bible written to the Laodiceans. However, Paul did write them (Col. 4:16). John warns the Laodiceans of lukewarmness because of her riches (Rev. 3:14-19).

Paul carried a burden for both the churches at Colosse and at Laodicea neither of which ever met him personally. He was a churchman in the finest sense of the word. In II Corinthians 11 he catalogues the things he suffered for the church. In verse 28 he writes, "Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches." He knew how Satan loves to invade and ruin churches.

If we are truly burdened for Christians, we will minister to them, "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb. 6:10). A church needs both obstetricians and pediatricians. People require loving care of a pediatrician after they become Christians.

PRINCIPLE: Christians should carry a burden for the church.

APPLICATION: Do you care about the household of faith? Are you willing to give yourself for the church? It may at times cause great personal pain but the church is worth it.

"and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh"

Paul cared deeply for those he never met or personally evangelized. He never visited Colosse or Laodicea. He cared for them by praying for them and writing the epistle of Colossians.

PRINCIPLE: Christians care deeply about those they never meet.

APPLICATION: Do you are about people you have never met? Do you care about the church in other parts of the world? Do you keep in touch? It is possible to fellowship at a distance through personal support and information. We can pray for others who are at great distance from us. Now in the day of the internet, we can contact many of them at a moment's notice.

Colossians 2:2

"that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ"

Paul here expresses his desire was for the spiritual welfare of the Christians in the Lycus Valley. His concern was always first and foremost their spiritual maturity. He did not design his ministry around their health, wealth, success or prosperity. His concern was for spiritual prosperity.

Four lines of defense protects the believer from assault from the enemy's counterattack. The first relates to truth.

"that their hearts may be encouraged"

This phrase indicates the first protection from assault on truth. The first defense for the Christian when his faith is under attack is to personally orient to God's Word. We find how to cope with adversity and frustration in this principle. This is our first line of defense.

PRINCIPLE: Orientation to God's Word while under pressure to question our faith is our first line of defense.

APPLICATION: What should we do when we face adversity? Scream and fall apart? Find someone with a sympathetic ear? We will never liberate ourselves from Satanic attack without getting behind this first line of defense. God fortifies our hearts with the Word first.

This phrase can mislead us if we read it with an understanding of people at the twenty-first century. Most of us interpret "heart" to mean emotions and "encouraged" to mean emotional support. Neither of these meanings convey the idea of the first century.

The stabilizing principle during times of attack upon our faith is that our "hearts may be encouraged." The word "heart" does not refer simply to our emotions. It has nothing to do with the idea behind Valentines Day; it does not mean romantic and sentimental. We often hear the expression "He means well; his heart is in the right place." In other words, he bumbles through life but he means well. He is sincere but wrong. The word "heart" is never used in this sense in the Bible.

When the Bible uses the word "heart" it refers to the entire person. The heart is the mind, emotion, will, spirit, memories, attitudes -- the complete person. When tragedy comes to our lives generally the first thing we do is stop thinking and begin to operate emotionally. We throw tantrums and become hysterical. Hysteria means we stop using the thinking part of the heart.

PRINCIPLE: The Christian life involves the complete person -- mind, emotion and will. The attitude is the result of the complete person.

APPLICATION: The Christian must draw upon the resources for the complete person to live the Christian life. Attitude sins devastate relationships. They make us judge other people. We enter antagonisms because of these attitudes. Attitude sins cause instability. Instability makes us operate as a psychotic person who does not know he is psychotic.

The Word of God establishes our "hearts" by orienting us to God's way of thinking for the complete person.

"Encouraged" means literally to call along side. It means to call upon someone who is near at hand. It eventually came to mean to call upon resources for help in time of need.

What are the resources to help in time of need for the Christian? Here someone comes alongside to teach us what we need in times of difficulty. It is not the person per se but the truth that the person brings that encourages us. It is the truth that stabilizes us in difficulty.

PRINCIPLE: Truth stabilizes us in times of difficulty.

APPLICATION: From the inculcation of truth we mount a counterattack against sham or counterfeit

ideas. When we call upon truth or utilize truth when things fall apart around us, we will experience God's peace. We will demonstrate to a lost world that not only does Jesus Christ save us eternally but he saves us in time. That is entirely apart from personal resources. He saves us by the Word of God. How much time have you spent behind this first line of defense?

The word "encouraged" may mean "confirmed" here. The Colossians believers were in danger of a spiritual paradigm shift. They were tempted to shift into an eclectic system of religion (Gnosticism). This caused them to enter a phase of instability. They were no longer sure of what they believed.

Spiritual instability makes us susceptible to false doctrine. No one can recover from a spiritual problem while dominated by their emotions. Enthusiasm will not protect us against doctrinal distortion. All it will do is make us like a yo-yo going up and down with every theological trend that comes along.

PRINCIPLE: The Word of God gives spiritual stability to the soul.

APPLICATION: Are you sufficiently knowledgeable of the Word of God to recognize and cope with false teaching? If not, spiritual instability will make you susceptible to attack upon your faith.

Do you take your problems out on those closest to you? Are you unkind to everyone? If you are, then you are a spiritual casualty in God's war against Satan. During this past week, did you take out your problems on other people? Have you become a dissatisfied member of the human race? Have you become obsessed with your problems? Did you become hysterical? If we blame everyone else for our problems we will remain in instability.

No matter what situation we may face in life, God can meet us in it if we allow him to do it. God has not designed the Christian life to operate like a yo-yo. He has designed stability into the Christian life by building an edification complex through the Word of God. That does not mean that we are free from difficulties and disappointments. No doubt every one of us will face bitter situations. God designs adversity in our lives to prove us.

If we try to tell everyone about the tragic plight of our lives, it would result in a maudlin mess. How would you like it if everyone you meet in church tells you about the ghastly things that happened to them each week? There would be no end to the mush: "You poor dear. Oh, I am so sorry." This is not what God designs for his children. God purposes that a believer stand on truth first and foremost. That does not mean that God precludes compassion by either himself or other people. Compassion is a secondary value to truth in God's program.

After proper instruction in the Word, the Christian develops a spiritual edification complex whereby he will be able to face any number of challenges to his faith. If, for example, we use the promise I Peter 5:7 "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you," then we move behind this first defense bulwark. If we fall apart and look for emotional sympathy then Satan make take us captive.

All of us have heartaches. The difference between people lies in how they handle their hurts. Some people sulk and hide themselves from people that hurt them. When they isolate themselves like that, they sink into attitude problems. They turn on their friends. They sulk and whine. They do not want to talk to anyone. If anyone attempts to communicate with them they bite their head off. They are irritable and unkind to anyone that comes along.

Are you that kind of person? Do you snarl and snap and bite? Do you turn on your friends? If you are that kind of person, you are not behind the first line of defense. You cannot orient to God and make it count for him.

PRINCIPLE: The Word of God develops an edification complex of the soul.

APPLICATION: The heart is not encouraged by sympathy. The worst thing we can do is to sympathize with people with negative attitudes. It will confirm their burgeoning self-pity.

Discouragement can lead to attitudinal problems. The Bible attacks this problem with the principle of displacement. The principle of displacement means that we replace negative thinking with thinking about the principles of the Word of God. We displace sinful thoughts with God's thoughts.

PRINCIPLE: The principle of displacement changes our attitudes so that we can live victoriously over attitudinal sins.

APPLICATION: No matter what situation we may face in life, God can meet us in it if we allow him to do it. God has not designed the Christian life to operate like a yo-yo. He has designed stability into the Christian life. That does not mean that we are free from difficulties, disappointments. No doubt every one of us will face bitter situations. God designs adversity in our lives to prove the capacity of our soul.

If we try to tell everyone about the tragic plight of our lives, it would be a maudlin mess. How would you like it if everyone you meet in church tells you about the ghastly things that happened to them each week? There would be no end to the mush: "You poor dear. Oh, I am so sorry." This is not what God designs for his children. God purposes that a believer stand on truth first and foremost. That does not mean that he excludes compassion. Compassion is a secondary value to truth in God's program.

We tend to run to counselors or other sublimations rather than using the Word of God to displace negative thinking.

The tense of the verb "encourage" indicates that we only need encouragement at times. Suffering in God's design is occasional (I Pet. 1:6). God does not expect us to suffer endlessly.

The voice indicates that the resources come from outside ourselves. They are divine resources. These resources are not operation bootstraps. We do not earn or deserve the right to possess these privileges. Encouragement comes from the Word of God.

The mood of "encouraged" indicates that the choice is potential depending on whether we want to use God's resources or not. They are available but whether we use them or not is entirely up to us. God will not force them upon us. We use them on our own free will.

PRINCIPLE: God does not want us to live the Christian life by operation bootstraps; he wants us to draw upon the Word of God to use his resources for life.

APPLICATION: It is God's will for us to appropriate divine resources but he will not overrule or override our volition. God wants us to relate to him on the basis of our choice. This is the basis of fellowship with him. Peace under duress is only potential. It depends on our utilization of God's resources. The resources are available but they must couple to our choice. Therefore, the way we prepare for the Christian life is to learn the principles of God's Word and apply them to our situation. We must be ready to apply these principles and promises at a moment's notice.

The second line of defense challenges us to enjoy intimate fellowship with other Christians.

"being knit together in love"

"Being knit together" is a compound word in the Greek. It means to make to come together. God wants us to join together in a union of fellowship.

In Acts 9:22 "knit together" mean to bring together Scriptures so as to prove a truth, "But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving (translated by proving) that this Jesus is the Christ." We put Scriptures together so as to compare them with what other passages teach. Paul proves that Jesus is the Messiah by putting Scriptures together. We are to put ourselves together with other Christians as we would put together proof from the Bible.

In Acts 16:10 the word means to examine closely, "Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them." Paul concluded by laying the circumstances together that it was the will of God for the team to go to Macedonia. Close fellowship among Christians is something we should closely examine.

In I Cor 2:16 the word is used of putting together reasons so as to demonstrate or prove, "For who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ." The implication in this passage is that no one can put information together to instruct God. He transcends finite human understanding. The human intellect does not have adequate frame of reference to deal with the infinity of God's mind. No one can prove anything to God. We are to put

Christians together as we would marshal logical arguments.

Ephesians 4:16 uses this word the passive sense, "from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." This means that God did something to the church. The church did not do this. God brings the church together in one symmetric whole. He gives the church the right gifts and the right people at the right time. It is his mix. He knows the right ingredients that will produce the right result.

PRINCIPLE: God wants Christians to coalesce, to join or knit together in intimate fellowship.

APPLICATION: Intimate fellowship with other Christians enhances the strength of our souls. Close communion comes from love.

Being "knit together" means that believers join together in love to fight against error. We must be careful how we join the attack. Christians should shoulder to shoulder in love serve the Lord. The unity of love comes from common truth.

The Greek indicates that knitting together in love comes before encouragement in truth. We will not apply truth to experience unless we walk in the unity of love among Christians. So it would read "having been knit together in love, we encourage..."

PRINCIPLE: Love among Christians precedes encouragement in truth.

APPLICATION: "Love" here is not sweetness and light. It is love that transcends personal feelings. This love does what is best for others even if it causes the person who delivers the message pain or the person who receives the message pain. Love communicates that which corresponds to truth. The best thing we can do for those we loves is to be truthful with them.

"and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding"

Here is the third line of defense in an assault against Christianity. In grace, God has given us a full assurance of understanding of the mystery of Christ.

The "riches of the full assurance of understanding" is sound judgment about the great truths of Christianity. God provides assets for our use in time. These go beyond our gifts, abilities, intelligence or talents. A person with "full assurance of understanding" no longer calls into question the Word of God. Doubt is no longer the central mode of operation. This believer embraces truth with high satisfaction.

Certainty comes from understanding. The confident believer carries "full assurance of understanding." He is full of assurance. Because he has many certainties, this results in the wealth of assurances.

"Full assurance" is the fixed persuasion that we comprehend the truth. This person has reached the elevation of confidence that he knows for sure what truth is. He does not misconstrue truth or attach meanings it does not bear. He knows the mind of God in the matter.

PRINCIPLE: Confidence comes from the "full assurance of understanding."

APPLICATION: "Full assurance" describes how we utilize God's privileges for our life. When we orient to God's provisions we may struggle with sins but if we sin, we have confidence that God will forgive when we confess (I John 1:9). We rest on God's faithfulness to forgive. We cast our care upon him because we are confident that God cares for us (Phil. 4:6,7; I Pet. 5:7). When we pray we know that God hears us because of Christ because we come "in Jesus' name."

Because God has given us privileges (grace), we can have confidence. We cannot have confidence in our performance. When the world looks at our orientation to grace they see a different quality of life. They see a confident person. This confidence cannot come without "knowledge." Knowledge of God's Word gives us confidence. We become confident people because we understand the grace, the privileges of God based on what Christ did.

Do you have confidence in your life? Do you know what to do with the sin, adversity and problems? Can you take a stand knowing you are in God's will?

If a person does not possess this certainty of truth, then error will perpetuate. If what we hold today

is gone tomorrow, we enter into dubiety and fluctuation where truth can never be fixed. Tolerance of every wind of doctrine becomes the only central norm for determining reality. If new ideas chase away convictions, spiritual instability will result. If what we hold today is gone tomorrow, truth cannot be eternal or absolute. What does that say about an eternal, absolute God? The mind becomes susceptible to constant question and influence without a revelation of God in Scripture.

Fixed knowledge of truth fortifies the mind against false teachers. It is less likely to become seduced by insinuations that contain some truth and some error. The mind most susceptible to seduction is the mind that possesses an incomplete, one-sided view of the issue. It is unable to reconcile conflicting challenges to its bias. That person is much more liable to become seduced because he is constantly off balance. He is perpetually disturbed and perplexed by conflicting ideas that were insufficiently formed in the first place.

A person traveling in unfamiliar territory is much more vulnerable to becoming lost. He may begin to doubt his direction. He becomes more prepared to listen to other suggestions no matter how capable they may be. No wonder "full assurance" is described here as "riches!"

The combination of great knowledge and a strong faith make a rich spirit. The word "riches" is the word from which we get the word thesaurus. We live in a day of tolerance and vacillation. We are so pliable that we view someone who holds convictions as abnormal.

The word "understanding" means acuteness of comprehension or penetrating intelligence that takes place before decision and action. This is reflective and productive thought. "Understanding" is the basis for recovering from instability.

PRINCIPLE: Confidence comes from an acute comprehension of the divine truth of God.

APPLICATION: If a believer understands the underlying principles of the Word, he or she can apply truth to their situation. If not, they wobble throughout their Christian life. Truth stabilizes the Christian life. If we live by our emotional boot straps, we will become vulnerable to every wind of doctrine that comes down the pike. If we live by

truth, we will recover from instability. We hold a frame of reference whereby we can categorize any challenge to truth and measure it against the Word of God. Having done that, we can correctly assess the proper practical course of action.

"to the knowledge of the mystery of God"

The fourth and final defense of the Christian life is "knowledge of the mystery of God." If the Christians understands the unique prerogatives and privileges of his position in Christ, he will develop poise in his Christian life.

What is "the mystery of God?" This is the key to this phrase. The mystery of God is all truth that Jesus provided for the church (Eph. 3:1-6; Rom. 16:25-26; Col. 1:25,26). This is a truth not revealed in the Old Testament.

The word "mystery" does not mean something spooky. It does not mean that it is obscure to us. It means truth not hitherto revealed. The truth of the church was not revealed in the Old Testament. This truth is not pertinent to how Old Testament believers lived their lives before God.

The New Testament believer is in union with Jesus Christ. He or she enjoys prerogatives peculiar to that position. Every believer in the church is indwelt both by Christ and the Holy Spirit. This was not true in the Old Testament. In the church every believer is a priest; in the Old Testament only a few were priests. Every believer is his own priest and can go directly to God to satisfy his needs. He is spiritually self sustaining; he does not need to depend on others in authority.

The word "knowledge" describes the underlying principles of the Word of God, in this case a specific principle -- "the mystery of God." "Knowledge" is the construction material that forms the basis for the edification complex of the believer's stability. It is the power to apprehend truth so that we can correctly grasp the issue face in life. The corrective for distortion of truth is additional knowledge of Christ.

The mystery of God is not hidden from us but for us. The mystery is Christ himself (1:27). This believer clearly understands that prerogatives and privileges of the Christian life come from Christ and not self. Our rights before God are because of

Christ. Therefore, we can be assured of those rights.

"both of the Father and of Christ"

Many modern texts read "even Christ." That is, the mystery is all about Christ and what he did upon the cross in making special privileges for the believer.

PRINCIPLE: If our knowledge grows into a certain understanding of the mystery of the Father and Christ, then our soul will prosper.

APPLICATION: We are what we eat, physically; we are what we read, mentally and we are what we believe, spiritually. Paul wants us to assimilate the riches of his truth to the full. He wanted us to know all the ramifications and implications of it.

God has made all the provisions necessary for the Christian life in Christ by grace. If we understand that, we grasp "the mystery." It is crucial to understand positional truth. Positional truth is our status before God eternally in Christ. We hold a perfect status before God. The only thing that will give us ultimate poise is our understanding of our rights before God in Christ.

Colossians 2:3

"in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

"in whom are hidden"

The "whom" here is the Lord Jesus Christ. Christianity is essentially a relationship with a person. The wealth of Christianity revolves around that person.

This is a truth not known in the Old Testament (1:26).

"all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"

The word "treasures" means stored up. It is the word from which we get our word thesaurus. A thesaurus is a treasury of words stored up to compare with one another. God begins to give a catalogue of treasures at salvation and they continue throughout the Christian experience until and including death. The entire plan of God revolves around the person and work of Jesus Christ.

God provides our initial salvation by forgiveness of sins in Christ. God gives us divine operating assets while we live life in time. God saves us eternally at physical death. That is an outline of God's thesaurus.

Note that "all" the treasures are hidden in him. They will always be in him. Jesus is the treasure of God. The wonderful thing about the "hidden treasures" in Christ is that we discover them by personally accepting him as our Savior. We do that by believing that his death on the cross forgives us of our sins.

Wisdom is the appropriation of truth to experience, 1:9. If we know truth we will be able to apply it properly to our situation. This is spiritual insight into who Jesus is.

Knowledge is the catalogue of truth, the power to apprehend truth. We must first grasp truth before we can apply it. We cannot apply truth that we do not know. Once we grasp truth, we can give an answer for our faith.

We find both "wisdom" and "knowledge" in Christ (Rom. 11:33; I Cor. 12:8).

PRINCIPLE: The Lord Jesus Christ is the key that unlocks God's treasure.

APPLICATION: We can obtain knowledge in school but not wisdom. Spiritual wisdom comes from personal knowledge and fellowship with the Lord Jesus. He is the key to wisdom and knowledge (I Cor. 1:23,24). He is the mind and might of God; the brains and brawn of God.

I Corinthians states that we have the "mind of Christ." Where do we have the mind of Christ? God has put it in writing -- the Word of God, the unabridged revelation of God. We cannot understand the Word of God without first knowing the Son of God (Rom. 8:7,8; I Cor. 2:14). We cannot know the Son of God without first knowing the Word of God. Everything that God wants us to know is in the Bible.

The unique difference about Jesus Christ from all other religious leaders is that he is alive today. All other religious leaders are all dead and buried but Jesus Christ is alive! A dead Confucius or Buddha cannot give eternal life. They died themselves. Jesus rose from the dead.

I would like to invite you to know the Son of God. If you accept the fact that he paid for all your sins upon the cross by faith, you will have eternal life. The Bible presents no other solution. The Bible guarantees no other answer for owning eternal life.

Colossians 2:4

"Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words."

"Now this I say"

"This" refers to the "full knowledge" of verse three. Paul has just presented the sufficiency of Christ. Full knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ protects the believer from deception. Mature believers protect themselves from deception by their full knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"lest anyone should deceive you"

Paul now briefs them on why they could not discern truth from error. We learn from our mistakes. We can probably learn more from our failures than from our successes. The word "lest" introduces a purpose clause. God does not want us to repeat the mistakes of the past.

Satan convinces people by beguiling them (II Cor. 11:3). If we do not know the truth sufficiently, we leave ourselves open to undermining what we believe. The Colossians let themselves open to the false teachers of the Lycus Valley because they did not sufficiently know the Word of God.

The word "deceive" means to reason aside. It came to mean to "lead astray" or "delude." It means to deceive by false reasoning, by false logic, by a system that sounds logical but is not sound reasoning. There are plenty of people out there who want to distort the pure Word of God.

In the Greek Old Testament this word was used by Jacob when he reproached Laban for refusing to live up to his side of the bargain of giving Rachel for his wife (Gen. 29:25, LXX).

"with persuasive words"

The terms "persuasive words" are used of a lawyer who argues that his guilty client is not culpable. It carries the idea of our idiom: "To talk someone into something." It is the appearance of logic. This

is a person who has the power to influence an audience toward an unjust verdict. Recent legal cases in North America patently demonstrate how lawyers can talk a jury off just punishment.

We must not surrender to glib and sometimes convincing arguments of false teachers. The ignorant and unwary in our day still fall to specious arguments because they are ignorant of God's Word.

False arguments that sound plausible can deceive. Persuasion and truth are not necessarily the same thing. False teachers can be very persuasive (Rom. 16:18). They need to cheat in order to ruin us. It is impossible for them to deceive and cheat, if it was not for our own ignorance of truth.

PRINCIPLE: The true Christian should have such a grip on truth that he or she will not listen to specious and seductive arguments.

APPLICATION: Glib talkers can rattle off philosophical sophistry. There are many religious tricksters on the loose. They will try to "con" Christians by enticing words. They throw kisses at the Lord Jesus Christ. They say nice things about him. That gives them credibility. It is amazing how many Christians become sucked into aberrant religious systems because they do not know enough of the Word of God to discern the true from the false (II Cor 11:3). The Devil will make a play for our heads.

If believers fortify themselves behind the defense perimeter of verse two, then they will be able to withstand people who talk them off from truth. If they have an edification complex in their soul from the Word of God, they will have stability of soul. Satan attacks the soul who has a vacuum of truth in his soul (Eph. 4:17).

People with little truth open themselves up to negatively view the unadulterated truth of the Bible. They are susceptible to a "fifth column" to come in and undermine truth. Are you vulnerable to being talked into false doctrine?

Colossians 2:5

"For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ."

There was an insidious error at work in Colosse. False teachers were attempting to teach that other avenues of information about God were possible other than the Bible.

"For though I am absent in the flesh"

Paul never visited the church at Colosse. Even though he was not physically present with them, he was with them in spirit.

"yet I am with you in spirit"

Paul identified with the Colossian church spiritually. Though he was not physically present, he was able to deal with an assault upon their faith by writing to them.

"rejoicing to see your good order"

The words "order" and "steadfastness" are military metaphors. They both describe an army set for battle. This is the attitude believers must adopt if they are to stand against false doctrine.

The word "order" refers to soldiers in orderly rank. It means to form an army in battle array. Soldiers are to line up in battle order. No soldier should break rank and run. Panic will destroy any army.

General Jesus orders his Christian troops in military array. The Christian church should march like an army, rank upon rank, with every man in his appointed place. Jesus Christ himself arranges the disposition of this Christian army. Every Christian should be ready to take commands from General Jesus and go to doctrinal battle for him.

The manual for battle is the Word of God. When it comes to spiritual war, the Christian needs to fight the battle on God's terms. In chemistry, certain laws are crucial to follow if we do not want to meet with a violent result. There is no latitude in the multiplication table. So the Christian life operates on principles that carry the Christian warrior in spiritual warfare.

PRINCIPLE: Christians are to display orderly rank and solid discipline as troops of Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION: Christians need both unity and solid understanding of the Word of God in the face of slick-tongued heretics. A soldier's discipline for order and steadfastness in the Word of God is necessary for a Christian walk.

"and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ"

The word "steadfast" is from the military term "phalanx". A phalanx was an ancient Greek formation of infantry. Soldiers were arrayed in rows of eight to sixteen rows making a solid block. This block could sweep through the more dispersed enemy. The phalanx was originally deployed by the Spartans. It was developed by Epaminondas of Thebes (362 B.C.). This method of war reached its apex under Alexander the Great. He used the Macedonian Phalanx (16 soldiers deep armed with a 24' spear). He conquered all of Greece and the Near East with this system of warfare.

The Christian is to be an immovable phalanx in the Word. The Christian phalanx is an unbreakable square. It stands solid against the charge of the enemy. The true church holds fast to its phalanx of faith. A true faith refuses to yield to opposing influences. This is not a frozen orthodoxy where all change and adventure of thinking are heresy.

PRINCIPLE: Christians are to display orderly rank and solid discipline as troops of Jesus Christ.

APPLICATION: How solidly do you adhere to the allegiance of your faith -- Jesus Christ? Does your love never waver from him? No Christian is free from the authority of Jesus Christ. When we reject his authority, we reject what is best for our soul. Then we substitute drugs and alcohol for the vacuum in our souls. When we substitute other answers for Jesus Christ, we break rank with him. Are you the kind of soldier who stays in rank with the Word of God?

Colossians 2:6

"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him"

This verse begins a practical antitoxin to deal with seducers. It is not enough to warn against desertion from Christ; the Christian must advance in his daily life of faith.

"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord"

The word "therefore" marks the transition from the doctrinal to the practical.

"Received" means to welcome what is brought or delivered by others. It means to receive truth by transmission from someone else. It is the Word of God that transmits truth about Christ.

When we became a Christian, we welcomed the doctrine of Christ; we took Jesus in every relation and capacity; we received the person himself. The doctrine concerning Christ is sufficient to meet any contingency in the Christian life. Our full reception of the doctrine of Christ is the only true safeguard against deceit. This is an exhortation to persist in the truth.

PRINCIPLE: We become a Christian by faith in Christ's death to forgive us for our sins.

APPLICATION: Has there been a time in your life when you personally welcomed Christ as your Savior? You may say, "Well, I do not know whether I have or not." We cannot marry and not know it! We either have received Christ or we have not. We cannot receive Christ and not know it.

Many people say, "I suppose I'm a Christian, I hope I am." Do you know for sure that you have made a decision to receive Christ? No one in their right mind would say, "I think I'm married, I hope I'm married, I suppose I'm married, I don't really know." If someone were to ask you, "Have you received Jesus Christ's death to forgive your sins?" you may say, "I am not sure." Then you are not a Christian. When the minister asks, "Will you have his man to be your husband?", you answer, "I do." When someone asks you, "Will you have this Man Christ Jesus to be your personal Savior?", you either say, "I do" or "I won't." If you say, "I do," he will forgive you immediately of all sin, past, present or future.

Titles of the Lord Jesus are very informative. They reveal nuances the author intends in a given context. This is what we find in this verse.

"Christ Jesus the Lord"

The Greek says, "the Christ Jesus, the Lord." Note the two definite articles. This is the full title of our Lord.

Note the title "Lord." When we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior, we get more than a Savior; we get a Lord. When we married our wife, we did not say, "I take you as my partner in business." No, we took her as our wife. Partnership in business may involve an aspect of marriage. When we receive Christ, we get more than that for which we bargained. We did not know much about our salvation when we began a Christ, but we need to find out that he is Lord as soon as possible.

He is Lord (II Cor. 4:5). That makes us a slave. We need to learn that we are no longer our own. Our Savior and Lord bought, ransomed and redeemed us.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus Christ is more than a Savior; he is our Lord.

APPLICATION: We need to recognize that Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives. That recognition will change how we live. Simple volition cannot execute the Christian life. When we lose consciousness of willing to do something, we sin and fail. Therefore, it is not will itself that delivers us, it is the object of our will that makes the difference, the Word of God that reveals Jesus the Lord.

Is the Lord Jesus Christ the object of our choices? If we appropriate the person and work of Christ to our lives by many choices, the sovereign Lord will strengthen us to execute the Christian life. When we recognize the sovereign Lord as Lord, God will enable us to live the kind of life he wants for us.

The "as" refers to the point when we received Christ as our Savior. The "so" refers to continued trust in the ongoing principles of Scripture for our daily walk with God. Spiritual life begins with faith and it continues by faith.

"so walk in Him"

The point of this verse revolves around two monosyllables -- "as" and "so." The point of the "as...so" clause is comparison. The "as" refers to the point when we received Christ as our Savior (John 1:11,12). The "as" refers to the truth that we receive Jesus Christ's death for our sin by faith. The "so"

refers to continued trust in the ongoing principles of Scripture for our daily walk with God. Spiritual life begins with faith and it continues on faith. The comparison between becoming a Christian and continuing as a Christian is faith.

"Walk" means live. It means the whole round of activities of the individual life. The word "walk" comes from two words, "to walk" and "around," "to walk around." This word conveys the idea to live as a course of life. We are to live the entire course of the Christian life by faith. Conduct must accord with the truths of our faith.

As we have received him by faith when we became a Christian, so we need to walk day by day by faith. II Corinthians 5:7 says, "For we walk by faith, not by sight." The Christian life rotates around faith. That is how it begins; that is how it continues. By faith God delivers us day by day from the power of sin.

Faith, not feeling, is the basis of victory. Some folk verify their walk with God by feeling. We are a Christian as much when we do not feel like a Christian as when we do feel like it. We live the Christian life by faith whether we feel like it or not. Our feelings have nothing to do with it. I am still married whether I feel like it or not!

The Exodus generation in the Old Testament failed to mix the promises with faith (Heb. 3:7-4:16). We cannot live the Christian life if we do not claim the promises by which we live it. If we do not know the promises, how can we claim them? The Exodus generation had a great future, a land flowing with milk and honey. For forty years they wandered in the desert of carnality because they did not apply enough of God's Word to seize the future God promised them.

PRINCIPLE: We utilize the same faith by which we became a Christian to live daily before God. A growing faith staves off retrogression.

APPLICATION: Feelings are fickle. They can lead us astray. Some people say, "I read the Bible and I do not feel anything." When we read a letter from a loved one, some things we may feel and others we may not. Some components of the letter may state simple fact. Other aspects of the letter may involve emotion. That does not mean that the parts of the letter that contain emotion are the only

valid part of the letter. When we read the Bible, at times we may feel something and other times we may not. Feelings are not the issue. When we read the Bible we read a communication from our Heavenly Father. We welcome ("received") what he wants us to know.

As we appropriate the provisions of God by faith, God's Word becomes a part of us. It is through our choices about the Word that the Word assimilates into our lifestyle. The Christian grows one day at a time.

Colossians 2:7

"rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."

Paul mixes his metaphors in this verse -- the metaphor of a tree and a building. Both metaphors convey the idea of stability.

Three statements about how our faith strengthen us show the stability of life in Christ.

"rooted"

The first statement as to how faith strengthens us is we are "rooted in him." The word "root" means to cause to take root. The Greek indicates that it is God who causes us to take root. The first metaphor of stability in our Christian walk is that our faith is rooted like a tree by God.

"Rooted" is an idiom for strength with a focus upon the source for strength. The Greek indicates that the Christian who is strong in faith is made to strike roots deep in the ground. As a tree roots itself in the ground God causes us to take root in Christ.

We cannot stabilize our lives in Christ until by faith we recognize that our roots in him. A tree's roots go deep into the soil and draws its nourishment from the ground.

The tense of the word "rooted" means that we were rooted in the past with the result that we remain rooted in the faith. Root may refer to our reception of Christ as Savior. This metaphor may refer to the idea that Christ provided salvation eternally for us. Once we come to know him, we are rooted in him forever.

PRINCIPLE: Our faith cannot strengthen until we root ourselves deep into the person and work of Christ

APPLICATION: There is ongoing results from sound teaching about Christ. Christ is nourishment to the growing, vital tree of Christian living. A Christian must have deep roots in Christ if he is to produce fruit. The mature Christ roots deep in Christ like a tree in the ground. He is the source of our life and strength. Stability comes from Christ.

When we walk daily by the same kind of faith with which we came to know Christ (v.6), our lives will strengthen in the faith. A walk with God establishes a sound faith. Verse seven gives the basis for our faith.

"and built up in Him"

The second statement about how God strengthens our faith is we are "built up in Him." The words "built up" means to build a house upon a specific location with an emphasis on the process. This is the second synonym for strength. As we grow in Christ, God makes us more able ("built up") to live the Christian life.

This is the metaphor of a building. Its foundations go far into the ground and sit on firm footings. A mature Christian has a solid foundation. The foundation is Jesus Christ. Well-built buildings can withstand great earthquakes. When the Christian faces storms and earth shattering adversity, he stands firm. Christ himself is the binding force for the building of a strong faith.

The tense of this verb is ongoing. The building process for the Christian is ongoing. A Christian must be build block by block until God erects an edification complex in his soul.

Jude 20 says that we build strength into our lives by what we believe, "But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit."

In Acts 20:32 and in this verse it means to build strength into the Christian life, "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." The grace-oriented Word of God will build us into God's design for us.

Acts 9:31 uses this word for churches, "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified." And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." God strengthens churches as well as individuals.

PRINCIPLE: When the process of becoming strong in Christ reaches a point of stability, the Christian becomes mature.

APPLICATION: Not only do Christians need to grow deep but we need to grow up as well. After a person comes to Christ there must be development and progress. We erect buildings brick by brick. It requires an architect, plans, materials and workers. This is the picture of a Christian who is in the process of growing up spiritually.

"and established in the faith"

The word "established" means to make firm or make secure, to cause something to be known as certain -- to confirm, verify. God is the cause of our certainty. God makes Christ known in such a way as to confirm its truth.

This word comes to mean increase in inner strength, with the result of greater firmness of character or attitude. It means to receive more inner strength, to be strengthened in one's heart.

The adjective means stable, fast, firm. The New Testament uses it of confirming a word (Mark 16:20), proving the promises reliable (Ro. 15:8), the testimony of Christ (I Cor 1:6). Our salvation was confirmed or guaranteed to us by the apostles (Heb. 2:3). Our hearts are confirmed by grace (Heb. 13:9).

The saints will be confirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ (I Cor. 1:8) and by God the Father (II Cor. 1:21).

The word in this verse means to be made firm. God confirms us in the faith. That is, God makes us faithful disciples by strengthening us in Christ's provisions. When we come to grasp who and what Jesus Christ is all about, God will establish us in as faithful disciples.

"as you have been taught"

Teaching is the foundation for stability (Col. 1:27,28; 3:16; I Tim. 2:7; 3:2; II Tim. 2:2, 23-26).

Teaching produces the three characteristics in the previous part of the verse. Their pastor was faithful in teaching them sound doctrine so that they can have spiritual stability.

PRINCIPLE: We need a firm faith established by God in Christ. Our repose is upon Christ; we are as unshakable as our Lord.

APPLICATION: Faith in God's provisions in Christ is the cement for the building of our faith. That kind of faith can withstand any gale that may come. A strong Christian can withstand the shock of an enemy assault. In this case the assault is the false teaching of the Gnostics. When we establish our footings in Christ, God gives us fixity. Our repose is upon Christ; we are unshakable as our Lord. His love for us never wavers or fails.

Since it is God who strengthens our faith, we can face our problems with a new power. Is your faith growing strong in your home, neighborhood and work? God will strengthen our faith in these tests.

Having made three statements about how God strengthens the believer, he makes a statement about how the believer should respond to what God has done.

"abounding in it with thanksgiving"

As we grow in stability, we must be careful to give God the thanks. He is the one who made the provision.

Note the emphasis of thanksgiving in Colossians (1:12; 2:7; 3:15, 17; 4:2). Mature and stable Christians recognize the work of God's grace in their hearts.

Note the word "abounding." The word "abounding" means overflow. It is one thing to give thanks; it is another to give thanks abundantly

Gratefulness is a distinguishing mark of the mature believer. Gratefulness comes from experiencing the three previous qualities of stability that God gives.

PRINCIPLE: Thanksgiving is a manifestation of a mature believer who recognizes what God has done in his or her life.

APPLICATION: The capacity of thanksgiving means that we do not grumble and complain about our station in life. We cannot both criticize

and be thankful at the same time. We cannot have it both ways.

Someone robbed the great Bible commentator, Dr. Matthew Henry, as he walked along a highway. Afterwards he told his friends there were four things for which he gave thanks. First, he was grateful that he had never been robbed before. After many years of life this was the first time he had been robbed and for that he was grateful. Second, he said, "Though they took all my money, I am glad they did not get very much." That was something for which to be thankful. Third, he said, "Though they took my money, they did not take my life, and I am grateful for that." Finally, he suggested, "I am thankful that it was I who was robbed, and not I who robbed." There was a man who learned how to "overflow with thankfulness!"

Colossians 2:8

"Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."

We now come to a major transition in the book of Colossians. After setting forth what the Christian needs to combat evil forces against them, he now turns to a polemic against the enemy that was threatening the church.

"Beware lest anyone cheat you"

"Beware"--be on guard against an attack. The Devil's boobytraps are everywhere. He has land mines in places where we would not suspect.

The word "cheat" means to carry off as a spoil of war, lead captive. False teachers can carry the Colossians off as so much booty. Satan is about to carry them off as a captive in a spiritual war to false philosophy-theology. This philosophy was about to take complete control (captive) of the Colossians by human wisdom (philosophy). False teaching wanted to kidnap the Colossians from the truth. Our colloquialisms for this are "Don't get conned," "Don't get sucked in," "Don't let someone sell you a bill of goods."

The Devil seeks to maneuver the believer into a predicament where God will not bless his life. He always tries to suck us into some deal or proposition. If he can neutralize us, we will be of no good

to God. An inert Christian is a trophy for the Devil. The Devil wants to maneuver us into a demilitarized zone where there is no fighting. There we do not fight the enemy; neither do we fight for God. He does not always lure us into gross sin. If he can paralyze the power of the Christian life, he wins.

PRINCIPLE: The Devil takes prisoners of Christians on a regular basis. Satan's strategy is to so stymie, so handicap the believer that he/she will never amount to anything for God.

APPLICATION: The only way to keep from being captured by the Devil is to use God's system of warfare. If we operate by using the promises of God we will become a walking defense perimeter.

Many Christians try to sustain their Christian lives by external mechanisms. If they go to church or are faithful to their small group, they feel this will protect them from the Devil taking them captive. That is an illusion. No life of incubation will protect the Christian from evil. There is no way to protect ourselves from temptation. A young couple coming home from a date in a car must carry in their souls God's viewpoint and the willingness to apply that viewpoint to their lives. Their line of defense comes from within.

God sustains the Christian life from within. Paul is in Rome. He is not holding the hands of the Colossians. He has cut their apron string of dependence upon his person. He is not in Colosse personally. They need to apply the promises of God for themselves. The first line of defense against any assault upon the Christian life is fellowship with God through the Word of God. If we do not use the "sword of the Spirit" (the Word of God) we will become a spiritual casualty in the war against Satan.

Are you spiritually self sustaining? We cannot live our spiritual lives in an incubator, therefore, we need power of God's Word to face temptation.

Paul turns his guns of polemic assault against a certain kind of philosophy, philosophy that carries religious assumptions.

"through philosophy"

Does the negative reference to philosophy here condemn all philosophy? Does the Bible disparage

the study of Plato, Socrates, Descartes, Spinoza or Kant? The Bible nowhere condemns philosophy as such. Paul uses "philosophy" here in the context of human viewpoint in religion. Philosophy here is a system of religion. The term here berates religious philosophy. The Bible challenges the pretensions of philosophy to address issues beyond the finite. Philosophy is limited to the faculty of the human mind.

This is not a polemic against all philosophy but against philosophy that seeks to undermine Christianity. Philosophy that seeks to enable us to understand the world and the principles underlying it, is a noble exercise.

The story of philosophy is a story of a pendulum whereby one philosophy contradicts another in perpetuity. It is a tale of discarded hypotheses. What philosophy cannot define, the Word of God makes clear. Apart from the Bible, no philosopher today knows any more about ultimate reality than the Greek philosophers before Christ.

This is the only occurrence of the word "philosophy" in the New Testament. It is noteworthy that there is only one occurrence in the New Testament since the Greeks viewed this as their highest pursuit.

Plato used this word for the love of knowledge and wisdom. Greek thought used philosophy for the systematic treatment of a subject, investigation into life. In the New Testament it came to mean human wisdom in contrast to revealed truth (the Bible).

"Philosophy" is the battlefield for the turf of the Christian life. Philosophy pursues reality. Our philosophy of life determines our course of living. If we are off here, we are off everywhere. What we believe is our base of operation for our lives. From what philosophy are you operating, the Devil's or God's? The Devil's philosophy is humanism, subjectivism, rationalism, empiricism, naturalism, false religions, etc.

The military handbook for God's war on Satan is the Word of God. The Christian soldier must be well trained or he/she will become a casualty of war. We do not send people to war with two days training! We must understand the spiritual equivalent to field operations, the use of air sup-

port and how to retreat, for example. If we do not understand God's system of war, we will suffer defeat in the spiritual war (Eph. 6:11-17). Human techniques will not sustain us in a war of spiritual forces. If we do not go with God's system of operations, Satan will take us captive in spiritual war. Either we use God's system or our own (or Satan's).

Two systems of Gnostic philosophy challenged the Colossian Christians:

- 1) Stoicism: Stoicism seeks an indifferent attitude. No matter what situation a person may face, he detaches himself from it whether it is prosperity or poverty. He holds all desire in check. He is not elevated by good fortune or cast down by misfortune. Circumstances are irrelevant to this person. The person is greater than the situation.
- 2) Epicureanism: There is no certainty in truth. Life is capricious. There is no purpose. Therefore, it is useless to deny self. Their philosophy was "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

PRINCIPLE: All philosophies of the world operate on assumptions (presuppositions; belief systems). Philosophy that presupposes a religious position is false philosophy.

APPLICATION: Most philosophers concede that they cannot find ultimate reality. All philosophies make assumptions about how to find reality. These assumptions are belief systems. Christianity is no more a belief system than philosophy itself (rationalism) or even science (empiricism). Science operates with the assumption that all reality must root in the physical world. However, if there is something beyond the physical (metaphysical) then that assumption falls to the ground as an incomplete system.

Christianity operates on a belief system (presupposition). That premise is God has spoken to us in a revelation (the Bible). Since it is impossible to understand all reality because of the finite human mind, we cannot find truth by finite means. We must find truth by infinite means -- the Word of God.

The Christian is isolated on the battlefield of life. We are on our own. No one else can live the Chris-

tian life for us. Our pastor cannot live that life for us. Our closest friends cannot do it. It is up to us. The believer must draw resources from the Word of God he has placed into his mind to counteract assaults upon his faith.

Paul's polemic against false philosophy exposes its insidious method.

"and empty deceit"

There is a philosophy that is hollow. The philosophy at Colosse was "empty" (hollow). This philosophy sets up its presuppositions against Christianity and makes its conclusions based on its own assumptions. This philosophy is false because it is prejudicial.

"Deceit" means to cheat, deceive, beguile. It is that which gives a false impression whether by appearance, statement or influence. Philosophy that connives misleads, it deceives or lies to people about what is true.

Matthew 13:22 uses the word "deceit" for the deception of riches, "Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful."

In Hebrews 3:13 uses this word for the deceitfulness of sin, "but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

Ephesians 4:22 uses "deceit" for lusts excited by deceit, i.e., deceit is the source of strength, not lusts deceitful in themselves, "That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts."

II Thessalonians 2:10 uses this word for all manner of unscrupulous communication and deeds, "And with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

All these things subtly and insidiously lead us astray from Christ. The individual so weakened by deception says, "I just cannot believe that." What happened? "I am taking sociology. I've ruled the Bible out of my life."

PRINCIPLE: Human religious philosophy is empty.

APPLICATION: The Christian who follows the religious philosophies of the world operates on empty delusion.

There are two areas of delusion:

1. False doctrine.
2. Idolatry of things (e.g., riches).

False philosophy can take on two levels, the level of ideas or the level of daily life. If we buy into belief systems contrary to God, it will result in disaster for the Christian life.

After Solomon sought fulfillment in pleasure, acquisition, women, power, etc., he proclaimed "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." The believer minus the Word of God will enter self-induced misery. If he loses his money, friends or success, he will come to a crash. Chasing the things of life never fulfills a person.

There are three uses of the phrase "according to" in this verse. This is the first use.

"according to the tradition of men"

This is the first system of war used by the Devil to defeat Christians.

The word "according" means according to the standard or norm of something. Some Christians try to live by the standard of tradition.

The word "tradition" means something handed down. Many people do not evaluate what they believe for themselves. They believe it simply because their family believed it, "My mom told me so." How do you know it is true? "I never question it." A person without healthy skepticism is vulnerable to seduction. The test question is "Can it be substantiated by the Bible?"

"Tradition" was used of the teaching of the Rabbis which they made void by their life-styles in Matt. 15:2, 3, 6; Mark 7:3, 5, 8, 9, 13; Gal. 1:14; Col. 2:8. It was used of apostolic teaching in I Cor. 11:2, 23, 15:3; II Thes 2:15 (doctrine in general). In II Thes. 3:6 it is used of instructions for everyday conduct.

The emphasis is on the transmission of scruples. These people were precise about which cup to use while worshipping but careless about an unclean

heart. Religion was a routine of superstitious ritual. By a series of postures and vain repetitions they observed their ceremonies. Everything was under formal regulation: postures, ablutions, amulets, etc. They were exacting about oblations but could not care less about a broken and contrite heart. Their religion was a mechanical pantomime. They lost sight of a genuine relationship with God.

PRINCIPLE: Tradition is anything we pick up that is not biblical in the life of our soul.

APPLICATION: The child picks up many values in the home. The school and social life add more evaluation of life. Everyone develops a culture of thinking. The culture firms up as we reach adulthood. We all have viewpoints on what is right and wrong. That, however, may be tradition.

If we add religion into the mix, our culture becomes yet more complicated. A church may have its taboos. This person will not chew bubble gum and he won't go with the girls who do!! All of this has nothing to do with God's viewpoint on life. This is tradition handed down from people. Anything that is contrary to the Bible is error.

We say, "Well, my father and mother and grand father and mother all believed this. This has been our custom. This is our religion." The main question is, "Is it true?" People answer this with "I never question my tradition." The true question is can it be substantiated by the Bible.

"according to the basic principles of the world"

The second system the Devil uses to propound his philosophy is "the basic principles of the world." "Basic principles" is elementary principles. It is any first things from which others in a series, or in a composite whole, take their rise. It is an element or first principle. This term was used for the letters of an alphabet.

This passage uses "tradition" of the delusive speculations of Gentile cults where they presented worship of angels as superior to faith in Christ. They viewed the constellations as animated and governed by heavenly beings. This might refer to elementary spirits or evil spirits who inspire heresy. The Colossian enemy was demonic.

In other passages use "basic principles" of the rudimentary principles of religion (Col. 2:20; Gal. 4:3,9). Finally, Hebrews 5:12 uses it of the elementary principles of the Old Testament.

The world has an inferior system of belief. The world functions on a much more restrictive scale of understanding than Christianity. The world system speculates; the Christian system comes to conclusions. They hope; we have actuality. We have advanced knowledge of the ultimate (God) through the Bible.

Christians march to a different drum beat philosophically. The world struggles to appreciate people who know what they believe. They believe Christians are speckled birds. That makes us odd or queer. They view us as eccentric. We do not play according to their rule book, "Morality? That is mid-Victorian, prudish!" They laugh at cheating. That is standard procedure for our culture. They wink at dishonesty.

PRINCIPLE: The ABCs Paul warns against here is any system that seeks to understand God by human systems of understanding.

APPLICATION: We inevitably move to dependence upon limited human systems to cope with reality. If the "basic principles" is the ABCs, why do Christians not move on to the higher learning of the Word of God? If we are working on a Ph.D in the Word of God, why revert to the ABCs of dependence upon self? Why descend back to the mere alphabet if we have gone on to learn many languages?

Why should a Christian revert to ritual ceremonies if they have established a dynamic fellowship with God by grace? Why should a Christian who has gone on to graduate school of spirituality sit in an elementary (Gal. 4:3,9)? It is the same as if a person is able to encompass the heavens and measure the distances between bodies in space, and then forego that capacity to sit in first grade learning two plus two equals four.

The third and last time Paul uses "according to" in this verse--"not according to Christ." Christ is the proper standard for living the Christian life.

"and not according to Christ"

The Christian philosophy has a different criterion -- the criterion of Christ.

The world depreciates and undervalues Christ. They operation on philosophy contrary to his person and work. However, the Word of God makes him the standard for our world view. The Bible ever exalts him. He is the center of our belief system. We must evaluate all other apparent philosophies in the light of who he is.

Those who place their belief system on men's philosophy, rather than revelation, do not follow Christ's philosophy. The standard operating procedure for the world is to completely overlook the supernatural. They are oblivious to the reality of Christ.

False systems of believe invariably undervalue Jesus the Lord. The Devil will systematically seek to lead the believer away from his Lord. He will tempt the believer to go off on religious tangents. He will do anything to woo us away from the Lord Jesus (II Cor. 11:3; II John 7-9).

These philosophies are not according to the standard of Christ. They do not base their belief on who Christ is. They are contradictory to his person and work. Religion undermines the finished work of Christ for our sin. It underestimates his mediation for us before God.

PRINCIPLE: We can test any doctrine by its view of the person and work of Christ.

APPLICATION: All that is false seeks to minimize the person and work of Christ. Satan systematically seeks to lead us away from Christ. He aims to lower Jesus' rank and significance. True Christianity bends to his authority and seeks to exalt him. Any tangent that woos us away from him is false philosophy.

Colossians 2:9

"For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily"

Having sent out a warning about false philosophy, Paul now turns to God's true wisdom.

"For in Him dwells"

The word "for" continues the thought of verse eight. In the Greek, the word "for" means "because." This word is important because it introduces another reason for abandoning false teaching. Verse eight presents the negative reasons for following false philosophy. This verse gives the positive reason -- all the fullness of God dwells in Christ. That is why he is superior to any philosophy or theology. He is all in all. To worship anything else is error.

The words "in Him" are emphatic in the Greek indicating a mighty contrast between philosophy and the Son. The Son is superior to any philosophy.

The word "dwells" comes from two words: to dwell and down, to settle in. It means to settle down in a dwelling, to dwell in a fixed place. Because the Greek word is a combination of two words, it is an intense term. It has the force of a permanent dwelling. "All the fullness of the Godhead bodily" dwells in Christ as a settled manner. The present tense also indicates a fixed abode. Deity does not come and go in Christ.

Here "dwells" refers to the indwelling of the totality of the attributes and powers of the Godhead living permanently in Christ (cf. 1:19).

PRINCIPLE: Any system of thought that does not orient to the criterion of Christ (v.8) must be wrong for "all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily."

APPLICATION: Any philosophy "not after Christ" (v.8) must be delusive and deceitful because it has missed the central truth of the universe -- the superiority of Christ. Philosophers have not been able to come to any certainty about the "why" of things. All they know for sure is that we do not know for sure. A panacea of tolerance is the result of lack of certainty. The only exception to tolerance is to allow no tolerance for those who are not tolerant! Today's world-view views anyone with firm conviction as obscurant. Tolerance is very intolerant of those who know what they believe. They have a great deal of certitude in uncertainty.

The reason men believe that it is impossible to come to some universal truth is their own finite creatureliness. It is true that it is impossible for the

finite to fully comprehend the infinite. If we are to understand the infinite, the infinite God must reveal himself deductively to us through the Word of God. God has spoken to us in propositions. He has given us enough, but not exhaustive, knowledge of himself. We cannot know with certainty God or his plans for the universe apart from the Bible.

Having seen that the word "dwells" means to permanently indwell, we now see what permanently indwells Christ.

"all the fullness of the Godhead"

The "fullness" is defined by the word "Godhead." "Godhead" does not mean mere divine qualities but the very essence of God.

The word "fullness" connotes that of which a thing is full. It refers to a total quantity, with emphasis upon completeness -- full number, full measure, totality. This means that the totality of the Godhead lives permanently in him. Jesus Christ is completely God. He is exactly what God is.

Jesus Christ possesses the "fullness" of God, not certain aspects of God's essence. Jesus Christ possesses unbounded power, the totality of the attributes of God. "Fullness" describes what constitutes God. He is not merely godlike. He is God himself.

"of the Godhead"

Jesus Christ exists in the nature or state of being God. The word "Godhead" means -- "deity, divine nature, divine being." In the Son all the fullness of absolute Godhead dwells. He carried more than mere divinity. He is absolute God.

This word "Godhead" must be distinguished from "divinity." There is another Greek for that meaning.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus Christ is God almighty. Christ is God's true wisdom; whoever has Christ has God.

APPLICATION: Whoever desires to have more than Christ desires to have more than God. We do not examine the world to find Christ; we study Christ to view the world. How high is your view of Jesus Christ? Do you understand him as God almighty or as a glorified man?

"bodily"

The word "bodily" means pertaining to being real (in the sense of material) in contrast to being symbolic. The complete content of deity exists in Jesus Christ in real form. This was the interpretation of Augustine. This means that the deity is in Christ in reality, not apparently.

It is also possible to interpret "bodily" as meaning in physical form. In the latter case it would mean that God took on flesh. However, it would be difficult to explain how "all" the fullness of the Godhead can dwell in physical form. God is everywhere present. How can everywhere presence dwell in a local being?

Another way we can understand "bodily" is that the resurrected and glorified Christ exists as both full deity and true humanity.

The word "bodily" means corporeally. Jesus' deity is permanently manifested in the incarnation (in flesh). God manifest in the flesh makes him clear to the consciousness of man. This does not refer simply to his existence in the past; it refers to his present position in heaven, at the right hand of the Father. Jesus sits in his humanity but he exists as God almighty as well.

This is the only occurrence of this term in the New Testament.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus Christ exists eternally in the reality of God. He also sits at the right hand of God in his humanity. The God-man exists in undiminished deity and true humanity forever.

APPLICATION: Since Jesus Christ exists eternally with the totality of God's attributes with unbounded powers, we should hold him in high regard. Jesus Christ became human in the incarnation. He was the person of God clothed with a human body. He became a compassionate High Priest. All things are from him, through him and for him (Rom. 11:36).

Colossians 2:10

"and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power."

Paul continues his emphasis upon the sufficiency of Christ for the believer. This section begins the results of the believer's association with Christ. The first result is that we are "complete in Him."

"and you are complete in Him"

We can translate this phrase "you have come to fullness of life." The emphasis in the Greek is upon the abiding results of our position in Christ. The believer permanently holds that position before God from the moment of his salvation.

The words "are complete" come from the same root as the word "fullness" of verse 9. This is an obvious reference to Christ's fullness. Christians have been filled out of Christ's fullness -- "all the fullness of the Godhead" lives permanently in Christ. This verse says that God has given believers fullness in him. Our fullness of life comes from Christ's fullness (John 1:16). We need no outside help from any other source. We need no supplementary wisdom.

Every Christian at the moment of salvation receives this fullness. This is God's estimate of us. God views us as pardoned and as righteous as Christ is righteous. We are with him in his life, sonship, heirship, glory and merit. God accomplishes this at the moment of salvation and it remains true until we stand in the presence of God. We do not receive Christ on the installment plan. We receive a complete Savior and complete results of our salvation at the moment we come to know him. We may appreciate him more as we grow in him, however, we do not receive more of him.

"In Him" means in union with Jesus Christ. This is the believer's position before God. As God views us, he looks at us exactly like he would look at Christ -- perfect. We are not perfect in our experience but in our position or status quo before God forever. We share his fullness. From God's viewpoint, nothing is wanting in us because of Christ. Jesus fully meets every demand of God for us.

If we have all we need before God in Christ, why should the Colossians turn to Gnostic philosophy? Why should Christians today run after every wind of doctrine?

This is true of every Christian no matter what their experience of living may be like. Jesus Christ is our substitute not only at the point of salvation but as an ongoing status before God. We stand judicially right before God forever. God's estimation of us is equivalent to his estimation of Christ. God identifies us with him in everything.

PRINCIPLE: When we understand our position before God in Christ, we are free to glorify the Lord. Security allows the believer freedom to relate to God.

APPLICATION: We are not free to glorify the Lord as long as we are under the yoke of legalism. Our capacity to love and honor the Lord does not depend upon our effort and morality. It depends on our recognition of what he has done. Positional truth gives us freedom toward God. The basis of our freedom is not what we do but what Christ did. We need to be free to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. A girl has no security if her boyfriend dates other girls. She does not have the freedom to express her love to him. We do not have freedom to love and honor the Lord Jesus Christ if we do not understand what he has done for us.

Colossians 2:11

"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ"

At this verse Paul turns from the error of Gnosticism to the error of legalism. The Colossians had no need for physical circumcision since they stood circumcised in Christ's death. We have all that we need in Christ (v.10).

This is the second result of the work of Christ for us.

"In Him "

"In Him" refers to our position in the Lord Jesus Christ as of the moment of our salvation. This is not talking about literal but spiritual circumcision. Without this understanding we lose the context of Paul's argument.

"you were also circumcised "

Circumcision is the cutting off the foreskin of the penis. Literally, "circumcision" means a cutting around. It was the external sign of incorporation into the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17; Acts 7:8; Rom. 4:11).

The circumcision here is not a physical circumcision but a spiritual circumcision, the circumcision of the heart (Rom. 2:29; Eph. 2:11). This is a con-

trast to the physical circumcision of the Old Testament.

The tense of "were" is past tense. God circumcised us at the point of our salvation. At that moment we entered into union with Christ. Another part of speech indicates that God placed us into union with Christ (passive voice). We did not earn or deserve that privilege. It is an act of God's unadulterated grace.

"with the circumcision made without hands"

"Made without hands" means circumcision in this passage was no human act. It is an action of the Holy Spirit. This circumcision is spiritual.

Upon the preaching of the gospel the Gentiles, a sect of Jewish believers arose who argued that circumcision is a necessary aspect of salvation (Acts 10:45; 11:2; 15:1; Gal. 2:12; Col. 4:11; Tit. 1:10). This is legalism.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus spiritually circumcised our sin capacity upon the cross.

APPLICATION: God does not expect us to deal with our sin capacity by religion. No amount of legalism will attain God's standards. Jesus accomplished all that is necessary to live the Christian life for us. Our part is to apply what he did by faith.

"by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh"

"Putting off" means to strip off clothes. Because of our position with Christ, Jesus took off the body of our sins like a suit of clothes at Christ's death. This is a full strip of the flesh.

The word "body" refers to the sin capacity. Jesus put off that factory which is the source of our sin. It is that faculty which produces lusts and personal sins.

The Greek noun for "putting off" is a reference to the death of Christ. God put off our sins of the flesh at the moment we exercised faith in the death of Christ to forgive sins.

"The sins of the flesh" is probably our sin capacity. Jesus destroyed all that we were in Adam. We are identified with Christ in his death.

"by the circumcision of Christ"

Jesus executed our spiritual circumcision positionally upon the cross.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus spiritually circumcised our sin capacity upon the cross.

APPLICATION: Jesus not only dealt with our sins on the cross, he also destroyed the factory that produces sin -- the sin capacity. This does not mean that God eradicates our sin capacity. It means that the principle of our sin capacity died when Christ died (Rom. 6).

Because we are positionally dead to sin, we are free to deal with what Christ already judged. An understanding of this principle is a key to Christian living. Positional truth is the basis for our victory; it is not victory itself. Positional truth means that God views us as dead and risen in Christ. It constitutes a positive spiritual crisis in the Christian life when the believer himself begins to view himself this way.

Do you take by faith the work of Christ for you? Do you try to live the Christian life by operation bootstraps? We cannot live the Christian way of life by legalism.

Colossians 2:12

"buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."

This verse explains when the circumcision of verse 11 occurred. God puts off our old life at the moment of salvation. At that time a believer is buried and raised with Christ.

This verse is a statement of what Jesus achieved by his death on the cross. It boils down to our incorporation into his status before God. This is our positional union with Christ in God's eyes.

The third result of the work of Christ on the cross is our burial with him.

"buried with Him in baptism"

The words "buried with" mean to bury together, join in burying or to be buried with. The word "with" indicates a "co" relationship with Jesus Christ. This is a co-burial. We must bury anything dead. When Jesus was buried, we were buried.

God buried us along with Jesus Christ! This obviously does not mean that God put us into the same tomb as Jesus and laid down beside him!

Colossians describes this as already taken place. We are already identified with Christ in his burial. The Bible uses "buried with" in the figurative sense only (Rom. 6:4). We are identified with Christ in his burial as set forth in his baptism.

"Baptism" here is not water baptism. It is Spirit baptism. Spirit baptism is an action of the Holy Spirit whereby he puts the believer into the body of Christ (i.e., our salvation). Water baptism simply is a physical demonstration of what the Holy Spirit did. Water baptism is simply the movements of Spirit baptism. We should not put undue emphasis upon the physical object; the importance is what the Holy Spirit did at our salvation.

PRINCIPLE: The Christian is both buried and raised with Christ positionally.

APPLICATION: Positional truth is like a prisoner who has been made legally free but he remains in prison not knowing that he is free to walk out the door. The Christian is legally free from the penalty and consequences of sin. God strips the flesh of its legal power over us. As God reckons he identifies us with Christ. God cannot see us for Jesus. That person that we were before Christ is dead in the sight of God. That person is dead and buried. God wants us to reckon like he reckons. Our position in Christ is eternal, infallible and unalterable.

When we act like we did before we came to Christ, we act out of character. It is like putting on a Halloween mask. When we act like that we fool those around us. We masquerade in make believe. We play the hypocrite. No one else may know but God does. God does not want us to pretend that we are not Christians. He will haul us off to the wood-shed if we do it too often. He will not put up with trifling. God will allow us to go so far and then he will pull us up short.

The fourth result of the work of Christ on the cross is we were raised with Christ.

"in which you also were raised with Him "

The words "were raised with" mean to raise together. It means to participate in the resurrection of Christ. This is a co-resurrection. When Jesus

rose, we arose. God identifies us with Christ in his resurrection. God did this to us at the moment of salvation (passive voice). We were dead spiritually but Jesus caused us to live again.

Immersion into water baptism portrays the burial of Christ and coming out of the water portrays the resurrection of Christ. However, this passage is dealing with spiritual resurrection. God views us as raised with Christ in the sense he identifies us with him in heaven today.

"through faith in the working of God"

The word "working" means active power (1:29; Eph. 1:19; 3:7; 4:16). God accomplishes salvation through resurrection power. This is God's great work. When God goes to work, he always does a wonderful job. God's work here is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Christianity is not a philosophy, a system or gimmick. It is a living relationship with a living Christ.

The parallel verse to the verse we are studying is, "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). This verse teaches the same thing as Colossians 2:12.

God raises us up through faith, not feelings (II Cor. 5:7; Eph. 2:8,9). We have stopped trying to save ourselves by personal effort. We have given up trusting anything but the grace of God. Faith in the finished work of Christ is the means whereby God identifies us with Christ.

"who raised Him from the dead"

Since God raised Jesus from the dead, the Christian has assurance of his position before God. If God is able to raise Jesus Christ from the dead, he can raise us to new life.

PRINCIPLE: Faith is the operating principle by which we engage positional truth.

APPLICATION: It is by faith in God's work that we receive positional burial and resurrection. God joined us to a living Savior at the moment of salvation. It is when we personally experience positional truth that the fact becomes real to us. If positional truth remains a cold doctrine we will benefit from the privileges it affords us. We need

to take it out of the deep freezer and apply it to our experience.

Colossians 2:13

"And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses"

Jesus Christ canceled the legal claims against the Christian. He did this through the cross (vv. 13-14). This is the fifth result of Jesus' work upon the cross.

"And you"

These two words express great emphasis in Paul's thought: "You and only you." These words emphasize our relationship, not our function.

The purpose of this phrase is to make every believer sense that they are a part of the plan of God. If you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are a part of the eternal plan of God. You are just as much in the plan as any other person who ever lived.

PRINCIPLE: Every Christian is part of the eternal plan of God.

APPLICATION: Some believe that clergy are first class Christians and laymen are second class. God's viewpoint is that all Christians regardless of giftedness or position are equal in God's program. There is no such thing as clergy and laymen in the Bible. Clergy is special and everyone else is a peon. This is not true. Everyone is in full time service in God's eternal plan.

God does provide leadership in the local church. The Bible labels such terms as "pastor" and "elder" for that leadership. These are terms of rank of authority but not of spiritual privilege.

"being dead in your trespasses "

This is "dead" spiritually, not physically. Before we received forgiveness in Christ we were dead to God by our violation of his standards. That is the predicament of the lost. It is the past of the child of God. Instead of being dead to God he is alive to God. Instead of being dead in trespasses, the Christian is dead to sin. This is the violation of God in act.

The word "being" indicates our status quo of death. As a non Christian we were in the status quo death. Unbelievers are outside the eternal plan of God for salvation.

Death means separation, not annihilation. Before we came to know Christ, we were cut off from God (John 5:24,25; II Cor. 5:14,15; Rom. 6:13). Those in sin are dead in sin. As death deteriorates the body so sin corrupts the soul. As a dead man is unable to help himself, so a man dead in sin is unable to help himself. He is dead to God so he cannot pray. They have no capacity for knowing God (I Cor. 2:14). They have nothing with which to know God.

A "trespass" is the crossing or violation of a standard.

"and the uncircumcision of your flesh"

Our nature was "uncircumcised," that is, separated from God. This describes our state of being before we came to know Christ. We were dead in our state to God. The corrupt moral condition in which the desires of the sin capacity still operate in the believer. This is the violation of God in principle.

The term "uncircumcised" refers to both male and female. All human beings have fallen sin capacities.

PRINCIPLE: Every Christian has a factory that produces sin -- the sin capacity.

APPLICATION: The Christian cannot live the Christian life by operation bootstraps. The sin capacity undermines our ability to live before God. That is why we must go to the cross and depend upon Christ to the Christian way of life.

"He has made alive together with Him"

Jesus exchanged his death for our life. We are now spiritually alive to God in Christ. We are not now alive physically anymore than we were before. This is spiritual aliveness, the life of God (Eph. 2:4,5).

Death is a result of having a sin capacity. Before Adam sinned he did not have a sin capacity so he never experienced death. Once he sinned, he acquired a sin capacity he experienced both spiritual and physical deaths. "The wages of sin in death"

(Rom. 6:23). The good news is Jesus took our death so we can have his eternal life (John 1:4; 14:6; I Jn. 5:10-12). We receive physical life from our parents at our first birth; we receive spiritual life and eternal life at our second birth.

"Has made alive together" means to endue life with, produce alive with, preserve alive with. At our conversion we received spiritual life with Christ (Eph. 2:5). God imparts this life to us at the moment of our salvation. In our union with Christ, God makes us alive in Christ. When a person receives Jesus Christ as their Savior, God performs a divine operation of giving them his life.

PRINCIPLE: When we receive Christ God gives us his very own life -- eternal life.

APPLICATION: The dead feel no pain. The reason non Christians do not feel lost is they cannot feel anything. No dead person feels dead. A person does not have to feel lost; they are lost. The unbeliever is in the process of perishing.

When we were "made alive" we entered into union with Jesus Christ for eternity. Do you have eternal life? You receive eternal life by accepting God's gift of Jesus' death for your sin. When you do that, you receive eternal life.

The sixth result of the work of Christ on the cross is that God forgives us by grace. That is a great blessed benefit of being born again.

"having forgiven you all trespasses"

The verb "having forgiven" connotes forgiveness as the result of grace or an act of love. It means to bestow a favor unconditionally. The favor bestowed unconditionally here is the remission of debt against God. That is the act of forgiveness (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). This is God's merciful act of sovereignty.

The Greek indicates that forgiveness precedes "made alive." Before we can come alive to God, God must forgive us first (I Jn. 2:12; Eph. 1:7; Acts 10:43; 13:38,29). The principle is that God cannot exercise grace until he satisfies his righteousness. God cannot act inconsistently with his own character. God cannot under maudlin sentiment pour out his love.

God forgives our sins at the cross. Because of the cross, God is free to give us eternal life and exer-

cise his grace in time. He is free to do this because his righteousness is satisfied by the suffering of Christ. Jesus took the judgment for our sins.

Note that God forgives "all" trespasses, not some. That will enable us to sleep at night. We do not truly rest until we rest in the work of Christ.

PRINCIPLE: God cannot exercise his grace until he satisfies his righteousness by the death of Christ.

APPLICATION: We are natural born sinners. We are sinners by nature, choice and practice. It is easier to do wrong than right; it is easier to tell a lie than tell the truth. Unless and until God forgives, sin stays on us. Our sin separates us from God. The cross of Christ purifies us from sin. The religions of the earth invent substitutes. Not one of them can take us to heaven.

The cross of Christ satisfies God's perfect righteousness. God can therefore exercise his grace and mercy toward us. The crucial consideration for eternal life is to accept God's way of dealing with our sin -- the cross of Christ. Do you trust the cross for eternal life? Are you depending on that as God's exclusive way to possess the life of God?

Colossians 2:14

"having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

The seventh result of the work of Christ on the cross: "having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us." Jesus destroyed the demands of the law against us.

"having wiped out the handwriting of requirements"

When God forgave us (v.13) he canceled the judgment in God's written law against us (Rom. 3:19).

"Wiped out" means to erase, obliterate. This is an intense word in the original because it is a compound word. God wipes out a number of things in the New Testament: Acts 3:19 [sins]; Rev. 3:5 [name in a book]; 7:17 [tears]. Here God wipes out the list of charges against us. God not only forgives our sin but he blots out the record of it. Not

only is the handwriting erased but the document itself is removed.

The word "handwriting" was used in writing outside the New Testament for the posting of a public debt. It was especially used of a record of financial accounts. Special emphasis was given to the handwritten nature of the document. This is a note hand signed by a debtor acknowledging his indebtedness. It is what we call an IOU. It was a record of debts we signed with our own handwriting. Jesus canceled the record of these debts to God.

"Handwriting" is used almost exclusively for the autograph on a promissory note. This word occurs frequently in Roman law. It is a signed admission of liability. Our sins pile up as a vast list of debts to God making it abundantly clear that we are liable before God.

"Requirements:" decree, ordinance, decision, command, a formalized rule (or set of rules) prescribing what people must do. The law as a certificate of requirements that puts us in debt to God. This is God's public opinion against us; it is his list of charges against our sin. This is the Mosaic law. God must stand resolved against us because he cannot contradict his own essence and standards. Therefore, the law demands perfection.

"that was against us"

"Against us:" opposite to, is used of that which is contrary to persons. The commandments of the Old Testament and our moral nature testify against us. Because God is perfect, every standard he holds is a testimony against us.

We face the totally hopeless IOU of God's righteousness. We owe God sinlessness. We could not possibly pay this debt. We do not have the personal resources. We are up to our hocks in debt. We must waltz on the debt because we cannot pay. Because of this, there was an IOU out against us. The beauty of Christianity is Jesus canceled our debt for us. Jesus personally paid off our debts.

"which was contrary to us"

"Contrary to:" set over against, meeting, set against, opposite, of enemies in battle, opposed, opposite. Because we cannot live up to the stan-

dard of the law it works against us and opposes us (Rom. 4:15; 5:20; I Cor. 15:56; Gal 3:23). God always defines righteousness in terms of his own perfection.

The law is like a taskmaster. It puts us in bondage but it does not give us the power to live up to the standards of the law. The law threatens us with penalty and pain.

PRINCIPLE: God canceled our IOU (the law) against us by the cross.

APPLICATION: The law demands perfection but we cannot live up to it. God demands absolute righteousness because he is absolute righteousness. None of us can pay that price. We cannot produce God's righteousness in our lives (Rom. 3:10f).

The law proves we are sinful. Therefore, the law drives us to Christ as our only hope (Gal. 3:13). The law says "You shall not." Something says within us "I shall." The assertion that that I cannot makes me want to do it. There is an inveterate rebellion in all our hearts. If we see a sign that says "Do not spit on the sidewalk," immediately our salivary glands begin to work. If the sign says "Do not touch the wet paint," we want to touch the paint to see if it is truly wet. The law provokes the very thing it forbids (Rom 8:3).

Jesus came to take away the charge of the law against us. He not only took away the charge but he put a new heart within us. Grace is effective where the law fails. Jesus completely, eternally and adequately settled the issue of the law by the cross.

There is a self-confessed indictment against us which we sign in agreement. We stand bankrupt before the law. God wiped out that list of charges against us. Jesus met the perfect demands of God's holiness. God has banished the record of our sins. This is positional, judicial, forensic vindication before God. Have you personally accepted Christ work on the cross to give you perfect forgiveness before God forever?

"And He has taken it out of the way"

Jesus fulfilled the law (Rom. 8:2). He took away its debt. Jesus discharged us from the debt of the law

(Gal. 3:13). He disannulled the obligation of the law.

"Has taken" in the Greek tense indicates that God takes away the indictment permanently. God will never judge us again. Jesus personally carried the judgment by the law against us. Since Jesus permanently took away our sins God will never judge us for our sin again. God will never make an issue of our sins again. Instead, he only makes an issue out of the Jesus' work upon the cross. Jesus lifted up our sin and carried it away.

"having nailed it to the cross"

God does away with the judgment of the law by the cross (Ga. 3:25; Heb. 7:12). Legalism is, therefore, contrary to the Christian life because the believer stands dead to the law in Christ. Jesus was publicly nailed to the cross as a debt was nailed in a public place as a notice of liability.

God not only cancels the ordinances of the law but he also removes the ordinance itself from leveling any further charges against us. The nailing up of the removed thing was prior to the taking out of the way. The nailing of the removed thing was the triumph to the cross. The death of Christ on the cross not only rendered the law ineffective but it gave public demonstration that the victory was complete. As the law hangs fast to the cross, it is publicly apparent to all that the law has no more demands upon us. God fixed the law to the cross with nails.

God wipes out the indictment against us on the cross. The indictment itself was crucified. This is unadulterated grace. The list of charges against us was based on the law. This list was wiped out by the law.

The very indictment against us was crucified. God wipes it out as if it never existed. He executed it on the cross. When Christ was nailed to the cross the law was nailed there as well.

PRINCIPLE: The cross is of the infinite value to the person who takes advantage of its work.

APPLICATION: God will never judge our sin again. Jesus lifted up our sin and carried it away. Sin was permanently and personally judged on the cross by Jesus' death for our sin. We will never face our sin again under the law of double jeop-

ardy. The law of double jeopardy means that it is wrong to pay for a crime twice. If Jesus paid for our sins it is wrong that we would have to pay for them as well. God removes sin permanently. The only issue left is what will we do with the work of Christ on the cross. Have you received the work of Christ on the cross as sufficient suffering for your sin?

Colossians 2:15

"Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

"Having disarmed principalities and powers"

"Disarmed" = to strip off oneself, to put off. Metaphorically it may refer to the stripping away of weapons and hence the removal of authority and power. Jesus discarded demonic powers. He stripped them of their power. He once and for all broke their power. Paul uses this same verb in 2:11 where he challenges us to put off the body of flesh. Paul closely connects "discarding the principalities" and "putting off the flesh."

The New Testament uses "principalities" of supra-mundane beings who exercise rule: angels (Eph. 3:10); evil angels (Rom. 8:38; here). Jude 6 refers to the authoritative power of fallen angels. "Principalities" is a term of dignity (dignitaries) whereas "powers" is a term of executive authority.

"Powers" is authority to do anything. This word combines the two ideas of right and might. The words "principalities and powers" therefore refer to demons operating under Satan, fallen angels.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus stripped demons of their power by the cross; God expects us to deal with Satanic attack by the cross.

APPLICATION: Jesus divested himself of evil powers at the cross. God expects us to use spiritual weapons to defeat "principalities and powers" in our lives (Eph. 6:12f).

"He made a public spectacle of them"

Jesus exposed the principalities and powers in a way a victor displays his captives or trophies in a triumphal procession. "Made a public spectacle of" means to cause someone to suffer public disgrace or shame -- "to disgrace in public, to put to

shame." The book of Hebrews uses this word of putting Jesus to public shame (6:6). We disgrace Jesus in public when we do an end run around the cross.

Matthew 1:19 uses this word of Joseph's unwillingness to put Mary on public display because she was pregnant before marriage. Cyprian law used this word for an adulteress who had to cut her hair and subjected to contempt by the community. It connotes the idea of mock, expose.

"Spectacle" is an idiom = literally "in boldness;" in an evident or publicly known manner -- "publicly, in an evident manner, well known." Jesus publicly disgraced evil powers by bearing away sin. Sin was their claim on man.

Jesus openly branded them as his victims and spoil. He displayed the losers for what they were - failures in the economy of God.

PRINCIPLE: Our Lord personally defeated demons publicly on the cross.

APPLICATION: Many Christians worry unnecessarily about demons. They believe that demons have some mysterious power that they can use to shipwreck the Christian life. They think that they are at the mercy and whim of demonic powers. This passage says that Jesus openly branded demons as victims of the cross. In principle, the cross has already defeated them, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (I John 3:8).

Jesus not only defeated the demonic world in principle but he also gave us the wherewithal to fight against them. We have spiritual armor (Eph. 6:12f).

"triumphing over them in it."

The words "triumphing over" mean to lead prisoners of war in a victory procession. The picture is of a military procession leading captives of war. It means to demonstrate one's successful conquest of the opposition. A general could lead his captives through the streets of Rome. Behind him the wretched kings, princes and people of the defeated nation would follow. They were openly branded as his victims and spoil. This one of the highest honors a Roman general could achieve. This was a common cultural phenomenon in the

Roman period of history. Certain prerequisites were required for this honor.

- This general must have been the chief general in the field of battle.
- The campaign must have been completely successful.
- A large number of enemy soldiers must have fallen in battle.
- He must gain an expansion of territory for the Roman Empire.

Jesus met all these conditions:

- He was the commander-in-chief in the field of battle -- the cross.
- Jesus completely paid for our sins on the cross.
- Satan and his emissaries fell in defeat.
- He secured salvation and eternal future for those who believe on him.

Jesus led the fallen angels in his victory procession. He leads the way with his victorious cross, "but thanks be to God who always causes us to triumph in union with Christ," 2 Cor 2:14. Jesus vanquished fallen angels and lead them in triumph in Colossians 2:15 (display of the defeated); in II Cor. 2:14 those led are not captives exposed to humiliation but displayed as the glory of Him who leads. On occasion the general's sons, with various officers, rode behind his chariot. In this case the main thought would be display.

Jesus disarmed the demonic principalities and powers by fulfilling the demands of the law. He delivered the believer from the powers that drive legalism.

Colossians Gnostics believed in cosmic powers with its classes and grades of angels and demons. Matter was an evil kingdom. Paul argues that the cosmic Christ has defeated the enemy. Jesus stripped them of their weapons and made a display of his defeated enemy. Jesus made it evident to the angelic forces that he thwarted the spiritual forces against him.

Jesus gained an immortal victory through his death. The last word "it" refers to the cross. The fight was fierce; the combatant died; but in dying

he triumphed (I Cor. 15:57). His enemy did not count on his resurrection. Jesus routed the enemy by the resurrection (Rom. 8:37; Heb. 2:14,15; I Jn. 3:8). The Devil overshot his mark again. The fallen angels thought for sure that Jesus was dead and gone.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus won for us an inestimable and final spiritual victory on the cross over Satan's forces.

APPLICATION: As the curse of the law was against us, so the power the devil is against us. Jesus disarmed the devil and all his powers by the cross. This was the first gospel preached in the Bible, Genesis 3:15

"And I will put enmity

Between you [Satan] and the woman [Eve],

And between your [Satan] seed and her [Eve] Seed;

He [Jesus] shall bruise your [Satan] head,

And you [Satan] shall bruise His [Jesus] heel."

Jesus dealt the devil a mortal blow whereas Satan only dealt Jesus a non-mortal blow ("heel"). We do not have to defeat an already defeated enemy.

Colossians 2:16

"So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths."

A pitfall that bedevils the child of God is legalism. Verses 16-19 set before us warnings against legalism.

There are two dangers in the Christian life; one is the extreme of the other. We can under live or over live the Christian life. If an airplane pilot undershoots the runway or overshoots it, he can get killed at either end. We do not want to believe anything less than that which is in the Bible. Neither do we want to believe any more than is in the Bible.

The Devil tries to push us to either end. Here he attempts to make us overshoot the runway through legalism. Legalism is pseudo spirituality. Religious types believe that there is something spiritual in asceticism. The more they deny themselves, the more they impress God. The more mis-

erable they make themselves the better their place with God.

"So let no one judge you "

Note the word "so." This word sends us back to verse fourteen. Jesus wiped out the ordinances against us on the cross. Old Testament ritual, restrictions and regulations were abolished on the cross yet many Christians today hang onto them. They have hang-over from their religious training. They do not realize that Jesus met all the demands of the law on the cross.

When a legalistic person observes a Christian operating on grace (v.15) he judges him as operating on license. Spiritual bullies use the standard of self to measure others. To defend his position of legalism he must attack those who operate on grace. The bond woman (law) always persecutes the free woman (grace; Gal. 4). Legalism always criticizes grace (Rom. 14:4). He wants to superimpose his system upon the grace believer. He loves to meddle in the affairs of other believers. He tries to run their lives. He sets himself as the criterion of spirituality. "You are not spiritual like me unless you have given up..." Principle = we cannot build our spirituality on someone else's lack of spirituality or apparent failure to meet our standards.

It is open season on Christians. People love to pass judgment on believers. It is also a favorite indoor sport of Christians. Christians love to judge other Christians. Matthew 7 argues against judgment of others:

"Judge not, that you be not judged.

"For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

"And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?

"Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye?

"Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

PRINCIPLE: The Christian is to not let legalism judge him.

APPLICATION: If we are in the habit of passing judgment on other Christians, we will find ourselves the victims one day. We pass premature judgment because we do not possess all the facts. If we did, it would withhold judgment or temper our judgment with mercy. Because we are ignorant of all the factors we pass hasty, censorious judgment only later to find that we were wrong. By then we have done so much damage we can do nothing to undo it.

Some people seek to build their righteousness on criticism and judgment of those who violate their own standards.

In order, we have annual, monthly and weekly religious celebrations in this verse.

"in food or in drink"

Christians are free from the legalistic requirements about food (Rom. 14:1-4). The terms "food" and "drink" refer to the acts of eating and drinking. It is not a question of food or drink; it is a matter of ascetic attitudes toward them. Romans 14 addresses this issue:

"Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand" (Rom. 14:1-4).

"For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

"But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse" (I Cor. 8:8). Food is a non issue to the Christian life.

" Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31). This is the operating principle in all disputes over food and drink.

We may eat all foods so long as we eat them with thanksgiving (I Tim. 4:3).

"or regarding a festival"

Israel had three outstanding feasts a year: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. The first and last days of these feasts were holy days. In those days they did no work. In the New Testament era we observe no feasts. Religious days such as Christmas, Easter, Lent, Maundy Thursday, Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are inventions of men. The Bible does not give the day the Lord Jesus was born. We commemorate the resurrection every Sunday, not just one day a year.

There are always those who pay their annual respect to God on Easter. Everyone likes something special. For one day a year they are on their best behavior and manners as if this impresses God. God nowhere in the Bible presents this as a standard of Christianity.

"or a new moon"

This day was celebrated by blowing trumpets, special sacrifice, feasting and religious instruction. Labor was suspended and no national or private feasts were permitted to take place. Religious authorities went to great pain to fix the commencement of the month. Also, the Gnosticism of the Lycus Valley had its systems of new moon worship as well.

The new moon may have its affect on our romantic life but there is no significance to Christianity!

PRINCIPLE: Ritual can destroy the vitality of our faith.

APPLICATION: Religious mechanism can attack our faith. If we place special value on religious apparatus rather than upon the person of Christ, we lose the reality of Christianity. Many people give up food for lint. Others wear uniforms or special clothing. Earlier this century many evangelicals would not travel on Sunday or go into an establishment where liquor was sold. Some Christian even chant mantras believing that God will specially bless them.

What moment we think that our religion can commend us to God, we miss the boat about how to live the Christian life.

The first day of the week is Sunday; the seventh day of the week is Saturday. If we were to keep the Sabbath day we would worship on Saturday.

Does the Bible teach the Christian is to worship on Saturday?

"or sabbaths"

The word "sabbath" means seven. The Bible uses "sabbath" most commonly of the seventh day of the week -- Saturday. "Sabbath" is used more broadly in the sense of a festival set apart for a special occasion.

The root for "sabbaths" means to cease, desist. The word came to mean a complete cessation. The idea is not relaxation or refreshment but cessation from activity. For six days God created and on the seventh he rested. The seventh day is a commemoration of grace -- God did the doing. We rest in that.

The observation of the seventh day of week by Israel was a "sign" between God and his people. God rested after six days of creation (Ex. 31:16,17; 20:8-11). Eventually these regulations became a burden to Israel due to over systemization of their religion. Two treatises of the Mishna are entirely occupied with regulations for observance. Jesus liberated people from the vexatious traditional accretions which were an end in themselves (Matt. 12:1-13; John 5:5-16). He made it a means to an end.

For the first three centuries of Christianity, "sabbaths" were never confounded with the first day of the week. Rom. 14:5; Gal. 4:9-11. Those who place Christians under legalism make an artificial separation between the ceremonial and moral law. They say that the sabbath has not been annulled.

- The Sabbath is the only one of the Ten Commands not repeated in the New Testament.
- Christians met on Sunday, not Saturday (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2).
- Our passage condemns Sabbath observance, Col. 2:16.
- The law was only a shadow of the reality to come (Jesus Christ; Heb 8:5; 10:1). What the Old Testament foreshadowed our Lord fulfilled (Mt. 5:17; Rom. 8:3-4).

PRINCIPLE: The Bible places no special privilege upon worship on special days.

APPLICATION: Many children sour on church because of the superficial and hypercritical behav-

ior patterns of their parents. As soon as church is over, their parents act like imbeciles the rest of the week. They are supposed to act like "Christians" on Sunday. They cannot go to a hockey game on Sunday. Somehow this is supposed to impress God. Children wind up antagonistic to God and the Bible. Pseudo spirituality restricts activities on Sunday.

Colossians 2:17

"which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ."

We should not let the law judge us (v.14) because Christ fulfilled the law (Rom 6:14). The five systems of legalism of verse 16 are the "shadow" in this verse.

"which are a shadow of things to come"

"Shadow" is used of the image or outline cast by an object (here), of ceremonies under the Law; of the Tabernacle and its appurtenances and offerings, Heb. 8:5; of these as appointed under the Law, Heb. 10:1. A "shadow" is the shape or shade cast by an object which blocks rays of light. Here it refers to an entity that corresponds to an archetype or foreshadowing, reality, corresponding reality.

The "shadow" of the Old Testament, that is, the Old Testament ceremonies about Christ are simply ways of depicting Christ before he came historically. The animal sacrifices were an illustration of his sacrificial death. They were not the reality of his death. Shadow, however, always reveals that there is reality somewhere.

"Things to come" -- the coming of Christ and his work.

"but the substance is of Christ"

The ceremonies of the law served their purpose well. After they fulfilled their purpose God instituted something better -- the reality of Christ. All the ceremony of the Old Testament, the legalistic system, the Aaronic priesthood, the tabernacle with its furnishings and ritual all pointed forward to Christ. They were pictures and parables of Christ. Jesus took the place of all that ceremony.

The "substance" is equivalent to reality. Reality is found in Christ (Heb. 8:5; 10:1,4). It impossible to

have shadow without light. A shadow points toward something real -- "substance." The Old Testament types merely foreshadowed the coming reality. Christ was the fulfillment of the types (Mt. 5:17; Rom. 8:3-4).

A "shadow" is only an image cast by a real object which represents its form. The Old Testament types were not real. Jesus Christ is the reality. Since the reality has come there is no longer a need to follow the shadow of the Old Testament types. Christ is the intrinsic value, not the types. It was the substance that caused the light that caused the shadow to come. To continue in ceremonial observance (shadows) implies that Christ has not come.

PRINCIPLE: The law cannot save a sinner nor sanctify a saint.

APPLICATION: It is very difficult to get the message of grace through to religious people. They feel they must make a contribution to their salvation. To come to grips with the fact that only Jesus can satisfy an absolutely holy God is a humbling experience. Before we can accept what God does for us we have to stop doing the doing (Rom. 4:5). It is imperative to turn from good works, the law, morality, religion, the Ten Commandments to become a Christian. God provides all that we need for salvation in the death of Christ (Gal. 3:13). When we believe that promise, we become a true Christian.

The law cannot sanctify a saint. Formerly, in the Old Testament, God wrote the law on tables of stone. In the New Testament he writes the law on our hearts. When we become a Christian, God puts a new heart in us to live before him.

Ritual without reality is a deadly error. It introduces meaninglessness into our lives. People who partake of the Lord's supper without understanding its meaning simply go through motions, but not the reality of the Christian life.

Some people feel there is good luck in going through rituals. Maybe God will bless them if they move in the shadows of religion. But Christianity presents Jesus Christ as reality. Would you rather have shadow or substance? Would you rather tell a shadow that you love it, or a person? It is no fun

to kiss a shadow! Ritual without Christ is like kissing a shadow.

Colossians 2:18

"Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind."

"Let no one cheat you"

"Cheat" means to give judgment against, to condemn. It comes from two Greek words: kata, against, and brabeus, an umpire, that is, to umpire against. Most of us have had umpires call strikes against us when they were balls. The noun for umpire occurs in

I Cor. 9:24 "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it."

Phil. 3:14 "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

The verb occurs in Col. 3:15, "And let the peace of God ('Christ' in some manuscripts) rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful." When we let God's peace act as an umpire in our hearts, we have tranquility with men. Let the peace that God gives cast the deciding vote in our struggle.

The umpire, however, in this passage is the false teacher who tries to frustrate adherence to the truth. Another rendering is "let no man decide for or against you (as an umpire)." "Do not give yourselves up to the judgment of any man."

"of your reward"

The false teacher judges as a referee that the Colossians were not worthy to receive a prize. They disqualified, condemned and judged them as not worthy of a reward. False teachers can rob the Christian of his spiritual reward. We cannot lose our salvation but we can lose reward. False teachers can bully you away from your reward. They can lead believers away from the truth only by the Christian succumbing to an attack from religion.

II Jn. 8 "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward."

We want a full reward, not a half reward, at the Judgment Seat of Christ. We want everything we are entitled to when we see him. Salvation is free but reward we earn. Since salvation is a gift we cannot lose it. Because we work for rewards, we can lose them.

Rev. 3: 11 "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown."

PRINCIPLE: False teachers can rob Christians of their reward by succumbing to error.

APPLICATION: Are you jeopardizing your reward in heaven by your careless attitude toward the truth?

"taking delight in false humility"

There is nothing in the word "humility" to indicate that it is false. The context indicates that it is a false humility. We might render "humility" as "subjection to." The idea is abject worship of angels. This is pretense of humility but they are proud people.

Worship of angels has the appearance of modesty or humility as if we are unworthy to talk to God ourselves. It was a humility of their own making, not a humility commanded from God. These notions were purely the inventions of men and not from the Bible (Isa. 8:20; I Cor. 4:6). Therefore, this whole thing was phony. It detracted from the mediation of Christ for our sins. Religious pride makes man presume upon the Word of God.

Many are impressed with what they give up for God. If they suffer for God, this is supposed to impress God. God is in the business of many provisions for us. He calls this the principle of grace. Bona fide humility is when we recognize that what we have is from God. All of us have a streak of asceticism that is usually brought to the surface when some horrible experience comes our way.

PRINCIPLE: Spiritual pride is a most difficult pride to correct.

APPLICATION: There are those who say that "I would never presume for sure that I know that I am going to heaven. No one can know that for

sure. We will not know whether we qualify until we get there. I would not have the audacity to claim I know I am going there." That is a mock humility. It is unvarnished, unbelief in the Bible.

The Bible states flatly that we can know we are going to heaven, "And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God" (I John 5:11-13).

Phony self-effacement appears spiritual but it is not true humility. True humility focuses upon God and his grace (provisions) to us. False humility draws attention to self.

"and worship of angels"

"Worship" signifies religion in its external aspect, religious worship, especially the ceremonial service of religion.

Acts 26:5 uses this word of the religion of the Jews.

In Jas. 1:26, 27 the writer purposely uses this word to set in contrast that which is unreal and deceptive, and the "pure religion" that consists in visiting "the fatherless and widows in their affliction."

Paul argues against Gnosticism in this passage. Gnosticism held that there is a hierarchy of angels between all human beings. We must placate God. Knowledge, which began in virtual ignorance, increases until at last one entered into the fullness of understanding of the Oneness of all things.

PRINCIPLE: Gnosticism of our day in the New Age Movement. Satan deludes people by religion.

APPLICATION: The ancient heresy of Gnosticism appears widely today under the name of the New Age Movement. It seeks the Oneness of all things. They tell us that we are all part of the universe of created matter. We unite in Oneness with God.

They claim that we can escape from self and move into oneness with the universe. That is why Paul refers to it here as a "false humility." It claims to move you beyond self. In actual practice, they fo-

cus on self. The real goal is to develop all your self powers. We call this the human potential movement. All you need is already there inside you. All you need to do is bring it out and develop your possibilities and full potential.

Shirley MacLaine's strange spirit beings, of astrology, ouija boards, tarot cards and assorted holy men, psychics, swamis, yogis and gurus are present day Gnosticism. All of these purport to offer help in increasing our understanding to fulfill the possibilities of our humanity.

The Christian who gets involved with the human potential movement is a present day Gnostic.

"intruding into those things"

The word "intruding" means primarily, to step in, or on. This is the only occurrence in the New Testament.

Metaphorically "intrude" means to frequent, dwell in (our passage). This word could mean to invade, to enter on. Because Colossians argues against Gnosticism it probably means the entrance of the initiated into the mystery religions. The mystery religions used this word as a term of ecstasy. This person took a stand based on what he saw in the mysteries when he was initiated into the religion.

"which he has not seen"

This person invents his own religion "which he has not seen." He has a do-it-yourself-religion. He makes it up as he goes along.

If you claim to be God yourself, you do not have anyone above you to whom you can look for help; you can only look down on everybody else. That is the danger and the folly of this kind of thing. A modern proverb answers it well: "There are two things one should never forget: 1. There is only one God. 2. You ain't Him!"

False teachers dwell on "vain" notions. The Gnostics entered into ecstatic experiences which had no basis in biblical revelation. Since the canon of Scripture (the list of books that belong in the Bible) has closed, there is no further need for more revelation from God.

This kind of person blames the Holy Spirit for his dreams and visions. This is common today. "The Lord told me this vision." When? How? "I just had

a feeling, a dream." What are the chapter, book and verse for this thinking? If it does not have scriptural support it ought to be checked off as so much spiritual drivel. It is spiritual hallucination.

God used visions before the Bible was completed (the canon) to communicate with the believer. Today visions are spurious, counterfeit, apocryphal and unreliable. We cannot go on the basis of our feelings because feelings fluctuate. We feel good at one moment and bad another time. The feelings of a Christian are no more reliable than the feelings of a non-Christian. Our fallen nature is susceptible to error, insidious and wicked as it ever was. The only reliable standard, the only credible guide is the Word of God. "Let God be true and every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4).

"vainly puffed up"

"Puffed up" means to blow up, inflate (from phusa, bellows). It is used in the New Testament metaphorically in the N.T. in the sense of inflated with pride (I Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4; Col. 2:18). Religion can inflate us with pride. Arrogant and haughty religion is vanity. cf. I Cor 8:1

"by his fleshly mind"

The sin capacity produces lust patterns. It is from these that sin originates.

PRINCIPLE: Appearance of humility is often unadulterated pride.

APPLICATION: Religious leaders love to advance their own notions about God because it gives them an edge on everyone else. This is spiritual pride, a love of advancing special notions. This puts them in a special place in the religious community. They loved to be thought of as wiser than other Christian leaders. Pride is at the foundation of many religious errors and biblical corruption. It is even the base of many evil practices.

Colossians 2:19

"And not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God."

"And not holding fast to the Head"

The Gnostic mysticism of Colosse cannot connect to the "Head" (Christ, 1:18; 2:10) of the "body" (the

church). They cannot at the same time assert a true claim on Christ and hold to Gnosticism. Jesus is the only mediator between God and man (I Tim. 2:5,6). By claiming the mediatorship of angels they fly the face of the finished work of Christ. No one can mediate between God and man except Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the exclusive basis of Christianity.

The words "holding fast to" mean to cause a state to continue on the basis of some authority or power -- "to hold, to keep, to cause to continue." God expects us to apprehend Jesus Christ. We can live without an arm but we cannot live without a head. We cannot live the Christian life without Christ the head. It is the head that gives orders. We must first check with him. The only way we can do that is by systematic study of the Word of God. He does not lead by spiritual duck bumps.

The failure of false teachers to hold fast to the head of the church is the foundation of false doctrine. False teachers detached from the head and have no life in them. They put angelic aeons in the place of Christ. Those who go to mediums are an example of this today.

All errors of believers relate to this as well. If the believer does not have a healthy relationship to the head, the life that flows from the head will be anemic. Fruit depends upon a healthy fellowship with the head (John 15:4-5).

PRINCIPLE: The only way to grow in the Christian life is to vitally link with Christ.

APPLICATION: Any wolf recognizes a woman in love. He knows she is out of circulation. The true Christian is deeply in love with Jesus Christ. The body severed from the head dies.

"and knit together"

"Knit together" means to cause to coalesce, to join or knit together, to bring together, to unite, to combine. It is often translated "teach" or "instruct." It means to bring a number of ideas together to come to a conclusion.

Eph. 4:15,16, "But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by

which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

This is a parallel passage to our verse. The "joints and ligaments" here are men given by Christ for equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. Gifted men such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers equip the saints for ministry.

PRINCIPLE: The church functions best when gifted men communicate the nourishment of truth to the church.

APPLICATION: The church coalesces when gifted men nourish the church with truth. Are you in a healthy church where the gifts edify the body of Christ?

"from whom all the body"

"From whom" is Jesus Christ the head (v. 19a). He is the body's source of life and growth.

The "body" is the church. When the church is on earth it is called the "body" of Christ. When the Christ comes to rapture the church, it is called the "bride" of Christ. The church is not a bride now.

The church as a "body" is the universal church. This church is any believer anywhere on earth.

"nourished"

"Nourished" means to supply fully, abundantly, to provide something besides what already exists to make available whatever is necessary to help or supply the needs of someone -- to provide for, to support, to supply the needs of, provision, support. This was a term of the ancient drama.

This is the word from which we get our word "chorus." In the ancient Greek world a wealthy benefactor supplied all the money needed for the expensive chorus to function. He gave everything needed. He defrayed expenses for training, costuming and staging. Great dramatists like Euripides and Sophocles presented plays at the great festivals. The play would often train for a year before it opened. Usually they performed a play in memory of the gods. It is like someone generosity supplying all the up front money for a Broadway play. It is a word of grace.

God is the benefactor here. He provides everything we need to live the Christian life. He defrays any expenses we may face to live before him.

2 Cor. 9:10 "Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness."

Gal. 3:5, "Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

Life comes from the head. God disperses that life throughout the body by believers by exercising their spiritual gifts prepared by gifted men ("joints and ligaments"). The saints, not the gifted men, do ministry. All this results from holding fast to the head.

PRINCIPLE: God is a God of grace who provides all that we need to live the Christian life.

APPLICATION: Do you feel that the Christian life depends upon your strength? Do you draw upon God as a God of grace to meet your need?

"by joints and ligaments"

"Joints"-- ligature, ligament, part of the joints of the body which binds the different parts together. The "joints" link different member of the body together. We can sit and stand because we have ligaments. Joints and ligaments provide the body with coordination and action.

Not only does Jesus hold authority over the church but he dynamically influences its life by "joints and ligaments." They give us nourishment and unite us to God.

Eph. 4:15,16, "But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

These verses are parallel passages to our verse. The "joints and ligaments" here are men given by Christ for equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. Gifted men such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers equip the saints for ministry.

"Joints and ligaments" refer to the means of God's provision. Truth given by gifted men is the means for association with Christ. Doctrine is the basic

resource we need to live the Christian life. Truth ties us all together. We link together by what we believe.

The truth of Christ joins together different nationalities, talents, mentalities. We build muscle and strength by using joints of the body. Muscle and strength are not necessarily the same thing. Strength comes from truth.

PRINCIPLE: The "joints and ligaments" refer to gifted leaders in the body of Christ who edify the body of Christ by passing on God's truth.

APPLICATION: Spiritual vitality is dependent upon submission to the head. Spiritually, the ministry of Christ consists in the communication of truth by gifted leaders. Are you "nourished" and "knit together" by leaders who carefully communicate the truth of the Word of God?

"grows with the increase that is from God"

"Grows" -- the whole body grows as God wants it to grow. The growth of the "body" here is the church rather than the physical body.

"Increase" means to increase in the extent of or in the instances of an activity or state -- to increase, to grow, to spread, to extend.

"In whom the whole building is held together and extends into (or 'increases until it becomes') a sacred temple in the Lord" (Eph 2.21).

"From God" -- God is the source of grace. True spirituality comes from life, the life of God, not from laws of Gnosticism. It is the nature of new life in Christ to grow. There is no growth apart from truth.

PRINCIPLE: Spiritual paralysis comes from disconnection from the head.

APPLICATION: Muscular action is caused by stimulation of nerve cells from the brain and spinal cord. When the nervous system is not working properly, it affects the muscles. Spiritual disorder is caused by distorted link to Christ the head. If we do not draw strength from him, spiritual disorder will follow. Sin paralyzes the spiritual life.

Colossians 2:20

"Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in

the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—"

Attendant to legalism is asceticism. Asceticism is the religion of self-denial. This is a system that seeks the favor of God by something man offers to God and rejects the cross as sufficient. The cross is not only the basis of our salvation but it is also the basis for our transformation.

"Therefore (not in some manuscripts)"

Everything we see a "therefore" we should look to see what it is there for! The "therefore" is like a line drawn under a column of figures that we are about to add. Paul now draws conclusions about legalism, mysticism and asceticism. He is attempting to make plain that the cross dealt radically with the rules of Judaism and Gnosticism (vv. 16-19).

Christianity is the antithesis of religion. Christianity is a relationship with God based on the finished work of Christ. Jesus did all the doing; we do none of it. Jesus satisfied God's righteous demands by his death for our sins.

"if you died with Christ"

We can translate the word "if" as "since." The Greek indicates that it is a reality that we are dead with Christ. It is not a potential; it is a fact. We call this "positional truth." All the sins of the world were poured out upon Christ. At the moment we believe God finally and forever forgives our sins by Christ's death, our position before God is perfect forever.

Most of us do not know what God did for us when we became a Christian. We look at the cross and see one thing and God sees another. When we look at the cross we see Christ dying there. When God looks at the cross he sees both Christ and the believer dying there. God sees every person who would ever believe dying there with Christ.

The word "died" is the most intensive word for death. It emphasizes separation from human rules which the believer's death with Christ produced. When Jesus died, we died (Gal. 2:20). Our life is forever hidden with Christ in God.

PRINCIPLE: Our co-death with Christ teaches us that God will never again bring up our sins against us.

APPLICATION: God forever removed our guilt when he forgave us by the death of Christ. This judicial act forever removed all guilt from the believer. It made it possible for him to stand before God completely cleansed. Because God put our sin upon Christ and identified us with him, he cleansed us forever of our sin. If we deny this, we deny the finished work of Christ.

This is far more than cleansing from guilt; it is an identification with Christ in his death. We can now walk in newness of life with the risen Son of God.

God has not put us into a religious straitjacket. No amount of amassing religious brownie points with God impresses him. People believe that if they amass these points with God that this will go on their record. Biblically, this is a religious fairy tale.

Religion bankrupts our relation to Christ. It ignores the accomplishment of the cross. Jesus has done it all; all to him I owe. The finished work of Christ is the only thing that impresses an absolutely holy God.

"from the basic principles of the world"

The Greek word for "basic principles" denotes an element, first principle. Literally, it means a row, rank, series. The verb means to walk in rank. It was used of the letters of the alphabet as the basic elements of writing.

2:8 uses this word of the delusive speculations of Gentile cults and Jewish legalism.

II Peter 3,10,12 uses this word of the substance of the material world.

Gal 4:3,9, the rudimentary principles of religion

Heb. 5:12, basic principles taught to spiritual babes.

Jesus freed us from the basics of religion.

"why, as though living in the world"

A believer without an understanding of positional truth will try to fake it. He may fool members of the human race but he will never fool God. A believer ignorant of the Bible is a spiritual zombie.

If we find interests, aims and enjoyments in the Christian life, why should we interject foreign philosophy into it? We live as if Jesus did not die for

our sin. If we died with Christ, all mundane relations cease. Mere rules get us nowhere. We need to live the expatriated power of the new sphere of life in Christ.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus has repatriated us into the life of God.

APPLICATION: Jesus delivered us from basic legalism, why then do we continue to live in legalism? We seek to please God by extreme self-denial. We can make a god of discipline. We can take perverse delight in asceticism.

Martin Luther lay naked in his cell all night in bitter cold beating his body. He hoped that this would please God. He thought that torturing himself he would find peace in his soul. God freed him from this asceticism by reading the book of Romans.

"do you subject yourselves to regulations"

"Regulations" are man-made rules. They have no basis in the Bible. This is do-it-yourself religion. Christianity is not religion. Religion places the emphasis upon man's responsibility. Grace puts the emphasis upon what God does.

Everyone thinks their religion is right. Most of these people are sincere. However, the more sincere we are, if we are wrong, the farther astray we will go from the truth. Sincerity becomes a facade for sloppiness. Sincerity is no virtue if we are sincerely wrong. Sincerity can be counterfeit. Most do-gooders are sincere but they are sincerely wrong. Do-gooders try to improve things. When it comes to suffering for sin, we cannot improve on the death of Christ. God will reject all human good when we face him. Only the work of Christ on the cross impresses him.

PRINCIPLE: The Bible does not give us the right to superimpose our standards on someone else.

APPLICATION: Jesus did not live an ascetic life. He went to feasts and weddings when asked. He did not sit in a corner mourning over the wickedness of the world. He went to the party like an ordinary guest.

Christians love taboos. Religion sucks them into false ideas all the time. A taboo is something a Christian thinks is wrong but the Bible says nothing about it. Some Christians believe that it is

wrong for boys and girls to swim in the same pool. "Mixed bathing" is a taboo in certain parts of the United States. Wearing make up is wrong in other circles. The Bible does not say these things are sin.

We all have a trend toward asceticism. We love to put ourselves into new bondage. Regulation is the back-bone of religion. Note the next verse "Touch not, taste not, handle not." Keeping rules gives people the idea that they are pious.

Not all taboos are bad. Some people look for any daylight whereby they might justify their sin. The mature Christian takes care to not offend the weaker brother (Romans 14,15; I Corinthians 8-10).

Colossians 2:21

"Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle"

Many people think that they are spiritual because they follow taboos. They don't smoke cigars and they don't go with the girls who do! No Christian in his right mind ought to do this, but it is no proof that we are spiritual Christians.

This verse sets forth three negatives. These negatives give the impression that if we are going to heaven, we must give up pleasure in life. Pseudo spirituality revels in rules.

"Do not touch"

"Touch" means to fasten oneself to. The idea is more than an inadvertent touch. It means to cling to. Under the ceremonial law touching a dead body and anything offered to an idol was wrong.

"do not taste"

To taste forbidden food was sinful in Colosse. Today certain religious types would have us live on lettuce leaves! We cannot live a spiritual life without denial of food. There are many food taboos today.

"do not handle"

"Handle" means to handle in a superficial way. Certain religious people want us to take great care with the ornaments of religious ceremony.

PRINCIPLE: Christianity is not a religion of rules.

APPLICATION: We can be as carnal as the Devil himself and not smoke cigars. If gossip is part of our lives, we are clearly carnal. We must get out of thinking of spirituality in negative terms, "I can't do this. I can't do that."

The genuine is more precious than the imitation. A real diamond is better than a glass diamond. Most people live their entire Christian lives with glass diamonds. They know little of dynamic spiritual life. Many live in the glass diamonds of legalism. Refraining from certain practices do not give us an "in" with God.

The Devil always tries to get us on tangents. We put emphasis on the negative and give our young people the impression that Christianity is a religion of reaction. That is why we lose them when they get to High School. They see Christianity as a religious straitjacket from which they must escape if they are to have any fun. If only we could keep the wonder of fellowship with Jesus Christ before our young people!

The religious regulation approach to Christianity is all wrong: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" This shows us that we do not understand our death with Christ. To revert to legalism is to return to childlike behavior -- thinking that God will be pleased by our negative approach to life.

Colossians 2:22

"which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men?"

"which all concern things which perish"

"Which" -- the three taboos of verse 21.

The word "perish" here means to destroy, to perish, a state of ruin or destruction, with the implication of disintegration. We can translate this phrase, "which all concern things which are for perishing." They are transitory, not eternal. Taboos fail in their purpose. They do not restrain evil.

"with the using"

The word "using" signifies misuse, the activity of using up something -- being consumed, consumption. We may render the clause "by their using

up." When we exercise taboos we render them unfit for further use.

These man-made regulations perish because they have no intrinsic worth in themselves. Those who use them witness them perish and pass away. They corrupt the Christian faith. They have no authority other than the injunctions of men.

"according to the commandments and doctrines of men?"

"Doctrines" means the content of teaching -- what is taught, doctrine, teaching. Taboos come from men, not God. The only authority for taboos is human.

Jesus challenged the Pharisees, "You observe these minute rituals, but inwardly you are tombs, filled with dead men's bones." You look great as you perform your ceremonies but inwardly you are like a grave full of rotting bones.

PRINCIPLE: Over regulation intensify evil.

APPLICATION: Human doctrine perishes with use. Holiness by self-effort is human doctrine. This is wrong in principle and unproductive in results. When we observe taboos of men we correlate our lives with temporal things. Temporary doctrines of men have little effect in spiritual things. It is a waste of time and a waste of our lives. The Bible emphasizes eternal things. In eternity human taboos will end in destruction.

Undue repression leads to violent eruption. If we repress evil, it will explode in our lives at some later point. The answer is not repression but living our lives around a person.

Taboos are futile. We can consume our lives with rules and regulations and have nothing to show for it at the end of our day.

Colossians 2:23

"These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."

Paul points out the futility of legalism and asceticism. Taboos impress some people because it implies that those who practice taboos rise above the desires of the flesh.

"These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom"

"These things" -- taboos and legalism.

Legalists consider themselves wiser than others. They have an "appearance" (show) of wisdom; it is not real wisdom; it is pretense. "Wisdom" is spirituality centered on Christ. Tabooism passes for spirituality in some evangelical circles.

"in self-imposed religion"

The word "self-imposed" means arbitrary and unwarranted piety. Legalism is over scrupulous religion. When we subject ourselves to regulations from men, we operate contrary to the very essence of the gospel of grace (Gal. 5:1f). Man-manufactured religion always trends toward some form of asceticism.

Men love to invent religious beliefs and practices that come from their own desires and initiatives. This is self-imposed religion, religion thought up by oneself -- self-made religion. When Christians impose their will over God's, they come up with weird systems of belief. This is religion based on man's will, emotionalism and ecstasies.

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to avoid religious systems invented by men.

APPLICATION: People love religion, if they do not have one, they will invent one. Evangelical Christianity at the twenty-first century loves to invent new forms of religion like that in the days of the Colossians. We love legalism, asceticism, ecstasies. At the same time, we do not expend effort in the Word of God exposing ourselves to what God truly wants from us.

When we get away from the Word we always move away from the grace of God.

"false humility"

Legalism parades a form of humility but it is only a show. True wisdom keeps us close to the grace of God.

This is the phony humility of self-effacement. If people stand erect or speak with confidence, religious types resent it because they are intimidated by their confidence. On the other hand, if we ingratiate ourselves to others, and make people think we are helpless, they will fall over them-

selves trying to help us. This is ingratiation based on self-effacement.

PRINCIPLE: This is a pride that apes humility.

APPLICATION: If we have a sad spirit and can hardly stand erect, if we appear weak and pitiful, people will come along and say, "Don't worry about it. We will help you." This pseudo-spirituality appeals to false humility. If we ever want anything from anyone, all we have to do is act helpless, and we will get it. Some types love to help people because it makes them feel good. It compensates for their many guilt feelings.

A Christian operating on true spirituality does not concoct pseudo humility. He directs his humility is toward God who provides him divine operating assets for the Christian life.

"and neglect of the body"

The word "neglect" means severity, hard treatment, unsparing treatment. Severe self-control suggests an ascetic and unsparing attitude toward the body. The Greeks used harsh control over the body to build courageous exposure to hardship and danger. Here it refers to ascetic discipline or severe self-control, suggesting an ascetic and unsparing attitude of religion.

Legalists neglect the body by abstaining from food. They kill bodily pleasures and appetites but there is nothing of true piety in these things. The Bible teaches us to worship God in spirit and truth and not by ritual and taboos.

PRINCIPLE: The principle of grace does not involve harsh treatment of the body.

APPLICATION: Christianity is not self-induced misery. Fasting, going without food and the ordinary things of life or any system that involves self affliction to gain God's favor, violates the grace of God. Fasting is not wrong. Fasting to gain God's favor is wrong.

Jesus did all the suffering necessary. He placated God sufficiently by his death on the cross to gain God's favor. If Jesus won God's favor, we violate him if we independently try to win that favor by ourselves.

"but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh"

"Indulgence" means a filling up, gratification, satiety. It is the process of indulging in or procuring the satisfaction of certain desires or needs. The flesh is of no value to remedy the indulgence of the flesh. Asceticism has no value in conquering the flesh.

Asceticism treats the body as an enemy. God's view is that the body is an instrument of godliness. Self-chosen acts of self-sacrifice will not overcome the flesh.

When we deny body appetites, it simply makes it hungrier. If we try to lose weight by a severe diet, we binge later. Denial arouses desire. We do not nourish the spirit by neglect of the body.

Emotional self-effacement is no remedy against the indulgence of the flesh. Giving up food for Lent or observe holy days will not overcome the sin nature. Legalism is on the side of the sin capacity. Legalism facilitates the sin capacity. Only God's plan of grace can combat the sin capacity.

PRINCIPLE: Denial arouses desire; grace counteracts the flesh.

APPLICATION: Whenever we become dynamic in our spirituality, the Devil uses religion as a counter punch. Severity to the body is evidence of specious piety. Asceticism is utterly hopeless in checking the indulgences of the flesh. We cannot control the flesh by rules.

The cross is the only answer. True spirituality accepts the crucifixion of the flesh by the cross. We please God by accepting his evaluation of human nature and depend wholly on grace.

We should beware of legalistic piety. Those who go around looking pious are liable to lie about other things too! We can appear to others as godly but at the same time sin can rage inwardly. Anger, vengeance and resentment inside can fill our minds and no one can know it. We cannot regulate the internal by externals. The only way we can conquer the inward life is by the life that Christ gives.

Asceticism invades God's providence and cannot control the flesh. The flesh merely goes underground and manifests itself in pride. The flesh

cannot please God; that is why he dealt with it so radically at the cross. God does not want us to pander to the flesh but to accept its crucifixion. We are to walk in the fact of the cross provided by grace.

The famous Bible teacher H.A. Ironside struggled with pride. After a period of struggle he went to a friend for advice about how to deal with this pride. Someone counseled him to put signs on his front and back with large written Bible verses about pride. He was to carry them throughout the city streets calling out these verses. This was designed to abolish his pride. Dr. Ironside said that he followed that advice. When he finished, his first thought was, "There is no other person in this area dedicated enough to do such a thing!!!"

All of these errors have one thing in common -- they lose sight of Christ!

Colossians 3

Colossians 3:1

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God."

Chapter three begins the practical division of the book of Colossians.

Paul now moves to the positive. Not only does the death of Christ relate to the believer but so does the resurrection of Christ. The one relates to our salvation in the past; the other relates to our future. Not only is the Christian to relinquish his pre-death life but he is to aspire to the post-resurrection life of Christ.

Jesus liberated us from legalism. We have new privileges in Christ. Chapter three launches our responsibility to live up to our privilege.

"If then you were raised with Christ"

The word "then" picks up the argument of chapter two. Paul draws an inference based on his arguments there.

The word "if" assumes reality; we can translate it by the word "since." "Since" (in view of the fact) you were raised with Christ. That God has already raised us with Christ, is an assumed fact. It is a fact that God has raised us with Christ (Eph 2:5,6).

It is something already done. There is no doubt in the "if" in the Greek here.

"Raised with Christ" is an advance on "dead with Christ" of 2:20. A prerogative of the Christian life is that the Christian is risen with Christ. "Risen with" means to cause to live again together with. Here God raises the believer to live together with Christ. By virtue of our union with Christ we are justified and will be glorified. Because this is a judicial resurrection, it makes it no less real.

God sees things differently than we do. God's viewpoint here is positional truth. God views us as already both dead (2:20), buried (2:12) and raised in Christ. God sees better than we do but he expects us to see what he has done in Christ with the eye of faith. This has nothing to do with our feelings. We cannot taste, feel or smell positional truth. Our position in Christ is infallible, unalterable, eternal and exalted. God said it and our faith lays hold of it. Religious duck bumps do not confirm the facts. Emotions simply appreciate what God has done. All God wants is for us to lay hold of our privilege by faith.

Our present resurrection with Christ is one of many expressions of our position in Christ. Positional truth cannot change. It is something we have forever with Christ. God provides our position with Christ. He establishes this position forever entirely apart from merit at the moment of our salvation. We can draw power daily from this resource.

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to live the Christian life on the declared fact of our resurrection with Christ.

APPLICATION: Every fact declared by God is for our taking by faith. Most people try to live the Christian life by rules. They strive to improve the flesh but flesh will never improve. They place themselves under regulations that they hope will deliver them from sinful inclinations. All these lead us away from Christ.

The heretics of Colosse sought to attain spiritual freedom by asceticism that would bring them into contact with spirit beings. Paul, however, points to true conquest of sin -- our positional truth in Christ. Positional truth elevates us to the very heights of heaven.

When we come to Christ we turn in our old, broken down life and in its place we gain Jesus Christ. The Christian life is living the life of Christ.

"seek those things which are above"

"Seek" is the first of many commands in the remaining practical section of Colossians.

"Seek" means to pursue, search for, endeavor to obtain, desire to possess. If a legalist were writing this he would write "Don't" but Paul writes "Seek..." God wants us to apply our eternal privileges to time. Make those privileges our scope of daily living. Center our lives on the ascended and glorified Christ.

God wants us to understand our rights in Christ, our position in Christ. This takes study and effort. Most Christians want fun -- "Come to our laugh and play club." Others want misery -- "Come to our rules and regulation club." God wants us to conform our position with our daily life. Everyday life is to conform to this position.

The Greek tense indicates that this seeking is to continue throughout the Christian life.

The word "seek" is a command. God calls us to function in relation to the fact.

"Things which are above" are heavenly things -- our positional truth. A daily attitude of seeking the things of positional truth will afford daily communion with the Lord.

The next verses explain how to go about seeking things above. Non-Christians are earth-bound, secular, materialists. They operate in a world of taste, see and feel. They spend all their time trying to keep body and soul together. That is life to them. They do not know that there is more to life than that. For the Christian, his life is Christ (v.4). This is far more than existence. When we center our lives on Christ, life takes on a purpose, a life worth living.

The Bible is the mind of God reduced to writing. We have what we need for the Christian life in writing. We have the Holy Spirit to help us dig it out.

PRINCIPLE: Every spiritual position is for the taking by faith and every spiritual function is for the action of faith.

APPLICATION: God grounds our holy walk in two spheres:

1. Godly living grounds in faith in Christ's accomplishments.
2. Godly living is governed by a continual exercise of faith in Christ's accomplishments.

God wants us to rest on what Christ has done, not on what we do. Everything we have before God is because we have been incorporated in Christ at our salvation. The Christian experience must relate to our position in Christ.

"where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God"

Jesus is seated at "the right hand of God." This is the completeness of our position. Our status quo before God in Christ is already finished in God's eyes. Our position is complete in the mind of God.

Jesus is "above" at the right hand of God. He represents us there (Ps. 110:1; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33; 5:31; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22). We must know where Jesus is. He is not in a grave in Palestine. He is at the summit of all existence, at the right hand of the Father.

"Right hand" is a metaphorical expression of power or authority, Acts 2:33; Matt. 26:64; Mark 14:62; Heb. 1:13. Our position in Christ is a position of high status of authority.

Christ's body is not laying in a grave in the Mid East. He is in heaven. That is more than you say for other religious leaders. They are dead and buried. This is what makes Christianity unique -- he is alive today. His humanity is seated at the right hand of God.

If Jesus Christ is dead then Christianity is a joke, a cruel farce. The glory of Christianity is that he is alive.

PRINCIPLE: The position of Christ at God's right hand carries a guarantee of our eternal glory. Our position before God is complete in Christ; he is the forerunner who accomplished the work that guarantees our coming fellowship with God.

APPLICATION: Jesus has finished our redemption (Heb. 9:23-10:18). Jesus' seated is a symbol of a complete salvation. God has presently seated

with Christ in a state of finished and complete redemption. There never will be a time when we are not in positional truth. The merit is all his and none of ours. No one can add to it or take from it. It is final and perfect. We sit with Christ with all the privileges, prerogatives, promises and powers of positional truth.

It is not possible to ask God for more than what we already have in Christ. We have everything necessary for a vital, dynamic life in Christ.

As everything in the physical realm draws to a center by gravity so everything in the spiritual realm draws to a center in Christ. Everything in our spiritual lives is to revolve around him. He is the one on whom we are to set our affections.

Every experience we have in life is based on some position in Christ. Confession rests on the finished work of Christ; worship rests on the privilege of our priesthood; prayer is based on coming to God in Christ's name. Positionally, we are at the right hand of the Father with Christ. Because of that, we share his destiny, priesthood, sonship, heirship and election. He has made possible many operating assets for living the Christian life.

We have the right to seek heavenly things because of Christ. When we seek Christ we do not seek a dead person. A study of Christ will lead us to positional truth.

Colossians 3:2

"Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth."

We turn to the second command in the practical section of Colossians. We must not only "seek" things above but we are to "think" things above. We are to put into practice what God affords us by our position in Christ.

Paul turns to a stronger term than "seek" of verse one -- "Set your mind." "Set your mind" places stress on the whole bent of life while "seek" emphasizes the pursuit of more concrete goals.

"Set your mind on things above"

If the Christian is to survive in spiritual war, his mind must focus on eternal things (II Cor. 4:18). "Seek" in verse one implies striving; this term implies concentration.

"Mind" includes understanding, attitude and the will. It means to employ one's faculty for thoughtful planning, with emphasis upon the underlying disposition or attitude -- to have an attitude, to think in a particular manner as in the attitude that Christ Jesus had (Phil. 2.5).

The false teachers of Colosse were pushing subjective mysticism. Paul condemned that in 2:20-23. God wants us to think about God's objective provisions.

When this term is used with "things" it means to think about events, not simply material objects. God wants us to establish an attitude toward his provisions for us. This word also means to keep on giving serious consideration to something -- to ponder, to let one's mind dwell on, to keep thinking about, to fix one's attention on as here -- "Let your mind dwell on the things which are above."

God wants us to love "things above." The Greek emphasizes "things above." "Things above" are the things which are ultimately essential, belonging to God. He wants our desire to orient around them. The wings of love soar our hearts toward eternal things.

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to take responsibility for our thoughts by thinking on our union with Christ.

APPLICATION: If we let our thoughts dwell on evil things, they will eventually become part of our attitude toward life. An attitude is an orientation to life. With a lustful attitude our lives will orient to evil. Some modern artists call evil "realism." The Bible calls it sin and depravity (Rom. 1:24-32). That is the attitude God wants us to have regarding evil.

Our greatest need is to think about God's divine operating assets which he has provided for us. God wants us to think about Christ and what he has done for us. We need to think about our union or position with him eternally.

Obviously we are not to think about evil things but we are not to daydream either. We dare not just think about anything. God does not want us to think about anything except what he OKs. We will save ourselves a lot of grief if we keep this in mind. Objective thinking will keep us from worrying about what will happen to our children. God

wants us to bring everything thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:5). This does not mean that all daydreaming is wrong but it does mean that we are not to spend a great deal of time in this sphere. God wants us to lasso every single thought and tie them to Jesus Christ.

Bill Bright, after receiving the Templeton award (over one million dollars; he immediately gave it to the cause of evangelism around the world) from Prince Philip said, "After 51 years of walking with Him, I have concluded that anything that we say or do that is not directly or indirectly related to Him is not going to accomplish very much for the good of the individuals involved and for the glory of God."

"not on things on the earth"

"Things on the earth" is set in contrast to "things above." These are moral things, not physical things. This is not Gnostic contempt for material things. Paul is not pushing spiritual escapism such as becoming a monk or hiding from everyday life. Rather, our Christianity operates within the framework of everyday life whether in work or marriage. God created physical things for our enjoyment (Ps. 24). The body and sex are good in God's viewpoint (I Tim. 4:1-4). However, this negation is toward the legalism and asceticism of chapter two.

The physical body is the environment where the flesh operates (Rom. 7). If we cherish the flesh, it will bring us down. The category to which we orient will become predominant in our thinking, then in our attitudes and finally in our actions. We ultimately become what we think about (Prov. 23:7).

Philippians 3:19-20 contrasts those who "mind earthly things" with those whose citizenship is in heaven.

God does not want us to focus on the trivial and self. Satan fills the earth with propaganda because he is the ruler of this world (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph. 2:3-4; I Tim. 4:1). He his out to deceive the world (Rev. 12:9). He is the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4). This is why God calls this world the "kingdom of darkness" (John 8:12; 9:5). Since the believer has been rescued from the devil's kingdom, he must think like God thinks with regard to this kingdom.

PRINCIPLE: God does not want us to focus on the trivial but on the eternal.

APPLICATION: Most of the things we think about are materialistic. It is not wrong to think about material things as long as material things do not become ultimate importance in our hearts. We must make a living; we must shop for groceries. God expects us to become productive members of the human race. We must educate our children and make provisions for the future.

Our problem is we think about material things exclusively. If we are earthbound, we will be miserable. We will have a worm's eye view of life instead of a bird's eye view. Materialism is so insidious that we succumb to it without realizing it. If we are honest, there is none of us who are not susceptible to it. We are forced to admit that "I do have materialistic tendencies."

We do not need faith when we deal in material things. We taste, feel, see and touch material things but faith takes us into another arena. Faith takes us into a spiritual stratosphere. There we can see things we could not see with a material viewpoint. Faith is the spiritual telescope that brings the things of God afar off near to our soul. We can, therefore, see things we could not otherwise see. Faith puts reality on intangible things. Eternal things are real but they are only real to those who have faith to see them. It was written of Moses, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27).

God calls upon us to think about eternal things. He wants us to be heavenly-minded. However, we are not to be so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. Most of us are so earthly minded that we are no heavenly good.

Colossians 3:3

"For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

Paul gives two reasons he wants the Christian to "seek" and "set our minds" on "things above." The first reason is that we died with Christ and are therefore hidden with him in God.

"For you died"

"For"-- the reason for setting our minds on "things above" (v. 3).

At the point of our salvation we died spiritually with Christ (Gal. 2:20). The Greek tense indicated that our death with Christ took place at a definite point. This death was a definite past experience.

The believer died 2000 years ago. This is not a death the believer experiences over and over. It took place once with Christ. Jesus took our death by his death. We died once for all to the world and now live with Christ in God.

This is the death of justification. Justification established our position before God in Christ. Justification places on us the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We are a partner in his righteousness. This past positional death in Christ (2:10) is the basis for daily living.

Verse one shows our identify with Christ in his resurrection; this verse shows our identify with Christ as he hung upon the cross. God identifies us we the death of Christ.

Because Christ is our portion we died to things below. If we died to these things it is foolish to "seek" and "set our mind" on "things below." Since we died to these things positionally we should behave like a dead person to these things. Sin should not affect us like it once did.

PRINCIPLE: We base our right of living before God on calculating our past death in Christ.

APPLICATION: "Dead reckoning" is a nautical term. When a captain cannot make astronomical calculations because of cloud covering, he must use "dead reckoning" to properly find his place in the ocean. "Dead reckoning" gauges the ship's location from the records of its progress made in the log book.

The Christian's log book is the Bible. There we find our position in Christ from what God has gone on record to say. We need not consult our feelings. We do not evaluate circumstances. We just calculate what God did for us in Christ.

Romans 6:6-11, "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as

many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord"

God wants us to reckon (calculate) ourselves dead to sin and alive to God.

"and your life is hidden with Christ in God"

"Hidden with Christ" is a statement of our eternal security in Christ. This does not mean that it is hidden from us but that it is hidden for us. Jesus lays away our life in his. God reserves eternal life in heaven for us (I Pet. 1:4,5).

The Greek tense of the verb "is hidden" means in this context that our life was hidden at a point in the past with the results going on forever. At the point we received Christ, eternal life began and goes on forever. When Christ comes (v.4), the life hidden in Christ goes with him.

"With Christ in God" constitutes a double shield. Not only are we in the bank but we are in the vault of the bank. God doubly safeguards the security of the person who trusts in Christ.

"With Christ" connotes identity. The believer has a fellowship of identity with the death of Christ and with the risen Lord that carries us to God.

PRINCIPLE: No intruder, not even Satan himself, can separate us from God. The believer owns a double security before God.

APPLICATION: God has locked us together with Christ in God. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:31-39). God

secures our position against the precarious conditions in life. Our own whims, other people or the devil himself cannot touch our eternal status before God.

When the Caesar threatened to take the life of Chrysostom unless he renounced Christ, he said, "You cannot, your majesty for my life is hid with Christ in God."

The eternal security of the believer is a matter of our position in Christ before God. This is something that Christ did for us. It has nothing to do with what we do. We cannot secure this position by the kind of life we live. The security rests in the death we died in Christ. Our eternal security before God is a matter of grace. Grace is what God gives, not what we do.

We do not become a Christian by what we do but by what we become. We are not secure in God by what we do but by what we are. However, what we have become and what we are impels us into a life that pleases God.

Colossians 3:4

"When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."

This verse speaks of our future with the Lord Jesus. This is the destiny of the believer.

"When Christ who is our life appears"

The word "appears" means to manifest. Manifest is more than "appear." The true meaning is to uncover, lay bare, reveal. It means to cause to become visible -- to make appear, to make visible, to cause to be seen, to cause something to be fully known by revealing clearly and in some detail.

When Jesus comes he will be made known, made plain. He will be brought to light to Christians. If a person appears in a Halloween mask, they are not what they appear. When Christ comes in manifestation he will demonstrate what he truly is. He will reveal his true character (John 3:21; I Cor. 4:5; II Cor. 5:10,11; Eph 5:13).

He will appear at the Rapture (1 Thes. 4:16-18). Then he will be visibly manifest. God is moving toward a new era. Even though God is presently working toward this new era, it is invisible to this present age.

God wants us to make "known the knowledge about him in every place like a sweet aroma" (2 Cor 2:14).

Christ is the believer's life: "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). He is the principle and end of the Christian's life. He lives in us by his Spirit, and we live to him in all we do, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21).

Christ will appear again. He is now hid but he will appear in all the grandeur of God's glory.

PRINCIPLE: On the occasion that Christ appears God expects us to celebrate our life in Christ.

APPLICATION: Do we look forward to Christ's coming to take us to himself? Should we not set our affections upon that world and live above this world? What is there here to make us fond of this age? A true Christian's heart draws to eternity. Our Lord is there, our home is there, our wealth is there. Since our hope is there, we will be there for ever.

This is the point when the believer will receive ultimate sanctification. Ultimate sanctification involves a new body and a soul separated from sin and the capacity to sin.

The best is yet ahead for the Christian. Meanwhile we should set our hearts on things above. We need to cultivate a taste for eternity and fellowship with God. We cultivate that taste by study of God's Word. Many have lost their appetite for the Word of God. When that happens, we are headed for spiritual disaster.

At the coming of Christ we hope for the perfection of our happiness.

"then you also will appear with Him in glory"

When Christ comes, we shall then appear with him in glory. It will be his glory to have his redeemed with him; he will come to be glorified in his saints (II Th. 1:10). It will be our glory to come with him and be with him for ever. At the Christ's coming there will be a general meeting of all the saints. Those whose life are now hidden with Christ shall then appear with Christ in that glory which he himself enjoys (Jn. 17:24).

The word "then" shows that God links us to Christ's coming. Christianity is not a religion but a

relationship. God establishes that relationship by positional truth. That is why when Jesus comes we will link to him.

When Jesus comes he will glorify the saints. As John proclaims it, "We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (i.e., believers will be glorified as He is glorified; I John 3:2; cf. I Cor. 13:12; Col. 1:27). Paul adds a new point to the believers' focal point of watchfulness: we should look upward to Christ's sway over us in time and also forward to His coming for us in the clouds.

We are united to him now but then we will share his manifested glory (splendor). "Glory" describes eternity. There will be no regrets in God's presence. We will experience no shame in the presence of God because of our position with Christ.

PRINCIPLE: The destiny of the Christian is not the grave but fellowship with the Lord of glory.

APPLICATION: The final resting place of the Christian is not the grave or crematorium. We will enjoy the fully manifested glory of Jesus Christ in eternity. We now fellowship with him spiritually, then we will fellowship with him in his physical presence.

Colossians 3:5

"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."

This verse begins the practical section of the epistle. Imperatives abound. This is a turning point of huge importance at this juncture in Colossians.

Paul builds his epistles on the same construct. The epistles do not vary much from this format. First, he lays a substructure of positional truth. Doctrine always comes first. Then the letter concludes with a superstructure of plain imperative of practical importance. These imperatives deal with both attitudes and behavior.

Before we do we must believe. First it is doctrine, then deed. First it is belief, then behavior. If our belief does not affect our behavior then we have a flawed belief. First it is creed, then conduct. If our conduct does not match our creed there is something wrong. First it is principles, then it is practice. First revelation, then responsibility. The last

two chapters are given over to lucid, crisp, terse, relevant and stinging imperatives.

PRINCIPLE: Our condition is predicated upon our position.

APPLICATION: Our position is the result of justification. Our condition is the result of our position. Our position is God's responsibility. Our condition is our responsibility.

We can do nothing about our position other than to accept it by faith. We can do something about our condition. However, our condition is predicated upon our position. We need to bring our condition into alignment with our position.

God wants us to put to death five areas that could attack our lives. If the goal of the Christian life is to bring our position into our experience, we should put five to death. In our position we are dead with Christ but God wants us to make a corpse of specific sin. If we do this, spirituality will flourish.

We died with Christ (3:3). How can kill what is already dead?

The members of our body are not evil in themselves as the Gnostics believed.

Verses 5-12 describe how we are to deal with the engine in us that produces sin: v. 5, "put to death" the capacity to sin; v. 9, strip off the old man; and in vv. 10 and 12, put on the new man in order to represent the life of Christ. The imagery moves from death to takes clothes on and off.

"Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth"

"Therefore" -- on the basis of your positional truth (1:1-3:4) "put to death" the evil forces that pull you down. This paragraph extends from verse 5 to verse 11. In these verses we are to "put to death," "put on" (v.10), "put off" (v.9). These are not suggestions; they are commands.

The great obstacle to living for the "things above" is our "members which are on the earth" -- the capacity within us which causes us to sin (Rom. 7:24). They are the corrupt desires of the mind that lead us away from God. God wants us to "put to death" or kill these members as we would kill a

fly. God wants us to put out of commission the strength of sin in our lives.

"Put to death" means to cease completely from activity, with the implication of extreme measures taken to guarantee such a cessation -- to stop completely, to cease completely.

God charges us with a mandate to radically deny the self-centered life. The Greek tense suggests decisive and urgent action. Since God has already done this by our co-death in Christ, we are now to make it part of our experience. We are to count it true in our experience (Rom. 6:5-14).

Metaphorically, "put to death" means to neutralize the tendency toward committing a given sin. When we confess a given sin, we neutralize that particular sin. That is the start of the process of neutralization. Another way to neutralize sin is the displacement of sin with a principle from the Word. When we do this we displace the temptation toward that sin with a principle from God's Word.

When a person becomes a Christian something radical happens to him. Verse three announces that we "died" with Christ. We cannot continue to live as we have in the past. Our history as a non-Christian has come to a close; God has made us a "new creation" (II Cor. 5:17). We are not the old person made over; we have the life of God resident within us now. God expects us to put away the old life. God does not want us to go on living as if nothing radical happened to our sin. Everything we say and do is either an asset or a liability to the cause of Christ. We are either a credit to Christ or a disgrace.

"Your members which are on the earth" is a contrast to the "things above" (3:1,2). These members are the sinful tendencies of our sinful nature (2:13). We cannot live like we did because we are new creations in Christ (II Cor. 5:17). The word "members" means the facets or faculties of our person. These faculties rule us. Our lusts pull us down. Cf Rom. 6:13; 8:13.

God wants us to kill off base inclinations, these wicked propensities that come from the flesh.

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to make a clean-cut break with sin.

APPLICATION: God commands us to make a clean-cut break from sin. God demands a holy life. Salvation is free but after you become a Christian, God expects some returns -- a holy life. He is gratified to see his children walk in loving obedience to his Word.

When a person becomes saved they are saved from something. "I am saved from hell." Yes, but what are you presently being saved from? II Tim. 2:19; Tit. 2:11-13; Mt 16:24. The Bible makes clear what is right and wrong, dirty and clean. We shortchange God when we walk in sin.

When we "put to death" the force that gives rise to sin, we must do it on the basis of what Christ did on the cross. We must execute our position (dead to sins in Christ) to the particular sins we commit as Christians. God has sentenced the things of verse 5 to death; we are the executioners.

God warns against five sins. Of the five, the fifth ("covetousness") can go to church and is rather fashionable. Mark the first of these five sins.

"fornication"

The Greek word for "fornication" is *porneia* from which we get the English pornography. It means to engage in sexual immorality of any kind, often with the implication of prostitution -- to engage in illicit sex, to commit fornication, sexual immorality. It means any sexually evil activity. This term includes both fornication and adultery. "Fornication" is both an attitude and an overt sin.

The heathen temples of Colosse were filled with illicit sexual activity of all kind. They committed illicit sex in the name of religion. They would worship Ishtar (fertility deity; goddess of love) or Aphrodite. That is another name for Easter where they worshipped sex and fertility. The bunny is fertile. "Eggs" has to do with fertility.

On another holiday they would worship Demeter (goddess of the harvest and fertility). The Phallic cult revolved around worship of sex. You can see why the whole city was just about 100% in favor of this! All the Christians did this before they received Christ at each holiday. This is the way they worshipped their gods. It is not surprising that the Colossian church was pulled in this direction.

The New Testament uses "fornication" in a number of shades of meaning. "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife!" (II Cor. 5:1). This young man was having sex with his step-mother. Corinth was the Paris of antiquity. It was notorious for its wickedness. Yet here was a case in the church that even offended the loose standards of Corinth -- "that one should have his father's wife."

This man was living in sin with his step-mother and the church treated it indifferently! The situation was too touchy. He may have had relatives in the church. Or, maybe they had too much money. When word got to Paul he exposed the whole thing.

"Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (I Cor. 6:13). Our body belongs to the Lord (Rom. 12:1), not ourselves. God wants us to have a clean, healthy body. The Holy Spirit does not live in a dirty house. Our Heavenly Guest likes clean accommodations (6:16; 6:18,19).

"Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (I Cor. 6:18). "Flee" means to become a fugitive. Run away from fornication. Don't play with it. This is a warning to the saints.

The Bible plainly declares that immorality is sinful. It is not a debatable issue in the Bible. There are no two sides to the question. There are no extenuating circumstances that make it right (Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; I Thes 4:3).

The New Testament uses "fornication" and "adultery" six times in the same verse; 20 times "fornication" stands by itself.

There are 82 warnings in the New Testament against immorality of one kind or another. "Fornication" occurs 34 times in the Bible, 26 times in the New Testament. Of the 8 times it occurs in the Old Testament it is invariably figurative, referring to the apostasy of Israel. Jehovah was the husband of Israel. Whenever Israel worshipped idols they committed fornication.

PRINCIPLE: Victory over fornication comes by fleeing from it.

APPLICATION: "Fornication" is a plague in High Schools and Universities and other parts of our society. Immorality does not begin in High School any more; it begins in Grade School.

The church is not exempt either. Immorality is so common in society it finds its way into the church as well.

Immorality appeals to people no matter what language they speak, what their educational background or their economical status. It is rampant on every continent as seen in the AIDS epidemic.

It is not necessary to take lessons to be immoral. All we need to do is do what comes naturally. Barnyard morality is the standard for our day. It is debatable where there is such a thing as morality at all. Is it right to have premarital sexual intercourse? This is not debatable from the Bible. God has spoken; it is a closed issue.

The sin of fornication is so powerful that we cannot conquer it by will power. The only way we can gain victory over it is to not put ourselves in situations where we will be tempted by it.

We live in a society where nothing is right or wrong. It just depends on the context. Immorality is simply a matter of the genes. This is more to be pitied than censored. Nothing is clearly wrong or right with the possible exception of murder. Murder is not too bad if you have sufficient aggravation. We live in a crazy, mixed-up world that has developed a system for condoning sin.

"uncleanness"

"Uncleanness" is any substance that is filthy or dirty -- filth, dirt, rubbish. This is the state of moral impurity, especially in relationship to sexual sin -- impurity, immorality, filthiness. "But inside they are full of dead people's bones and all kinds of filth" (Mt 23:27).

This word occurs 10 times in the New Testament. "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves" (Rom 1:24). This describes raw humanity who dabble in raw spiritual sewage of society. They are foul, reeking with sin. This is the seamy side of life.

"Lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced (II Cor 12:21). This is written to saints who fell into sin.

"Uncleanness" is an action; it can be committed; it is more than an attitude. Every form of impurity is involved here (Gal 5:19 Eph 4:19). Just like a hog they dive into the muck and submerge themselves in the mud.

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints" (Eph 5:3). "All" -- whatever form of uncleanness may come our way. We expect this from the lost who are vulgar, profane and blasphemous. This is their atmosphere of operation.

"For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness" (I Thes 4:7).

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to deal decisively with uncleanness on the authority of the Word of God.

APPLICATION: If we remove the Bible from society there is no standard by which to measure right and wrong. We cannot place confidence in a society that turns rapists and murderers back on society with very little time served in jail.

The Bible is the only book that speaks with authority on morality and immorality. Some of the most immoral people who have ever crawled on the face of the earth are in universities. A person can become a brilliant philosopher, surgeon or engineer and remain immoral. Education in itself has no morals. It does not possess a moral standard. It is possible to be a brilliant physicist and a pervert who molests children.

The Bible does not say "wound" uncleanness in our lives. It does not say "cripple" uncleanness. God does not want us to compromise with uncleanness. There is no neutrality or peaceful co-existence with sin.

The third area the Christ is to put to death is "passion."

"passion"

The Greek word for "passion" is pathos from which we get the English "passion." This is an un-

controllable desire, a compulsive desire. It means to suffer and primarily denotes whatever one suffers or experiences in any way; hence, an affection of the mind, a passionate desire. The New Testament uses this word primarily of evil desire (Rom. 1:26).

This word denotes strong desire of any kind, the various kinds being frequently specified by some adjective. The word is used of a good desire in Luke 22:15; Phil. 1:23, and 1 Thes. 2:17 only. Everywhere else the New Testament uses it in a bad sense.

In Rom. 6:12 it refers to those evil desires that are ready to express themselves in bodily activity. These lusts are the natural tendencies towards things evil. They are not necessarily base but they are always inconsistent with the will of God (Rom. 13:14; Gal. 5:16, 24; Eph. 2:3; 2 Pet. 2:18; 1 John 2:16).

Romans 1:26 uses this word of sexual deviation, sexual perversion; I Thes 4.5 of immorality.

PRINCIPLE: Some people are ruled by their desires and make no attempt to rule them.

APPLICATION: When sexual perversion seeps into the church it becomes a scandal. The flesh is just as foul in the Christian as in the non-Christian. If a Christian is not aware of this deadly tendency to sin, he may get caught off guard. Someone in whom he places his confidence might snare him.

People who commit sin often say, "Well, I could not help myself." J. Vernon McGee tells the story of the little boy who was caught with his hand in the cookie jar. When his mother asked him what he was doing he said, "I am fighting temptation." That is not the place to fight temptation.

God assumes that we can conquer compulsive sins. He expects us to execute them.

The fourth sin catalogued in this list of five is "evil desire."

"evil desire"

The word "desire" occurs 35 times in the New Testament and is sometimes translated "lust" (Jn 8:44; Gal 5:24; Eph 2:1-3; I Jn 2:16,17).

This is illicit ("evil") craving. It means to experience strong physical desires, particularly of a sexual nature -- passion, lust, lustful desire. "God gave them over to shameful passions" (Ro 1.26). "Not with lustful desires, like the heathen" (I Th 4.5). "The sinful passions aroused by the Law were at work in our bodies" (Ro 7.5). "They have crucified their sinful nature with its passions and desires" (Gal. 5.24).

"Lust" is the greed to have more. It is to strongly desire, to have what belongs to someone else and/or to engage in an activity that is morally wrong -- to covet, to lust, evil desires.

"I have not coveted anyone's silver, gold, or clothing" (Ac 20.33). "Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully" (Mt 5.28). "Many foolish desires" (I Tim 6.9). "Youthful desires" (II Tim 2.22). "The former desires when you were ignorant" (I Pet. 1.14). "Do not gratify the desires of the body" (Gal. 5.16).

This is strong desire of any kind and is used of a good desire in Luke 22:15; Phil. 1:23, and I Thes. 2:17 only. Everywhere else it conveys a bad sense. In Rom. 6:12 the injunction against letting sin reign in our mortal body to obey the lust thereof refers to those evil desires that are ready to express themselves in bodily activity.

This is a phrase that describes the emotions of the soul, the natural tendency towards things evil. Such lusts are not necessarily base and immoral. They may be refined in character but are evil if inconsistent with the will of God.

In Rom. 7:7, 8 the commandment convicted Paul of sinfulness in his desires for unlawful objects.

PRINCIPLE: The believer lusts when he goes beyond the limits of desire that the Bible authorizes.

APPLICATION: The Spirit of God makes the will of God clear through the Word of God. If we insist on going beyond the Bible in our desire we enter the sphere of lust.

We may know that it is wrong to marry a non-Christian, but if we marry them we go out of bounds from the Bible. We are headed for chastening. The non-Christian crowd can get away with murder but the Christian cannot. The Word of God is the supreme court beyond which there is

no appeal. The Holy Spirit does not like a dirty home in which to dwell.

The fifth and last in the list of five sins we are to put to death is "covetousness."

"and covetousness, which is idolatry"

This word occurs 10 times in the New Testament.

"Covetousness" is the desire to have more. The Greeks defined it as insatiate desire. It can no more satisfy than using a sieve for a container. "Covetousness" is ruthless self-seeking. It is a strong desire to acquire more and more material possessions or to possess more things than other people have. This is all irrespective of need -- greed, avarice, covetousness.

It takes advantage of others from the motivation of greed. This person exploits others. "In this matter, then, no one should do wrong to his brother or take advantage of him" (I Th 4.6). "As something you want to do and not because you are being taken advantage of" (II Cor 9.5).

The New Testament always uses this word in a bad sense in the New Testament (Mk 7:22; Lk 12:15; Rom. 1:29; Eph 5:3; I Thes. 2:5). "They are experts in greed" (2 Pet. 2.14). Gadgets, stuff and things do not make up real life. Often people who have all the stuff have the least of true life. The "good life" is not necessarily good. They have no monopoly of life.

Once we strip off the camouflage of covetousness by confessing it as sin, by identifying it for what it is, then God gives us relief from greed.

PRINCIPLE: The desire to have more and more is a vanity that can never satisfy.

APPLICATION: Some believe that looking in store windows and longing for certain items is covetousness. If you go to a boat show and say "I like that one," that is not covetousness but normal desire. If your neighbor has beautiful wife and you seek her for yourself, that is covetousness.

Satisfaction comes from knowing Christ (Phil. 4:10-13). Knowing him personally will displace your need for more.

"Covetousness" conveys the idea of idolatry. Idolatry is worship of something other than God. It is to love enjoyments over God and to place too

high a value on them. This distorts a proper enjoyment of them. When we have inordinate sorrow and anxiety over their loss, they have become a god to us. Therefore, covetousness is spiritual idolatry.

"Covetousness" is used of material possessions in Luke 12:15; 2 Pet. 2:3; 2 Cor. 9:5. It is also used of sensuality in Eph. 4:19, "greediness" and "covetous practices" in 2 Pet. 2:14.

"Idolatry" is found in 1 Cor. 10:14; Gal. 5:20 and, in the plural, in 1 Pet. 4:3.

The essence of idolatry is the desire to obtain. It is the desire to get something out of God. A covetous person believes he can persuade or even bribe God to give him something. This is the person whose whole life is dominated by the desire to get more. He worships things and not God.

An idolater is a slave to the depraved ideas his idols represent (Gal. 4:8, 9) and thereby, to divers lusts (Tit. 3:3).

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1 Jn 5:21). Some think that this means that you are not to have statues of Buddha in your house. No, this goes beyond statues, pictures, icons that people superstitiously revere; this is an idolatry of the heart -- covetousness.

The tenth commandment reads: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (Ex. 20:17). Think of the kind of houses Israelites lived in during their wandering. They lived in tents! They were not even shanties. Some were able to build better tents than their neighbors. Some tents would leak and they would covet their neighbor's tent. Covetousness also includes his car, snow thrower, television or electric fork!

Covetousness places undue emphasis on the things of life. These people develop a lust pattern. They center their lives around approbation lust, money, success, social life, friends, health, sex, status symbols -- anything but God.

PRINCIPLE: Covetousness is erecting something other than God in his place.

APPLICATION: We often view "covetousness" as a less severe sin than the previous four. In this verse it lives in very bad company.

God lists the first four sins without comment but provides "covetousness" with a short commentary following it -- "which is idolatry." The essence of covetousness is idolatry. We substitute something other than God in his place and worship it.

Colossians 3:6

"Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience."

"Because of these things the wrath of God is coming"

"These things" -- the sins of verse 5. It is due to these things that the wrath of God "is coming." God does not condone sin. We excuse the sins of verse 5 as "vices." God calls them sin.

The verb "is coming" indicates that God's wrath has already begun (John 3:36). The climax of this wrath is final judgment on evil (II Thes. 1:7-9). God also makes it a habit to discipline believers who go astray (Hebrews 12).

These five sins make God angry (Rom. 1:18). This is no divine temper tantrum that seeks to vindictively strike down anyone who disagrees with God. God's wrath is not lightening bolts from heaven but his justice executed upon those who violate his person. God's being is the basis for the moral order of the universe.

"upon the sons of disobedience"

"Sons of disobedience" is not found in some manuscripts.

"Disobedience" is literally the condition of being unpersuadable. This word denotes obstinacy. These are people who obstinately reject the will of God (Rom. 11:30,32; Eph. 2:2; 5:6; Eph. 2:2; 5:6; Heb. 4:6, 11).

This word is always used of disobedience toward God. Those who oppose God, he calls "sons of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2; 5:6). It is used of the disobedience of the Jews in Romans 11:30; Heb 4:6,11 and of all men Rom 11:32.

The disobedient person refuses to believe the truth no matter what evidence God sets before him (Ac 14:2). Therefore God's wrath will come upon them (Jn 3:36; Eph. 5:6).

PRINCIPLE: We reap what we sow; no one escapes the consequences of his sin.

APPLICATION: We have reached a place in society where almost anything goes. We face a tide of evil. Restraints either by law or by public opinion erode away. Moral absolutes are no longer in vogue.

If God is God then he must act consistently with his being. If we violate God we must pay the price. If a non-Christian rejects God's offer of salvation free in Christ, then we must pay for his sins personally.

If a Christian digs his heels against God, then he will suffer chastening (Heb. 12:6). If a Christian becomes obstinate over a period of time, God will step in and discipline him as he did David. After David committed adultery and stayed out of fellowship with God for three years, God brought him up short (II Sam. 12:1-12).

Colossians 3:7

"In which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them."

"In which you yourselves once walked"

The Colossians characteristically committed the five sins of verse 5 before they became Christians. That is why it is crucial to "put them to death." It is imperative that Christians kill, not wound, immorality and covetousness in their lives.

"when you lived in them "

Those were the days Christians walked in the "will of the Gentiles" (I Pet. 4:3). Living in sin was our thought pattern and behavior pattern.

PRINCIPLE: It is difficult to walk in the presence of evil and not fellowship with it.

APPLICATION: It is as difficult to walk across the gumbo mud of the Red River Valley without it sticking to our feet as it is to walk in the presence of evil and not sin. The course of life we chose will determine the patter of life we live. If we walk with those who practice the sins of verse 5 there is a great chance we will revert to those sins again.

We are no longer what we once were. We have come to fellowship with Jesus the Lord. That is why sin does not dominate us anymore (Rom.

6:14). We have a new life and therefore new power.

Christians sin but it is like the difference between falling down on the deck of a ship and falling overboard. There is a big difference between falling into sin and living in sin. That is the difference between sheep and swine. Sheep may fall into the mud but they get out as fast as they can. Mud is adverse to his character.

Colossians 3:8

"But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth."

Now we turn to the sins of the disposition. In verse five we studied the sins of passion. God wants us to deal with the sins of disposition as well as the sins of passion (vv. 8,9).

We now come to the second divine directive of this paragraph. The ugly sins of verse 5 we are to "put to death" but the six sins of verses eight and nine we are to "put off." God wants us to divest ourselves of these six sins. The analogy changes from killing to disrobing.

The sins of these verses are sins of the mouth. These are sins generally acceptable in Christian circles. "These are Christian sins." That is like an "honest thief" or a "chase prostitute." There are no such animals.

"But now"

"But now" sets up a contrast. Verse seven treats the difference between the pre-Christian life and the post life with Christ. This right-about-face word tells us that belief in the cross divides the believer's life. The post cross life is different in that the believer has a new status before God (positional truth). The Christian has a new identity. It is this new identity that is the basis of living the Christian life.

Many non-Christians and even Christians try to live their lives on the basis of personal reformation. Many do indeed make great changes to their behavioral patterns. Many non-Christians make great advances in their lives. A housewife might be a silent alcoholic. At some point she comes to a realization of the damage alcoholism is doing to her family and herself. She takes effective steps to

straighten out her life. This does not have a thing to do with Christ. Many unbelievers change their lives. That does not cut any ice with God.

"Now" -- not by and by. Right now we are to put off the following list of sins immediately.

The list of sins in this category have to do with the mouth. There are two categories of sin in this passage: 1) the sins of the flesh and 2) the sins of the disposition and mouth. Ephesians 2:3,5 distinguish between these two types of sin. II Corinthians 7:1 makes the same distinction, "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." We can compare the "filthiness of the flesh" to Colossians 3:5 and "spirit" to 3:8,9. Most saints do not commit blatant sins of the flesh. However, we are tempted to generate anger or maliciousness.

PRINCIPLE: God puts us to put off the dirty sins of the disposition.

APPLICATION: God expects us to address the sins of the disposition as much as the sins of the flesh. God expects us to dress like a different crowd -- like the family of God. Do you dress the part of Christianity? To dress the part we have to divest ourselves of the old life. Jesus Christ has given us the wardrobe of grace. He expects us to wear it.

God orders us to discard six items of clothing. These are the dirty garments that spoil our lives and testimony.

"you yourselves are to put off all these:"

The words "put off" means to take off like a suit of clothes (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22, 25; Heb. 12:1; James 1:21; I Peter 2:1). These words mean to put off, lay aside, to put away from oneself, cast off. Romans 13:12 uses these words figuratively of works of darkness, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light." The phrase "let us cast off" denotes a definite act.

"Put off" is a lesser word than "put to death" of verse five. "Put off" simply means to disrobe. Acts uses the verb "put off" at the stoning of Stephen, "And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the

feet of a young man named Saul" (7:58). The metaphor is one of divestiture of clothes.

God wants us to put away the sins of this verse like we would take off dirty clothes after working in the yard. The tense indicates that we are to take off the following dirty sins as a definite act. Discard these sins as we would throw dirty clothes in a hamper. Even if the dirty clothes stand up in a corner, leave them there! God wants us to discard the sin of our lives.

The following lists of sins dirty Christian grooming. If the Christian walks around with these sins in this life he is not very presentable to God or others.

"All these" -- put off the whole group of sins; do not select just a couple of them. God wants us to put off all sin of this category (Eph. 4:22-31). We are to put off the category of sins of the tongue.

PRINCIPLE: There is a negative side to Christianity -- we are to put off the hand-me-downs from Adam.

APPLICATION: The only way some of us react under pressure is to vest the sins of the disposition. We get angry, explode in anger, slander, malign, use filthy language and lie. To get out of a bad situation, we lie. If it is at all possible, we will lie our way out of it. This the natural mode of operation for those without Christ. This vestment does not look good on Christians. These garments went out of style when we became Christians. God has given us a new set of clothes.

God wants us to take off the dirty clothes before we put on the new. If we put a new suit coat over greasy jeans our attire has no fashion and we are out of vogue spiritually.

When we dress up with the attire of verses 8 and 9 we masquerade like something we are not. This is not us. God gave us a new suit of clothes (vv. 12-17).

"Anger" is the first of six sins the Christian is to disrobe.

"anger"

"Anger" is chronic resentment, a settled state of anger. Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; 1 Tim. 2:8; Jas. 1:19 use anger of the wrath of man. "Anger" combines both

anger and revenge (sanguinary revenge). It is the animus, the working and fermenting of the mind, the demonstration of strong passion (which may issue in anger or revenge, though it does not necessarily include it). It is the native character, disposition or temper of the mind.

This can be a good virtue because it is used of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 3:5) and God's anger with Israel in the wilderness (Heb. 3:11; 4:3). In John 3:36 it is used of those who disobey the gospel. God purpose in judgment is seen in such passages as Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7; Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 5:9; 12:19; Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Thes. 1:10; 5:9. The focal point in God's anger is discipline of evil.

There is a justified anger. We use justified anger when our anger is objective, not subjective. The Lord Jesus was angry at the Pharisees because of their hard hearts. The problem of good or bad anger revolves around the object of our anger.

PRINCIPLE: Anger originates from jealousy and resentment which produce chain sinning.

APPLICATION: Anger reveals the instability of character. Lack of emotional control comes out of anger.

Jealousy and resentment give birth to many repercussions. These sins lead to chain sinning. Jealousy and resentment short-circuit everything in the soul.

Anger will take revenge on others. Anger often wants to get even. It may hurl threats. When we develop an orientation to anger, everything in the soul gets out of kilter. Anger will attempt to downgrade others because of the desire for revenge. The person may wake up because of guilt and say, "This is not me. Generally, I am a wonderful person." Then he takes another dive into anger throwing a match on a pile of fireworks. Jealousy and resentment produce criticism, nagging, judging, maligning, overt revenge and emotions out of kilter.

Some of us may never become disposed to murder, rape or commit adultery but we may become tempted to express our anger. Yet anger is the prerogative of God. Anger is an attempt to act like God. When we exercise anger we pour poison in our souls. It will sour our spirit.

This is the first article of clothing God wants us to divest. God wants us to get rid of that silent, abiding anger. Something that lasts like this is difficult to eradicate from our lives. It is an inveterate, slow burning, long lasting, smoldering anger which refuses to be pacified. We love to nurse it anger to keep it warm.

This is a person who has been angry so long that anger has become part of his makeup. Anger is the basis of his operations. He views all life from this vantage point. He becomes hostile, belligerent, warlike in his dealings with everyone. His loved ones may have the kindest of intentions toward him but he takes it wrong. He is adverse to everything or anything. It makes no difference whether there has been no factual wrong. He will suppose you are wronging him. His anger is a curved mirror which distorts all his relationships. He carries his hurt because he supposes you are hurting him in everything he does.

Life is too short to nurture hurts. Anger hurts the person exercising anger more than the object of their anger. Frequent fits of anger produce in the soul a propensity toward bitterness and morosity. The mind then becomes ulcerated, peevish and querulous and wounded by the least occasion. Anger is the light that blows out the light of reason.

Prov 16:32, "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city."

Anger feeds anger. It grows upon itself. The anger of one person can make another person angry. It is a contagious emotion.

"Anger" is a manifestation of our sin capacity. It is a dirty shirt that needs removal by confession.

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to deal with our surly disposition.

APPLICATION: Some of us have a proclivity toward bad temper. We are ornery and everyone knows it. We may not like to face it but it is true anyway. We cannot get along with our family or our colleagues at work. Everyone is wrong except us. The people at work know you have a low boiling point. They tease you to watch your angry response. They love to put burrs under your saddle. They especially love to see Christians lose

their cool. They will do anything to exasperate you because they love to see you walk inconsistently to the Christian way of life. Then they say, "That hypocrite is no different from us." Non-Christians do not understand the difference between the "new man" and the "old man" residing in the believer.

The place where we fail the most in anger is in the home. Our favorite verse is "Be you angry!" but that verse continues "and sin not" (Eph. 4:26). If we are going to be angry we can only be angry one day at a time. God does not want the sun to go down while we are angry. We must deal with it quickly in a clean fashion. God does not want us to leave untidy anger lying around. If we are still angry at 10:00 a.m. the next morning we will develop a disposition of anger. We will probably be angry all day.

"Wrath" is the second of six sins to divest like dirty clothes.

"wrath"

"Wrath" is acute explosions of anger (II Cor. 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Eph. 4:31). The word for "wrath" means the mind, the spirit that breathes out, an intense passion of the mind. It is the animus, the working and fermenting of the mind, the demonstration of strong passion which may issue in anger or revenge, though it does not necessarily include it. A wrathful person is a person who deals with difficult situations by explosive outbursts.

We must distinguish wrath from anger. "Anger" is the abiding, settled habit of the mind, the settled purpose of wrath. "Wrath" is the turbulent commotion of the mind, rage. "Anger" is the heat of the fire and "wrath" is the bursting forth in flame. "Anger" is less sudden in its rise but more lasting. "Wrath" is a more agitated condition. It is more of a state of intense anger with outbursts of passionate anger coming from indignation. "Anger" is a more settled and abiding condition of the attitude frequently with a view to taking revenge. It is less sudden in its rise but more lasting in its nature.

"Anger" expresses more inward feeling. It more active than "wrath." "Wrath" may produce revenge but it does not necessarily include it. Characteristically it blazes up quickly and promptly subsides although that may not happen in each case.

"Wrath" is found 18 times in the New Testament (10 of which are in the book of Revelation). Seven passages refer to the wrath of God (Rom. 2:8). Everywhere else the New Testament uses it in a bad sense. "Wrath" and "anger" couple in two places in Revelation (16:19; 19:15).

Since the wrathful person has not taken time to develop his character, he cannot control his anger. Some excuse themselves by saying that they have a "quick temper." This is a rationalization. Christianity should go beyond church attendance; it should affect our daily lives. Christianity should affect both our attitudes and actions.

Others excuse their temper by saying that they have the ability to express themselves and speak their mind. "I am a forward person; I say what I think." A mouth out of control never shows the character of Christianity. It manifests weakness and selfishness.

PRINCIPLE: Temper tantrums are non Christian.

APPLICATION: "Wrath" means turbulent emotions. Some people believe that if they violently display their anger that this is a wonderful and effective way to communicate with other people. They believe that if they throw tantrums they can get their way. Tantrums are just emotions of anger out of whack.

This is a person with a short fuse and vicious temper. A person with a short fuse has great difficulty in hiding his temper. Some people with long fuses give the impression that they are docile and easy going. In reality they are a bomb ticking ready to go off with the right detonator. The detonators are usually jealousy and resentment.

It does not take much for some of us to lose our temper. It would be nice to lose it and not find it again but we always seem to find it again. We are not long tempered but very short tempered. If we have a short fuse it does not take long for us to blow.

What is it that makes you anger than anything else? Write down those areas. Go to God's Word and memorize verses that deal with volatile anger.

Temper tantrums are generally the direct result of frustration. It is the thwarting of a strong desire. This is similar to the child who kicks, stamps his

feet, jumps up and down, bites, screams and throws himself on the floor or holds his breath or sobs hysterically.

It is said of a rattlesnake that it will accidentally bite itself if it gets angry enough. Harboring hate against others often results in biting ourselves. We think we hurt others by holding anger inside but we hurt ourselves the most.

"Malice" is the third sin to put off like dirty clothes.

"malice"

"Malice" is the desire to hurt others. This is badness in quality (opposite of excellence), a vicious character (Rom. 1:29; I Cor. 5:8; 14:20; Eph. 4:31; Tit. 3:3; I Pet. 2:1; 2:16). It is the quality of wickedness, with the implication of that which is harmful and damaging. "Malice" is a feeling of hostility and strong dislike, with a possible implication of desiring to do harm -- "hateful feeling." "Together with every hateful feeling" (Eph 4.31).

"Malice" is the word for bad, badness. This is vice in all its forms. It is a bad heart, a mind oriented to evil and malignity. It is bent on doing harm to other people.

Malice may be concealed anger and wrath. It also may be congealed anger -- anger that is carried along for a period of time. This is an anger that tries to get even after allowing anger to lie in the mind and after explosions of anger. It is the ill-will remaining in the heart. It is poisonous thinking toward others. Malice loves to emit its septic bilge into hurting others. This evil needs to be put off like a dirty garment.

PRINCIPLE: Malice is the desire to hurt others; it is a form of depravity that directs evil at others.

APPLICATION: Malice is the desire to poke someone in the nose or slap them silly. When anger no longer works and tantrums no longer get attention, they turn to behavior patterns which in a depraved sense tries to hurt others. This is like drug addiction where people use substitutes for their frustrations. This is how people become addicted to speed and acid.

A woman who would never think of getting into any form of promiscuity becomes angry at her husband. First she gets angry and then throws

tantrums. That does not work. Now she is desperate. What can she do? The best way she can hurt her husband is to have an affair. She enters into this affair, not because she loves or even likes this person, she does it because she wants to hurt her husband.

The sequence is anger becomes wrath and wrath becomes malice.

"Blasphemy" is the fourth sin to put off like a dirty shirt.

"blasphemy"

We invariably think of blasphemy as taking God's name in vain. In this context it means to speak evil of God's people. We are not to slander one another. As we would not blaspheme God if we are a Christian, so we should not slander fellow Christians. It may take the form of slander or it may simply be gossip.

"Blasphemy" is slander, to revile, to defame, to blaspheme, reviling. It can mean to speak evil of God or man. This term means to speak ill of someone and hurt their name and reputation. It means to speak against someone in such a way as to harm or injure his or her reputation.

Slander is to drop reviling words, calumniate. It abuses people and destroys their good name. Slander loves to defame and insult.

"No one should defame another" Tit 3.2

"And not as I have been reviled" Ro 3:8

"For the name of God is reviled by the Gentiles because of you" Ro 2.24

"Those who went along reviled him" Mt 27.39.

"False witness, reviling" Mt 15.19.

PRINCIPLE: Slander is a form of blasphemy.

APPLICATION: When we attack the character of someone, it is a parallel principle to blasphemy. Blasphemy is an attack on the character of God. Slander is an attack on other people.

We love to whisper things about other people. We love to talk about other people and it makes no difference whether what we say is true or not. When we destroy the reputation of other people, it is slander. Slander is the desire to detract from the

success of others. We can malign either another person or God.

Do you pass on uninformed, second-hand, unauthorized, unproved, invalidated information about people? You do not know whether it is true or false but you pass it along as if it were fact. Are you sure of the information you are passing on? Do you know it for a fact? Would you put it in writing?

We are willing to pass on choice morsels of gossip even though we do not know for sure whether they are true or not. If we peddle false information people will get our number. A dog who will bring a bone will take a bone. People will soon realize that if you gossip about others, you will gossip about them too. "If that is the way she talks about her, she will probably talk that way about me."

There is a tendency to downgrade people we envy. We are not as gifted as they are so we downgrade them to bring them to our level. We love to make less of them to people who respect them.

It is the favorite indoor sport today to diminish Christian workers. It is open season on Christian workers by Christians themselves.

Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth;

Keep watch over the door of my lips (Psalm 141:3).

Once evil words go out we cannot bring them back. Who knows where they will go? You may straighten this out with the Lord but there is no way we can retrieve what we have said. It is like breaking open a feather pillow and let the feathers go to the winds. There is no way to gather them back again. We will account for every word we speak, "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment" (Mt 12:36).

God demands that our lips be a credit to Christ. He does not want us to bring reproach to the name of Christ. This is a reasonable expectation on God's part. God made an enormous investment in us by giving his Son on the cross. He has given us the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. With all this spiritual equipment, he has a right to expect more of us that we are giving him.

We come to the fifth garment we are to put off like a dirty garment.

"filthy language out of your mouth"

A dirty mind produces lewd talk. "Filthy language" is evil speech in the sense of obscene speech, a foul-mouthed person, obscene, shameful speech involving culturally disapproved themes -- vulgar speech, obscene speech, dirty talk. This person's mind has become so deteriorated that he cannot communicate with a proper vocabulary

This is the license of an ungoverned mouth -- obscene language -- but not limited to this.

Some people delight in dirty talk. They love smutty, slimy stories. The more slimy the detail the better they like it.

PRINCIPLE: Filthy language is foul talk including crude and coarse language.

APPLICATION: Many Christians revert to filthy language when frustrated. They become obscene because they do not handle their problems biblically.

Other Christians shame and hurt others by their mouth because of their inability to cope with life biblically.

"out of your mouth"

This phrase may not only refer to "filthy language" but the entire list of sins in verse 8. If so, then the entire list of sins is cataloged as sins of the mouth. "Anger" and "wrath" are forms of this vice when it verbalizes their displeasure. "Blasphemy" for example is slander.

Jesus said that the mouth reveals what is in the heart. How can both bitter and pure waters come out of the same fountain? How can both praise to God and curse of men come out of the same mouth (James 3:10,11)?

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, LORD, my strength and my Redeemer" (Ps. 19:14).

"Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth;

Keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45).

"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:6).

PRINCIPLE: We will bring up in the bucket of our speech everything that is in the well of our hearts.

APPLICATION: We reveal what is in our hearts by what we say. When we open our mouths we reveal our hearts.

"For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. 8 But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:7,8).

Although no man can tame the tongue the Holy Spirit can.

Some of us have too much mouth. We use it when we shouldn't. Our mouth is the last part of our anatomy to submit to the Lord of glory.

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; 4 neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks" (Ephesians 5:3,4).

Colossians 3:9

"Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds."

The last of the six sins God wants us to put off like a dirty garment is lying.

"Do not lie to one another"

A lie is an attempt to communicate what is false with the evident purpose of misleading "What I say is true; I belong to Christ and I do not lie" (Ro 9.1). The Greek term involves more than simply

telling what is not true, for this could occur without an intent to deceive or mislead. Lying, therefore, involves not only the communication of a falsehood but also the intent to deceive.

Lying destroys trust. It violates truth and love.

PRINCIPLE: A lie misleads causing distrust; the cross restores broken relationships.

APPLICATION: How can we reconcile untruth with the Truth himself? If we operate in untruth we misunderstand the relationship between the God of truth and the Christian life.

The profound change at our new birth changed the nature of the Christian's life. This is more than some surface change; it is a radical change of orientation to life. Conversion should change our relationships with people. People should learn to trust us better because we know Christ.

"since you have put off the old man"

The figure of the "old man" is common in Paul's writing (Rom. 6:6; Eph 4:22). It means the whole unregenerate life. This life came from Adam and therefore has corporate associations. We put away our old life and received a new life in Christ. This transformation causes us to embrace the cause of Christ. We therefore renounce lying and commit ourselves to the truth.

The words "put off" mean to take off or strip off clothing -- to undress, to disrobe, stripping off. "He stripped off the clothing of the rulers and authorities and made them a public spectacle" (Col 2.15). This term is used in 2:11 as well. In both 2:15 and 2:11 it refers to the effects of the cross. This word is an intensive double compound (stronger than "put off" of verse 8). This word carries the idea of "strip off from oneself."

The Greek indicates that this stripping off from oneself took place at the cross. That is where the great change took place. This principle is the basis for all spiritual life in the New Testament. God never exhorts us to crucify self. God wants us to utilize the crucifixion of Christ in our conflict with sin. This is the reason we are not to lie.

The words "old man" refer to what belongs to the past, i.e., the believer's former self before his conversion. It is old because it has been superseded by that which is new (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col.

3:9). "Old man" is an idiom for our former person life -- the old or former pattern of behavior. This is in contrast to a new pattern of life given to us in Christ. God wants us to rid ourselves of the old life before Christ (Eph 4.22). The life in the old man is an obsolete mode of life because the Christian has new life in Christ.

"with his deeds"

The word "deeds" denotes a doing, transaction, a deed -- the action of which is looked upon as incomplete and in progress. "Deeds" is function, implying sustained activity and/or responsibility. We have stopped acting upon our old life and we start acting upon our new life.

PRINCIPLE: The basis of putting off the old life is the cross.

APPLICATION: There is negative point of view in Christian living -- we must "put off from" ourselves the deeds of the flesh. Our former outfit was the old corporate self derived from Adam and his sin. This "hand-me-down" from Adam pulls our spirituality down.

Jesus gave us a clean life by the Cross, a whole new suit of clothes. God does not want us to clean the "hand-me-down" clothes. He wants us to divest ourselves from them and "put on" (v.10) a whole new set of clothes.

Colossians 3:10

"And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him."

Since we have put away sin from ourselves and engage fellowship with Christ, this should arm us against sin. This fellowship is based on constructing an edifice of maturity in Christ.

This verse moves on from the negative ("put off," v.9) to the positive ("put on").

"And have put on the new man "

"Put on" means to envelop in, to hide in, to dress. God wants us to put on the character of Christ. He wants us to insinuate ourselves into the new man (Rom. 13:12,14; Gal. 3:27; I Cor. 15:53,54; Eph. 4:24; 6:11).

The "new man" is the regenerate person. There are two Greek words for "new." One means new in species. This is not the term here. This term means new in point of time. If a Christian has allowed sin to dominate his life, he loses the spiritual edifice of his soul. The way to rebuild this edifice is through putting on the new man by renewing knowledge according to the standard of Christ. When we put on the new man we are building an edification complex in our soul.

PRINCIPLE: God wants the Christian to "put on" his new way of life. Conduct needs to conform to new status.

APPLICATION: Every believer is a new man (II Cor. 5:17). We are new because we hold the same status that Jesus does before God. We are new because we possess the life of Christ. We are new because of our position before God.

As of the moment of salvation, we are a new man regardless of our maturity. Yet this passage goes beyond our newness in Christ. This passage deals with development into the character of Christ (Gal. 4:19). This is the application of the Word of God to experience.

The first step in experiencing maturity in Christ is confession of known sin. Our sins have already been judged by Christ on the cross. Our sins can no longer hinder us from advancing toward maturity. Two important dimensions are involved here: 1) principle -- we understand what Christ did for our sins as Christians and 2) the application of that principle (I Jn. 1:9). When we do this we put on the new man. When we judge the "old man" by the cross the "new man" is made operative.

We put on the new principle which is constantly renewed. When we put on the new man there is constant renewal based on confession. The idea is really -- refreshed. We constantly renew ourselves like drinking a cool drink of water when very thirsty. We must constantly drink to refresh our spirituality (Eph 5:26; Jn 7:37-39).

"who is renewed in knowledge "

The word "renewed" means to cause something to become new and different, with the implication of becoming superior. It means to make new, to renew, to cause a change to a previous, preferable

state. This word comes to mean to restore, to bring back, to make new, not in the sense of recent but different. This is the renewal of spiritual power.

A Christian who enters into a pattern of sinning goes into reverse in his Christian development. This is done through going negative to thirst for the Word of God. Once we go into a pattern of retrogression the believer deepens in propensity to sin. When we do this we turn to sin as a substitute for fulfillment.

An ignorant soul cannot live the Christian life (Prov. 19:2). God works upon our behavior by renewing our knowledge. The "new man" needs renewal of knowledge. The Greek word here is knowledge that we experience. It is not enough to leave knowledge in the cranium. Once we apply truth to experience over a number of applications we begin to mature again. At some point our maturity will reach an edification complex.

"Is renewed" is present tense. Day by day victory over sin rests upon renewal in knowledge. We need daily renewed knowledge of Christ, as opposed to heretical teachings (Heb. 6:4-6).

"Yet our spiritual being is renewed day after day" (2 Cor 4.16) -- the daily renewal of "the inward man" (in contrast to the physical frame), i.e., of the renewal of spiritual power.

"But be transformed by the renewal of the mind" (Ro 12.2).

"And put on the new self which is made new in knowledge (Col 3.10).

"To be made new in the spirit of your mind," but more accurately, "to be made new in your spirit and mind" (Eph 4.23).

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to know Jesus experientially and intimately so that when we enter fellowship with him, God will renew our souls.

APPLICATION: Renewal comes from experiential knowledge (insight, experiential knowledge, 1:9; 2:2) of Jesus Christ. This revived state comes from a personal, intimate, deep knowledge of fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Do you have a full, or thorough personal, experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ. Have you experience knowing Jesus as the apostle Paul did

(Phil. 3:10)? Do you have enough discernment about Jesus Christ to know his mind?

"according to the image of Him who created him"

"Image" involves the two ideas of representation and manifestation.

God made man originally in his own image before Adam sinned (Gen. 1:27). Sin defaced that image by sin (Gen. 9:6). However, God renews that image by Christ's work on the cross.

The New Testament uses "image" in a number of senses:

- of the descendants of Adam as bearing his image, 1 Cor. 15:49,
- each a representation derived from the prototype, of subjects relative to things spiritual, Heb. 10:1,
- negatively of the Law as having "a shadow of the good things to come, not the very image of the things," i.e., not the essential and substantial form of them; the contrast has been likened to the difference between a statue and the shadow cast by it of the relations between God the Father, Christ, and man,
- of man as he was created as being a visible representation of God, 1 Cor. 11:7, a being corresponding to the Original; the condition of man as a fallen creature has not entirely effaced the image; he is still suitable to bear responsibility, he still has Godlike qualities, such as love of goodness and beauty, none of which are found in a mere animal; in the Fall man ceased to be a perfect vehicle for the representation of God; God's grace in Christ will yet accomplish more than what Adam lost;
- of regenerate persons, in being moral representations of what God is, Col. 3:10; cp. Eph. 4:24;
- of believers, in their glorified state, not merely as resembling Christ but representing Him, Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; here the perfection is the work of Divine grace; believers are yet to represent, not something like Him, but what He is in Himself, both in His spiritual body and in His moral character;

- of Christ in relation to God, 2 Cor. 4:4, "the image of God," i.e., essentially and absolutely the perfect expression and representation of the Archetype, God the Father; in Col. 1:15, "the image of the invisible God" gives the additional thought suggested by the word "invisible," that Christ is the visible representation and manifestation of God to created beings; the likeness expressed in this manifestation is involved in the essential relations in the Godhead, and is therefore unique and perfect; "he that has seen Me has seen the Father," John 14:9.

"According to" is a prepositional phrase meaning according to the standard. God's standard is Jesus Christ. God's purpose is to make us just like the Lord Jesus. The new man was created to be like God (Eph. 4:24). This is same as the principle of Gal 4:19 -- conformed into the character of Christ.

One day we will be "like him" (I John 3:2).

PRINCIPLE: God holds up Jesus Christ as the standard to which he wants us to conform.

APPLICATION: Is your life day by day becoming more like the Lord Jesus Christ?

Colossians 3:11

"Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all."

"where there is neither Greek nor Jew"

"Where" means "in which state." In Christ there are no class distinctions.

We must remember that people are not born equal. We have different IQ's, physical beauty, strength. There is no such thing as true equality in this life. Members of the human race are not born equal.

Regeneration brings true equality to people. "Where" indicates our position in Christ. This separates us from religion.

PRINCIPLE: Regeneration brings true equality.

APPLICATION: People are not equal physically, mentally or economically in this life. Only the gospel can place people on equal footing with God and others.

Regeneration means new birth. We were born the first time physically. Subsequently, we need to be born spiritually. Have you had a spiritual birth (John 3:3,7)? John 3 tells how to receive spiritual birth -- we must believe that Jesus Christ saves us from our sin (3:16). Are you willing to be born spiritually today?

The terms "Greek" and "Jew" are national differences.

"Greek" -- a person who is a Gentile in view of being a Greek -- Gentile, non-Jew. The Roman world classified a "Greek" as a person who participates in Greek culture and in so doing would speak the Greek language, but not necessarily a person of Greek ethnic background. A "Greek" was equivalent to a civilized person Greek applied to such Gentiles as spoke the Greek language, e.g., Gal. 2:3; 3:28 used in contrast to the "barbarian" (Rom 1:14).

"circumcised nor uncircumcised"

This is religious difference -- no rite of religion can influence the Christian life

"Circumcised" are Jews. "Uncircumcised" -- those who are not Jews.

"barbarian, Scythian"

"Barbarian" and "Scythian" are cultural differences

"Barbarian" properly means one whose speech is rude, or harsh; the word is onomatopoeic, indicating in the sound the uncouth character represented by the repeated syllable "bar-bar." Hence it signified one who speaks a strange or foreign language (I Cor. 14:11).

The "barbarian" came to denote anyone ignorant of Greek or its culture, a person not participating in Greek culture and civilization. The focus is on culture rather than on language (I Cor 14.11). One may render the contrast in Ro 1.14 as "the civilized and the uncivilized."

"Scythians" were uncultured, nomadic people from north of the Black and Caspian seas. They were fierce barbarians who scalped their enemies and used their skulls as drinking cups and offered human sacrifices. They are taken as a specific representative of the barbarian world.

"slave nor free"

These are economic or social distinctions (Gal 3:28).

The "slave" in Roman times was not classified in law as a human being. His master could maim or kill him at his pleasure. The slave had no rights. He did not even have the right of marriage.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus destroys the walls that divide. All distinctions are void in Christ.

APPLICATION: The world of the New Testament, as our day, was full of divisions between people. The Greek looked down on slaves and barbarians and Scythian. The Greek was the aristocrat of the Roman world and lauded it over anyone who was not Greek in his culture.

The Jew looked down on the Gentile.

Regardless of the level of culture or civilization, each ethnic group seems to be able to point to some other group regarded as uncivilized. We cannot excuse racism on the basis of class or background. Jesus sets aside all our education, background, nationality and experience.

Jesus breaks down social barriers. Jesus sets aside national, religious, cultural and social distinctions. God's Word says that there is one place where everyone is equal and that is at the foot of the cross.

There is no ultimate answer to race problems because of the degeneracy of the human being. We can legislate rights but we cannot legislate the heart. Slavery was rampant in Paul's day. In the Devil's world there is no solution to the inequalities of life. There never will be an ultimate solution to the social and racial problems except the gospel.

"but Christ is all and in all"

Christ takes down all walls that divide. There is no difference in condition, education, circumstance, personality. All stand on the same level before God.

Jesus made this happen by his cross. All are equal at the foot of the cross. Whatever we are in other respects, Christ is all to us. God wants us to center around Christ, not our differences. As our new head he breaks down social barriers of pride,

place and circumstance. Race and culture evaporate in his presence. Union with Christ wipes out natural distinctions.

PRINCIPLE: Regardless of religion, nationality, culture or economic status, all Christians should live the transforming life of Christ.

APPLICATION: It comes as a shock to religious people that all they need to be acceptable to God is the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no need for catechism, baptism or joining a church. Christ is all we need for salvation.

Moreover, Christ is all we need for the Christian life. We do not get more of him than we have. He is a person and we do not receive a person on the installment plan (John 1:16). Since we received new life in Christ we received Christ fully. All we need to do is learn to appropriate him personally to our experience (II Cor. 4:10; Phil. 1:20,21).

In our world of division we need to remember that there are no distinctions in the body of Christ.

Colossians 3:12

"Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering"

In this verse we come to the third of seven divine directives in chapter three: "Put on." First the negative, "put off," now the positive "put on." We must discard the old garments before we put on the new. We must put off the behavior of the sinful self and put on the garments of our life in Christ. We put off six garments of the old man and put on eight garments of the new man.

The command to "put on" certain virtues begins with an appeal to our status with God. If the believer is aware of his relationship to God, he can live the Christian life as it should be lived. Paul appeals to three prerogatives to motivate the Colossians: they are "elect," "holy" and "beloved." These are titles God gives to those who know him.

"Therefore"

"Therefore" harks back to verse ten: "put on the new man." Now that we have put on the new man, this is how we are to be outfitted for the new life in Christ. The garments listed in verses 12-14 look good on the our new man. They fit him. They

benefit him. They are characteristics of those with Christ.

It is not enough to "put off" something; we must "put on" something. We must put off the sins of verses 8 and 9, anger, etc. but we must also put on "tender mercies," etc.

We need to deck ourselves out in the new man. The Christian never looks better than when dressed in the garments of the new man.

PRINCIPLE: New character demands new characteristics.

APPLICATION: The logic of commitment to the Lord goes something like this. If we owe all to the Lord, he should have all of us. This is the logic of love. There is a close connection between God's grace and our response to him. Grace and gratitude are from the same word in the Greek. The virtues in the following list root themselves in our election.

"as the elect of God"

The first title to which God appeals to live the Christian life is "elect of God." We are God's elect. This is one of the greatest titles conferred upon the child of God.

"Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?" (Rom. 8:33).

"Knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God" (I Thes. 1:4).

"Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (II Tim. 2:10).

"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:" (I Pet. 1:2).

"Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness" (Titus 1:1).

Election has to do with the plan of God. As long as a believer is alive on earth he is in the plan of God. There is no way for us to get out of the plan of God. We can lose the benefits of God's plan by stepping out of fellowship with God but we can-

not get out of the plan of God. God thinks of us in terms of billions of years.

"Election" is a doctrine many people dislike and some even hate. Can you imagine a Christian hating a Christian doctrine! This is because man is so proud. He wants to totally understand all of God's working. He hates mystery. He refuses to grant God the privilege of selection. The Bible teaches election as plain as our face (as disconcerting as that may be)!. It makes no difference whether we understand election or not, the Bible teaches it. Whether we can harmonize or synchronize election with free will is irrelevant, inconsequential and insignificant; it is true just the same. If we knew everything about anything God teaches then we would be as smart as God.

We cannot get on our theological high horse and say, "I do not believe it." If we say that, then we are saying that we do not believe the Bible. We cannot pick and chose what we want to believe about the Bible. If any part of the Bible is suspect, then it is all suspect. We cannot say "I will believe this about the Bible but not believe that." We believe it all or we believe none of it.

The believer shares the election of Christ. When we learn about our status before God we can then "put on" certain virtues. All believers, good, bad or indifferent are elect. Whether we are spiritual or carnal, mature or immature, God views us as elect.

If you commit some terrible sin, God still views you as elect. You are in the plan of God. Our guilt will tell us that we are no longer a part of the plan of God. The way back into fellowship with God is not through guilt but through understanding our position before God in Christ. An attitude defeated by guilt will not dynamically live the Christian life.

Although we need conviction for our sin, guilt is not the answer to get back into fellowship with God. We need to understand that we are elect, holy and beloved. If we get back into fellowship by what we do, we tend to put our nose in the air and self righteously parade our own effort. We yield to approbation lust.

PRINCIPLE: God appeals for us to live the Christian life on the basis of our election.

APPLICATION: Some people feel that elect, holy and beloved do not refer to every believer. "That cannot refer to the carnal crowd." No, this is not an appeal to great believers. Every believer is elect, holy and beloved. You may be the worst believer who ever lived. You may be the most carnal Christian imaginable. You may have committed sins that shock both yourself and the Christian community. You may have violated all ten commandments. Yet you, in God's eyes, are elect, holy and beloved.

The Bible teaches both the election of God and the free will of man. We cannot harmonize these two doctrines in our finite mind. If we cripple one of these doctrines by the other we have error. If we believe in the election to the exclusion of evangelism, missions and whosoever may come, that is error. That is fatalism. On the other hand, if we believe in the free will of man to the exclusion of election, that is error. God expects us to accept both doctrines at face value. We must believe both equally. To believe one without the other is to become lopsided. Bible balance is to believe both. Almost every Bible doctrine has two sides -- the divine and the human. We go on a tangent if we emphasize one without the other.

Election is a vital doctrine for Christian living as we shall see in successive studies.

God appeals to three titles of the child of God to live the Christian life: "elect of God, holy and beloved." Today we come to the second title.

"holy"

"Holy" means separated unto God. This means that God can take the worst believer and by his grace can turn him into someone who is holy, set apart unto God.

God calls us holy in Hebrews 3:1, "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus."

The word "saint" is the same word as "holy." God calls Christians "saints" (holy) in Colossians 1:2, "To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse." The meaning of holy, saint, sanctification, holiness is set apart.

Hebrews 12:10, "For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness."

Hebrews 12:14, "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord."

I Peter 1:15,16, "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'"

PRINCIPLE: God appeals to our status of being set apart to live the Christian life.

APPLICATION: Some are afraid of the word holy because some people have tried to trademark it into a special meaning of people who are spiritually spooky!

When we receive Christ as our Savior, God sets us apart to himself positionally. Because we belong to God who is set apart and unique, we are to be uniquely like him. Then we become raw material for God to work upon. He will begin to chisel us, sand us down and steel wool us into his likeness. God carries on this work until he makes us exactly like the Lord Jesus. God will complete that work when we Jesus comes again.

The third and last title to which God appeals to live the Christian life is "beloved."

"beloved"

The grammar of the word "beloved" indicates the permanence of God's love when he chose us. This means that we are always the objects of God's love which never changes (Rom. 5:8; 1 John 4:9-11, 19). God is immutable in his love which means that his love never changes toward us. God's love can never change under any circumstance toward us. Our love may wane toward God. As a member of the human race all of us are unstable to some extent.

The Father loves the Son with an infinite amount of love. When we enter into union with Christ, God accepts us in the beloved one (Eph. 1:6). Therefore, the Father loves us with the same amount of love that he has for the Son -- an infinite amount.

"Beloved" means the object of love. No believer has the right to say that "No one loves me."

Jeremiah 31:3, "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love."

Romans 1:7, "To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints."

Romans 5:5, "Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates (proves) His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

PRINCIPLE: God gives endearing titles to God's people so that they will live out their Christian lives on the basis of their prerogatives in Christ.

APPLICATION: Christians should live out what they are. They should live out what is becoming to them. It is becoming to those who hold such titles to be loving towards all men.

If God thinks of Christians with these titles (elect of God, holy, beloved), every Christian ought to think of each other this way.

The list of virtues here are the opposites of the list of vices just denounced. Social sins were just exposed. Now he challenges people to social virtues.

"put on "

"Put on" is the parallel of the preceding "put off." Having removed the clothes (characteristics) of the old man, God wants us to put on the clothes of the new man.

"Put on" means to put on a garment. We cannot put on our position in Christ. It is already on the believer. Our position before God was put on at the point of salvation and it goes on forever. We cannot put on our election. We can only put on our experience based on our election or position.

"Put on" means to develop, function. God orders us to put on eight garments.

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to approximate our daily condition to our heavenly condition.

APPLICATION: God wants us to wear his spiritual garments. It will not do to let these garments hang in the closet of the Word of God. They will not do us any good there. We must wear them.

God expects us to approximate our daily condition to our heavenly condition. He wants us to put off the sins of the disposition but he also wants us to put on the disposition of the new man. It is a robing procedure. We cannot put on the robes of the new man until we have put off the rags of the old man. It is not befitting a Christian to come to God wearing the rags of criticism and bitterness. We cannot put on the robes of praise over those rags. We need spiritual attire for a spiritual walk.

The first garment God with which wants us to clothe ourselves is "tender mercies."

"tender mercies"

General meaning: compassion, pity, tender hearted. Empathy is ability to identify with someone else and put ourselves in their place. "Tender mercies" is putting feeling into action and words.

Literally, "tender mercies" mean bowels of sympathy. The people of the first century believed that emotions originated in the stomach. We have an idiom that says, "I have a feeling in my gut." Do you allow your emotions to feel for others?

Mercy is grace in action. It means to appreciate grace in your soul.

"Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy" (Phil. 2:1).

"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32).

"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous" (1 Pet. 3:8).

God wants us to be full of compassion, full of pity toward others. One of the garments God wants us to clothe ourselves with is the garment of empathy. Is your heart callused toward others? Are you hardhearted toward people who hurt?

Since we are the objects of mercy, we should show mercy (Lk. 6:36).

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to clothe ourselves with empathy.

APPLICATION: Clothes make the man. Clothes in Scripture signify character (Isa. 64:6). The church

will be arrayed in fine linen. The first line of clothing God wants us to don is "mercy."

The world is heartless today. It has become indifferent to suffering and hurt. We have become mechanical in our dealing with others.

We are a number in the information age. Computers do not deal with my name but my number. A computer cannot tell how I feel. I cannot tell the computer that it has made a mistake. It simply sends me a notice of billing and I pay it.

Even our medical doctors run patience through their offices without taking time to know them. Do you have a heart of compassion to those who are around you?

The second line of clothing with which God wants us to don ourselves is "kindness."

"kindness"

Is kindness letting the whole human race run over you, one at a time or by the dozens? No, kindness is generosity, goodness. It is the relaxed attitude when someone says something unkind about us in our presence or behind our back.

Do we become bitter, angry, upset, vindictive, implacable, or hostile when someone says something bad about us? If we have these attitude sins in our mind, we cannot execute kindness. Kindness is a relaxed mental attitude. Kindness does not mind other people's business but stays loose and relaxed and does not hate anyone, seek retaliation, or use revenge tactics.

Kindness is a disposition of courtesy. God does not want to soften our minds but make them tender towards others. Are we considerate of other people who suffer? Do we enthusiastically lift up someone who has fallen low?

Kindness is also practical helpfulness. It is not the person who is overtly sweet. These people may think horrible things about others but they are "sweet!" They may think in terms of bitterness and jealousy and hatred but they imbue sweetness and are kind outwardly.

Kindness manifests compassion. This is action that comes out of empathy. It may take the form of a kind word, an invitation to lunch, an offer to help.

"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another" (Rom. 12:10).

"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 5:32).

"But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared" (Tit. 3:4).

We seldom think of God as kind. We normally think of him as love, just and truth.

PRINCIPLE: Kindness is the manifestation of compassion.

APPLICATION: We may be righteous but we may be not kind, gracious or sympathetic. We might not do things wrong but we may be rigid and not compassionate. Are you kindly disposed toward other believers?

The third article of spiritual clothing that God wants us to put on is "humility."

"humility"

Humility is orientation to the grace of God. It is not self-effacement. We do not have to wear black and carry a solemn expression. We do not have to confirm to tradition. We do not have to look like an undertaker to be humble!

This does not mean to eliminate thinking about yourself. We need to think about ourselves if we are going to operate properly as a human being. If I get up in the morning and come to work without a shower, a shave or combing my hair, am I spiritual? No, I am a nut! Obviously it is not wrong to brush your teeth!

Humility is not self depreciation. It is rather acknowledges that what we have is from God (orientation to grace). We did not earn our salvation.

"Serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews" (Ac 20:19).

"But in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Phil. 2:3).

Humbleness of mind means that we have the right estimation or evaluation of ourselves. Most of us have an exaggerated estimation of our ability, capacity, worth and gift. No one shares such an exalted estimation of us as we ourselves. We over-

rate ourselves. No one else overrates us. We have a tendency to think more highly of ourselves than anyone else.

"For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:21).

It is difficult for us to care about others when we do not have this garment of humbleness of mind. Pride is the last citadel to capitulate to King Jesus. The contrast to humility is self-sufficient arrogance. We estimate ourselves above other people.

The word means lowliness of mind. Jesus applied this term to himself in Matthew 11:29. Humility is the opposite of arrogance.

PRINCIPLE: Humility is orientation to grace.

APPLICATION: There is a divine and a human side to humility. On the divine side, God wants us to accept that fact that we are a finite creature dependent upon God. On the human side, every Christian is of royal lineage, therefore, we should never express arrogance toward each other. In both, humility is a recognition of God's provision of grace in our lives.

The fourth garment of spiritual clothing we are to don is "meekness."

"meekness"

Some people think that it is wrong to have good posture. A humble person stands round shouldered. He makes squeaking noises like a mouse. A humble person never uses strong language; he does not even raise his voice. He is as if he were a little mouse that makes little noises.

Meekness is a term that is difficult to understand because of its usage in the English. The English has lost the essence of its meaning. It is more than gentleness. It carries the idea of strength. Both Moses and Jesus were called meek.

Meekness is inwrought grace. It demonstrates our dependence on God (Gal. 6:1; I Cor. 4:21; II Tim. 2:25; I Pet. 5:5f). Dependence on God spurs meekness in our relationship with fellow believers.

Meekness is a lowly attitude toward others; it is not weakness. Meekness is a tempered character one realizes that what he has is from God. This person is not overbearing.

Jesus is said to be meek in Matthew 11: "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle (meek) and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light"

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22,23).

"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

"Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jam. 1:21).

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom" (Jam. 3:13).

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (I Pet. 3:15).

PRINCIPLE: Meekness is inwrought grace.

APPLICATION: A meek person is someone who understands that who and what they are is from God. Do you acknowledge that everything you are and have is from God?

The fifth garment of spirituality the believer is to "put on" is "longsuffering."

"longsuffering"

Longsuffering is self-restraint. In the face of provocation we hold steady (1:11). Although we have the power to take revenge we do not exercise that power. Although we might resent someone for what they do to us, we choose not to become resentful.

Despair, bitterness or cynicism does not drive the longsuffering person. He does not succumb under duress. He holds self-restraint in the face of provocation. He withholds retaliation and is not prompt to punish others. Longsuffering is patience through long sequential stages of trial.

Longsuffering is associated with hope in I Thes 1:3; mercy in Ro 2:4; I Pet 3:20

God is longsuffering with us (Rom. 2:4; 9:22). Why should not God ask the same of us (James 5:7-11)?

Longsuffering is patience for the long haul. Most of us can suffer for a short time. Few can endure monotony or trial for long. We need to have courage for the great trial and patience for the ongoing trial.

A believer who is longsuffering orients to pressure, adversity and suffering. God can only bless us by suffering in time. God cannot bless us by suffering in eternity because there will be no suffering in eternity.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22,23).

"Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy" (Col. 1:11).

PRINCIPLE: Longsuffering is the capacity to suffer a long time without provocation.

APPLICATION: One of the most difficult character traits to develop is the ability to suffer for a long time. That is one of the hardest things God calls upon to do. Many of us can put up with provocation so much as it is not for very long. God wants us to suffer long both the mischief of men and the rebukes of God's providential working.

God is long suffering with us, why should not we suffer long with others? To suffer for a short time is bearable but to suffer for a long time, that is quite another matter.

Colossians 3:13

"Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."

God adds two more characteristics to demonstrate the social virtues of verse 12 in action. First, "bearing with one another." This is the sixth garment with which the Christian is to clothe himself.

"Bearing with"

God wants us to bear with others with the attitudes of verse 12. The words "bearing with" signify to hold up against a thing and so to bear with (Matt. 17:7; 1 Cor. 4:12; 2 Cor. 11:1, 4, 19, 20; Heb. 13:22, etc.). "Bearing with" means to be patient with, in the sense of enduring possible difficulty (Eph 4.2).

God wants us to have enough character in an adverse situation to hold ourselves back from the temptation to let loose and fly at them. This is noble self-restraint.

"Bear with" means to put up with someone. Bear and forbear. God expects us to lovingly put up with one another. Love gives others latitude. That is how husbands and wives get along together.

PRINCIPLE: Forbearance gives latitude to the failings of other people.

APPLICATION: For human beings to live together there must be latitude. What produces latitude? Love. We would not put up with such behavior with someone else but love enables us to bear with it. We lovingly forbear.

There is no forbearance when there is no love. Where people are rigid and do not give an inch, there is no love. God has not appointed us to remake others. They are not going to change. We must lovingly bear with their personalities or their lack of it. We lovingly put up with idiosyncrasies. They have a few queer quirks but so do we.

If we do not love them there will be nothing but friction. It is the principle that obtains between husbands and wives. They lovingly put up with one another. Certain things get on each other's nerves but love provides the lubrication so that they are able to grant latitude. They overlook great many things because there is love between them. If there is no love, friction will become so abrasive that the marriage will split apart.

We lovingly put up with peculiarities. We all have some quirks; all of us have our peculiarities. But we are so close to our own peculiarities that they do not seem peculiar. We despise in other people the same peculiarities that we have ourselves. We can recognize them in others, but we have a blind spot to them in ourselves. Love enables the wife to

overlook the fact that her husband has two left feet.

Love will enable us to overlook the shortcomings of others. Some people want to oversee everyone; they want to supervise. We are to overlook their frailties and leave them with the Lord. We must give account of ourselves, not our neighbors.

"Bearing with" means not to hate, hurt, gossip about, mind their business or malign anyone. God does not want us to live someone else's life. God has not appointed us to straighten out other people. He has not elected us a bully.

"one another"

We need to learn to live with one another. "One another" means one another of the same kind. This refers to fellow Christians. We need to learn to live with fellow Christians.

PRINCIPLE: Forbearance gives latitude to the failings of other people.

APPLICATION: Forbearance is tolerance. There is a good and a bad tolerance from the Christian point of view. Bad tolerance is to tolerate false doctrine within the body of Christ. It is sad to see this rampant among evangelicals today. It is the Christian duty to be intolerant against that which discounts Jesus or his work upon the cross.

However, the second tolerance is the tolerance of insult or injury against our person. No matter how totally obnoxious the person may be to us, God expects us to bear with them.

The normal tendency when we encounter a legalistic, immature believer is to squash them with truth. This reflex comes when they try to intrude into our space. There is an obvious difference in our spiritual condition. What should be the reaction of the mature believer when this rude, crude person sticks his nose in our business? Bear with him. The mature believer will not fall apart and use revenge tactics. He will not get upset.

The second characteristic that demonstrates social virtue is "forgiving one another." This is the seventh garment with which the Christian is to clothe himself.

"and forgiving"

Forgiveness means to bestow favor unconditionally (divine forgiveness--Eph. 4:32; Col 2:13; 3:13; human forgiveness--Lk. 7:42,43 (debt); II Cor 2:7,10;12:13; Eph. 4:32). "Forgive" means to give graciously, unconditionally, without strings. To forgive is to grace someone.

The mature believer forgives on the basis of his own forgiveness. God forgave us at the point of salvation and we are in the process of being forgiven. So when we forgive it is not forgiveness based on strain. "I am not going to hit this guy in the nose, I am not, I am not!" That is strain. There is no strain when we forgive on the basis of grace.

This is forgiveness on the basis of one's gracious attitude toward an individual (2 Cor 12:13). It carries the idea of good will on the part of the giver -- to give, grant or bestow generously (Gal. 3:18; Rom. 8:32).

"one another"

"One another" is a reciprocal pronoun. We perform this gracious act in the interest of another. This has to do with grace toward the household of faith.

PRINCIPLE: The ability to forgive is God-given.

APPLICATION: One of the most difficult things a Christian is called upon to do is to forgive freely and unconditionally. The more we understand the grace God gave to us the better we will be able to forgive.

"if anyone has a complaint against another"

A complaint is a grievance against someone else. An occasion of complaint implies blame. The complaint may be justified.

A "complaint" is an idiom meaning to accept an allegation against someone for a legal review. It is to bring an accusation against someone. It is an idiom meaning "to accept in accordance with a charge, to accept a complaint in court, to admit a complaint to judgment."

PRINCIPLE: Forgiveness is the freedom from attitudinal sins against others.

APPLICATION: Can you let a complain you have against someone drop? Can you forgive fault

against you? Do you hold grudges? If Christ forgave faults against him, so should we.

Complaint includes complaint about imaginary wrong. It does not mean to complain until forgiveness is asked. Once we are satisfied with their admission of failure, then we will condescend to forgive them. That is the way many operate.

A mature believer is not bitter toward those who wrong him. He is not hostile, implacable. His mind is completely free and relaxed toward other people. He does not retaliate through gossip and maligning. He does not use revenge tactics. Forgiveness means to forget it and therefore not retaliate.

When we forbear, we hold everything back; when we forgive, we hold nothing against. Forbearance refuses to demand what is deserving. Forgiveness gives more than what is deserving. What beautiful balance of attitude!

"even as Christ forgave you"

To forgive as Christ forgave does not mean that the Christian is to become a doormat. It does mean that when we have a complaint against someone, we approach the problem with a certain bearing -- an attitude of forgiveness.

Jesus Christ is the standard for non retaliation. As Christ forgave so we are to forgive. The phrase "even as" indicates the standard.

Jesus could have retaliated against the Scribes and Pharisees, the people who wronged him. He did not seek any form of retaliation against them. He would forget their rejection and insults. He treated them on the basis of his character which was oriented to grace. Grace becomes overtly mercy. He did not attempt to ruin, hurt or destroy them. He did not try to penalize them in any way. He did, however, confront them.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus Christ is the standard for forgiveness.

APPLICATION: God does not want us to wait until people who have hurt us come crawling. He wants us to forgive immediately. If we do not forgive immediately, we will end up very tight people. We will become bitter and upset. We may even become hysterical. We will eventually become vicious and vindictive. We will develop ter-

rible behavior patterns. We may end up screaming and throwing tantrums.

There is no place in the Christian life for hysteria, whiners, cry babies, tantrum tillies or for any type of panic experience. That is why Jesus is the standard to show us how to treat obnoxious people.

We are to forgive as Christ forgave. Christ forgave immediately; he did not go into a tizzy; he did not whine or cry; he did not fall apart. He did not use abnormal behavior patterns seeking revenge to hurt and destroy.

This is the only way to keep from wearing out your transmission. When we get our transmission out of line, distortions will occur. We may end up with illnesses and psychosomatic illnesses. We will develop all sorts of problems. We may get ulcers or break out in rashes. The reason? We are out of kilter. God designed the body to go with the soul. The soul is the transmission of life. When the transmission strips its gears, then our lives do not go anywhere.

We cannot afford to harbor resentment against anyone, anytime for anything. If we forgive as Christ forgave, our mentality will be free from mental attitude sins. If we allow hatred, bitterness, antagonism, vindictiveness, implacability or jealousy to get hold of us, then our soul will become distorted. We are not like Christ in exercising forgiveness.

"so you also must do"

God wants us to follow the pattern of forgiveness Christ set.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus Christ set God's standard for forgiveness for us.

APPLICATION: God wants us to forgive as Christ forgave us (Eph. 4:32). We may resist that idea and say, "I will not." If we develop that attitude then God will by-pass us. God will not use us as long as we maintain that attitude. "But they are wrong; they are at fault." That has nothing to do with it. Do you want God to by-pass you? "No." Then forgive them.

We cannot afford unforgiveness. As long as we are "off limits" with God, God will not use us. God will stick us at the back of the line. An unforgiving spirit is a sour spirit. We can take something for a

sour stomach but forgiveness is the medicine for a sour spirit.

There will always be those people with whom we cannot work out a problem. The Lord Jesus confronted the Pharisees. He did not forgive them for their distortions. He unmasked them. Therefore, there is a place for intolerance. Jesus was intolerant of their sin, sham and hypocrisy.

If Christ forgave what is keeping us from forgiving? Forgiveness means to forget the offense against us. We are not to bring it up to the offender, to constantly harass them with reminders of the hurt of the past is non forgiveness. Some of us not only get hysterical but we get historical! We go back over past injuries again and again. Rehashing the problem indicates there was no forgiveness in the first place.

"Well, I'll forgive, but I'll never forget." Is that the way Christ forgave? How did Christ forgive us? He dismissed and forgot our sins. We must do the same. We must forgive freely, fully, finally. We forgive those who hurt us the same way -- freely. Jesus will never taunt me with my sins; he will not bedevil me with them. God does not say that we are to pray about it; just do it. God does not want us to take it under advisement; just do it.

Colossians 3:14

"But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."

Love is the eighth, final and ultimate grace of the Christian life.

"But above all these things"

God first priority for us is to put on love. Besides the other virtues, put on love which is the last and best virtue. "Love" is the garment that is to be "above all." This means over all. This is the most important characteristic quality for the Christian. Let this be the mark of distinction for the believer. This is the final garment the believer is to put on. It binds all other garments together.

"put on love"

The translators supply "put on" from the previous verse. The emphasis is place on the word "love." Literally it reads, "And above all these things, love." Love is the priority of all the graces in this

list. Love ties all other virtues together and is therefore the most important grace (I Cor 13:13).

PRINCIPLE: Love is the outstanding mark of the Christian (John 13:34,35).

APPLICATION: If we do not love one another no one will know that we belong to Jesus. An outstanding shortcoming of the saints is lack of love. Do you have lack of love for fellow Christians? Why are you so critical of others?

God does not ask us to agree with every other Christian but he does as us to love them. We must learn to lovingly disagree. We can disagree without becoming disagreeable. If we disagree without love then we project ourselves out of the will of God. The price is too high. God will not use us.

Is love the priority grace of your life?

"which is the bond of perfection"

The word "bond" means to bind together, to unite. In this context, "bond" means a girdle. This is not the kind of girdle that redesigns the individual that wears it!! In the first century both men and women wore girdles. Among people of the Near East the final piece of dress was the girdle or sash. This was a universal piece of clothing. This garment held together all other pieces of clothing.

The "bond" was a broad belt that held all clothes in place. Every soldier wore this broad belt to hold his clothes together and a scabbard to hold his sword and other things. There he carried his rations and breastplate. The "bond" or girdle was a foundational garment that holds all garments together. Love holds everything together. Love binds all the graces together and holds them in their proper place as a girdle. Love ties the other graces together like a broad belt or girdle.

Love is unconditional acceptance of others. The Christian is "dearly beloved" (v.12). As people loved by God, we love others. Since we are dear to the heart of God our hearts should be dear toward others. We should love like he loves. We are never more like God than when we forgive someone who trespasses against us out of love.

A person who loves combines all characteristics of the Christian life together. Without love, the characteristics of verses 12 and 13 cannot hold in place. The girdle gave beauty and composure to all the

graces. It also gave ease of movement to perform necessary tasks of life.

"Perfection" is the state of perfection implying the process of maturity. It notes a fulfillment, completion, perfection, an end accomplished as the effect of that process (Heb. 7:11; Lk. 1:45). This word for perfection stresses the actual accomplishment of the end in view (here; Heb. 6:1; Judges 9:16,19; Prov. 11:3; Jer. 2:2). This is maturity in thoughts and behavior (Heb. 6:1). Love binds the characteristics of maturity together in harmony. Love is the perfecting quality. It makes for maturity. It integrates it altogether into a harmonious whole.

PRINCIPLE: Love gives unity to all characteristics of the Christian life and is therefore the mark of maturity.

APPLICATION: How does love tie together such a grace as forgiveness? As long as we have a bitter spirit, an unforgiving spirit, we are out of harmony with God. God will disqualify us from spiritual work. God cannot do spiritual work with unspiritual people. If a grudge, grievance or rankling feeling lurk in our hearts, we do not love (James 3:14).

We cannot nurse a grudge and love at the same time. That is why love ties forgiveness into our lives. Granted, someone snubbed you. Sure, someone hurt you. We are still at fault because forgiveness is not forthcoming. Love will cause us to forgive.

God does not call upon us to love with our own anemic, synthetic, saccharine, imitation love. He calls upon us to love with his love, out of his love. Inevitably we will not approve of other people. If we love with the love God has given us, a love based on the Word of God, we can love unlovely people. This is a love formed by God's Word. It will help us love others who do not see things the way we do.

Colossians 3:15

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful."

"And let the peace of God"

The better manuscripts translate "the peace of God" with "the peace of Christ." If we know

Christ's peace, we know that God accepts us by his grace. This knowledge gives us a disposition of peace. The more the person and work of Christ dominate our thinking, the greater peace the Christian will have in himself. Gratitude for what Christ has done produces harmony of soul.

"Peace" in the Bible has more to do with the ideas of harmony, blessing, welfare of being or inner prosperity. There is a harmony of soul that comes from Christ. The peace of Christ steels our hearts against fretfulness and anxiety (Isa 26:3).

If we worry enough we can have mental collapse, mental exhaustion, a nervous breakdown. The peace of Christ is tailor-made for our minds and hearts (Jn 14:17; 16:33; 20:21; Rom 14:17; 15:13; Gal 5:22,23; Phil 4:6,7). We can worry ourselves into an early grave. God's remedy is his own peace. His peace is internal tranquility in the midst of external turbulence. God's peace will enable us to sit down on the inside. It will enable us to come to rest. We will experience freedom from agitation and concern. We will not become exercised about everything.

PRINCIPLE: Harmony of soul comes from an understand of the person and work of Christ.

APPLICATION: We may say, "It is my temperament to worry; I am just made that way." God's peace will enable us to relax on the inside.

We fret. We let circumstances or people or both to get under our skin. "She gets into my hair." "He gets under my skin." When we worry, we take our case out of the hands of the Lord (Ps 37:1; Heb 13:20; II Thes. 3:16; I Thes 5:23). By that, we declare that we know better than he does how to handle our problems. We say in effect, "I am smarter than God. I know how to handle my problems better than he does. I am going to work my way out of this problem."

Every problem we have ever had the Lord has been faithful (I Cor. 10:13). In every dilemma, in every problem that we have faced, he has been faithful. After the problem we say, "What a fool I was for worrying." We waste so much time worry when we could put it in the hands of God. Yet it takes a toll on our nervous system.

An understanding of the sovereignty of God in our problem brings harmony of soul.

"rule in your hearts"

To "rule" is an athletic term meaning to act as an umpire. In ancient Greece the umpire presided over the Olympic games and the Isthmian games. He discerned the athlete's qualification to take part in the games. He determined whether the winner violated any rules during the contest. He enforced the rules and awarded the prizes.

The Christian is to let the peace of Christ arbitrate or decide all matters in his heart. The peace of Christ should direct, control or rule in our hearts. This peace gives us correct judgment and decision when we let God's rule govern our lives. If we let Christ's peace rule and govern it will produce peace in our hearts.

Baseball players are fully aware of that man in black standing behind the catcher. He rules the game; he calls the plays and presides over the game. He calls balls and strikes. He knows where the strike zone is. God wants our hearts to act like an umpire.

The human spirit that feeds upon the Word of God calls the balls and strikes of the believer's life. The umpire is the human spirit filled with the Word of God. This allows the believer to operate with discernment. When a believer operates with discernment he has the peace of Christ.

PRINCIPLE: The peace of Christ derived from the Word of God arbitrates or decides all matters in the heart of the believer.

APPLICATION: One of the outstanding sins of the Christian is worry. We worry needlessly. Worry does no good. We know we should not worry; we know it will not help the situation yet we persist in our worry. Some of us worry about everything: big, medium or small. We apparently enjoy it. Why pray when you can worry? We worry about things that will never happen. We worry that they might happen. Some of us worry about things that never happened! We try to justify our worry with the rationalization that "Everyone does it."

There is a divine remedy for worry (Philippians 4:6,7). This is a fringe benefit of having the "peace of Christ." We can let the peace of Christ referee in our hearts. Who is in charge of the game? Who is in charge of our hearts? The referee of the peace of Christ.

Every time we worry, we doubt God. That is a sin. God wants to free us from carking, corroding care. He wants us to understand from the Word of God the provision God made for us in Christ.

"to which also you were called "

God calls us to peace. This is our calling. This is personal peace, not peace between nations. This peace is a calmness of soul even though great trial is pressing upon us.

The peace of Christ should be the arbitrating factor in our souls because God has called us to peace. God has called us into a life of Christ whereby he blesses us by who and what Christ is.

"To which" is literally "into which." At a point of time God called us into the body of Christ whereby he graces us with the blessings of positional truth. At the point of our salvation God provides everything we need for the Christian life.

"Called" doubles for the idea of election. At a point of time God enters us into union with Christ. Jesus Christ is the key to our election. From eternity God elected him to deal with the problems of the human race (Eph. 1:4,5). One of the things God does for us at our salvation is to place us into a status whereby we share his election.

"in one body"

The one body simply recognizes that all believers are in the church. They are all in the body of Christ. The body is a technical term for all believers in the church age. Here the body indicates action and service. Every believer is in full time Christian service.

PRINCIPLE: God has called us to peace.

APPLICATION: It is obvious that Christians do not possess their possessions. We do not experience the peace that God wants to give us. Yet this is our calling. It is of no use to say, "But if you knew my wife, she is so horrible." "If you knew my boss, he is a monster." Circumstances do not play a part in the peace of God.

In spite of obstacles, the peace of Christ is adequate. Therefore, there is no justification for statements such as "If you knew the pressure I am under at work all day" or, "If you knew the kind of relatives I have to deal with."

"and be thankful"

The Greek says "become thankful." It does not mean to "be" something; it means to become something that we were not before. "Become" indicates that the Colossians were not thankful before this challenge from Paul.

Every believer should have an attitude of thanksgiving no matter what happens. Adversity is a test to see whether we are a slave to our circumstances or whether the circumstances are a slave to us. If we have inner joy where all systems are go, then there is no disaster, failure, problem or catastrophe for which we could not be thankful.

The peace of Christ enables us to be thankful for everything. The plan of God converts everything into blessing. This is the normal Christian life. It is abnormal to fall apart, to live in a state of panic, to sublimate. The plan of God stabilizes our orientation in life.

Thankfulness occurs throughout the Word of God. Why? The Christian knows that he neither earns nor deserves anything from God. Everything we have is of God's grace. We do not deserve food on the table or the roof over our heads. They are both gifts from God.

Thankfulness relates to our capacity of soul. A person with little capacity of soul has little capacity to give God thanks. If we do not appreciate fully the work of Christ, how can we give thanks properly for it? The key to thanksgiving is the ability to understand the blessings God has bestowed upon us.

PRINCIPLE: Adversity is a test of our soul to see whether we are free from the circumstances of life.

APPLICATION: When God asks us to give thanks he is not asking us to pray about it. He does not say "Try to be thankful." He says, "Become thankful" (Ps. 92:1; 106:1; I Thes. 5:18). We have a solid foundation for giving thanks because he has done so much for us (Eph 5:20).

A common complaint among parents is that their children do not show appreciation for what they have been given. When we recall our childhood, we did not appreciate our parents either. Children today are no different. They are not thankful for what they have. Children have little capacity to understand what their parents have done for

them. God can say, "My children do not appreciate what I have done for them. They seldom give thanks for what they have." This is an issue of our maturity in Christ.

In your daily devotions, do you make it a practice to give thanks to God every day? God wants us to say, "Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul, for making me whole, for sustaining me every day."

Colossians 3:16

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you"

This is the only occurrence of the phrase "the word of Christ" in the New Testament. The normal way the New Testament phrases the idea of the Bible is "the word of the Lord" or "the word of God."

Note the word "let." The word of Christ is ready and willing to dwell in us. The only issue that remains is our volition. The word will indwell us if we let it. God manufactures the word of Christ in our hearts.

The word "dwell" means to keep house. We should live in the Word of God like we live in our homes. We are familiar with our home where all the closets are, where we have items stored. We must thoroughly acquaint ourselves with the Word. The Word should become so familiar to us that we know it like the back of our hand. The idea is to let the Word of God dwell inside and live at home in our lives. The Word of God needs to inhabit us. This is more than just reading the Bible.

God wants us to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts (v. 15) and the Word of Christ dwell in our hearts.

Some treat the Word of God like a rabbit's foot or charm. We use it like a fetish. We cannot use the Bible that way. We cannot rub the Bible on warts and they disappear. We cannot flip the pages of the Bible and blindly put our finger on a verse and claim it. The Bible is no prayer wheel or magic book. We must systematically study the Bible and memorize pertinent verses to deal with weak ar-

eas of our Christian life (Deut. 6:6; 11:18; Josh. 1:8; Job 22:21,22; 23:12; Ps. 1:2; 119:9,11; Jer 15:16).

There are some believers who think that when they get into a jam all they have to do is pray "Oh Lord, help me." Others think that all they need to do is put their finger on a Bible verse and God will lead them. They give glowing testimonies of how in a time of duress they flipped open their Bible and put their finger on a verse that helped them. The odds of doing that are about as good as loaded dice in a crap game.

PRINCIPLE: The Word of God needs to find lodgment in our souls.

APPLICATION: If we spent as much time in the Word of God as we do in the newspaper, just think how much we would know of God's will for our lives! We might know how many robberies and murders took place in our city for that week but what difference does that make in our lives? We might be better off if we did not know.

If we generate a serious attitude about letting the Word of God dwell in our lives, we will be richer and our character will grow stronger. Our individual lives will change and our homes will be better.

You may say, "But I do not understand what I read in the Bible." We must work at it. Gradually we will retain more. We do not learn to ride a bicycle the first time we get on it. Neither do we learn the Bible without effort. It takes time, effort and dedication. The results will gratify our souls.

Most of us do not take the Word of God seriously. We play at it. We do not mark our Bible or memorize it. We do not make it a part of us. There are people who memorize hundreds of plays for a football game. Yet if we memorize a verse of Scripture we want a medal!

"richly in all wisdom"

It is not enough to let the Word of God dwell in us; we must let it dwell richly, not meagerly. "Richly" is an idiom for abundantly -- abundantly to the point of wealth. Many people have a poor grasp of the "word of Christ." We are to let the Word of God dwell profusely and qualitatively in us. God wants us to fully assimilate the Word. He wants us to personally assimilate it. If we have a

small tank and a big car, we have to stop at every gas station we pass. We cannot fill up our tank once and that is it for the rest of the life of the car! We will stall on the freeway.

"Wisdom" has to do with the application of truth. It is not enough to treat the Word of God theoretically. When the Word of God dwells in us it makes us wise in the way God does things. It means to move truth from the mind into experience.

PRINCIPLE: God bases the Christian life on the tandem of truth and the application of truth.

APPLICATION: If a car is going to move it needs gas in the tank. The tank for the Christian is the human spirit. If the human spirit runs without intake of the Word of God it becomes skinny and anemic. When the tank is empty the car is not operational. If there is gas in the spiritual tank of the believer, he can pump it into his experience. The Word of God does no good if the Christian does not transfer it into his life.

We fall apart in a jam when we do not apply the Word of God. The Word of God not applied is of no practical use. If we learn the Word of God academically but do not transfer it into our human spirit, it will not do any good.

It is difficult to think in a jam. It is hard to think while we are falling apart. Some students are comatose for most of the semester and 24 hours before their exam they stay up all night drinking ammonia cokes and coffee boning up on the entire semester. They open their blue book and they wonder why their mind goes blank. We cannot learn nearly as well while we are under pressure. The only kind of learning under pressure that is of any benefit is the kind where we end up with knots on our head!

Three words in verse 16 end in "ing:" "teaching," "admonishing" and "singing." Some of us would not know the difference between a participle from a pickle! However, these three participles are the by-products or side-effects of the previous part of the verse. If the Word of God finds lodgment in our souls, then we will teach, admonish and sing. These three characteristics will trend in our lives and will become a pattern. It will not be sporadic or intermittent.

"teaching and admonishing one another "

Paul employed these verbs in 1:28 with the same meaning. Here, however, he adds that we are to do this in music.

"Teaching" has to do with the communication of truth. If we are going to teach we must learn. If we are going to talk we must listen. If we speak we must hear.

"Admonishing" has to do with showing someone else how to execute the Christian life. "Admonishing" means to place in the mind personally. Sometimes the New Testament translates it "warn" (Acts 20:31).

It is our privilege not only to teach others but to warn them. Most of us do not like to become involved in the problems of other people. All of us have a circle of Christian friends to whom we are a blessing (all things being equal). God expects us to warn them graciously when an occasion arises to do so.

Admonish has to do with application. Some people cannot apply Scripture for themselves. They need others to help them. When a person learns to fly, he needs someone there to personally show him how to turn without stalling out. If you stall out things can get quite messy! Admonishing helps another person make application. We do not teach another person how to shoot by saying, "Here is a gun go out and shoot." He must squeeze off the trigger for an accurate shot. It is in application where we hit the target.

Note some "one another" passages of Scripture: Eph 4:32; 5:21; Col. 3:13; I Thes. 5:11; Heb. 10:25; Jas. 5:16; I Pet. 3:8; I Jn. 1:7. Most of us are not aware of our responsibility to other Christians.

"One another" means mutual help in applying truth to experience. We have a responsibility to one another (Gal. 6:10; Heb. 6:10). Most of us know of our obligation to get the gospel out to the non Christian. Few of us know of our obligation to the saint. Are you involved in encouraging a Christian? Who gave you the authority to retire from this? There is no honorable discharge in this work. God has given us a ministry to one another.

PRINCIPLE: God has designed the Christian life in a way that we need others to help us apply Scripture to our experience.

APPLICATION: God wants us to saturate our minds with the Word of God. We have so many rough edges. Many of these areas we inherited from our parents. We cannot get rid of our sharp tongue in our own strength. We are ornery, possess a critical attitude and a bad temper. We wonder why we are not more saintly or why we have such a short fuse. Why is it that we explode so quickly? We do not avail ourselves of the Word of God. The Word of God will operate upon us (Heb. 4:12).

No wonder our minds are corrupt after watching a night of television. After an evening of T.V. we feel as if we need an internal bath. We watch ghastly murders and rapes. We wonder why our Christian lives are so ineffective. We are clean through the Word of God (John 15:3; Ps. 119:9). The Word of God is a spiritual spot remover. We become defiled by day to day life. We need the Word of God to remove the sin in our lives (I Jn. 2:14).

The Lord defeated Satan by the Word of God (Matt. 4:4,7,10). He did not have a scroll of Deuteronomy to read to the devil. He quoted Scripture. When the devil attacks you, you cannot say "Wait a minute, Devil till I find a verse for you. Wait till I go home for my Bible." He will not wait; he will clobber you. You must have a verse right now. We must say like the Lord "It is written...."

We will find that when Satan tempts us we will have the right verse for the right situation. At a time when he tempts us to say something we shouldn't, a verse comes up on the television screen of our soul and we are saved from that sin. We will find that the more of the Word of God we have in our souls the less room there is for unworthy things. Do foul birds make nests in your mind? Saturate your mind with the Word of God.

We need others to encourage us in the application of truth to experience. When I became a Christian a Christian kept challenging me to memorize a verse a day. That did more for my spiritual life than any thing else in my Christian life.

The third result of God's Word finding lodgment in our soul is a song in our heart.

"in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"

It is great to learn truth but we must celebrate it as well. We celebrate it in worship of praise. Truth and the celebration of truth are a great combination of praise.

Two operating principles must guide Christian music: content and worship.

"Psalms" has to do with content of Scriptural truth. The New Testament uses "Psalms" 7 times. Four times of the book of Psalms and three times of the Psalms in general (I Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19 and here). "Psalms" were probably the Psalms of the Old Testament.

"Hymns" was originally a heathen word for a song for a god or hero after death. The New Testament confines the meaning to direct address of praise and glory to the living God. However, a Psalm might commemorate the mercies and blessing God bestows. A hymn was a song of praise of newly composed texts directed toward Christ.

"Spiritual songs" are compatible with Scripture but they are not Scripture itself. These songs do not state their lyrics in biblical language; they do not quote the Bible. These songs were the most general of the three comprising all kinds of songs. This passage qualifies these songs by the term "spiritual." These songs relate to the spiritual dimension.

God presents in this passage considerable latitude in Christian music. The latitude is set forth in three categories. The first category is psalms that are praises addressed to God. The second category is hymns that contain testimony. "Spiritual songs" is the third category.

The Old Testament was filled with both vocal and instrumental music. David used musical instruments in worship. We do not read much about music in the New Testament. There is nothing about music in the Acts of the Apostles. Some churches prohibit musical instruments but the New Testament does not prohibit musical instruments. There is nothing in the Bible that prohibits a piano, a sound system or carpet on the floor.

PRINCIPLE: Worship by music contains two elements: content and heart.

APPLICATION: All Christian music must contain a message. Much Christian music is subjective if not sentimental. This music expresses only personal experience and not the truth of Scripture. Often these experiences do not correspond to reality.

The weight of music will differ; the musical value will not be the same. God has a place for different styles of music.

This section of Colossians has its parallel in Ephesians 5:18-20. This Ephesian passage indicates that a genuine song in the heart comes from the filling of the Spirit. To be filled with the Spirit produces the same results as being filled with the Word.

"singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

We do not truly sing until we sing with grace in our hearts. This is the song of the soul. The person may not be able to sing very well but a song breaks out in the heart. That is why the Bible says "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord." Some can carry a tune and others cannot but the point is the expression of the heart. Maybe that is why God allows for "noise" sung unto him!!

If we have no grace in our hearts we cannot sing unto the Lord. A non Christian cannot sing with grace in their hearts to the Lord. A Christian with little understanding of God's provisions cannot sing with grace in their hearts to the Lord (Eph. 5:19). Some Christians sound like crippled crows when they sing. God makes crows as well as canaries. Some of us sing best on the inside.

It is not enough to sing true content. God wants us to sing with our hearts as well as our lips.

"With grace" -- we need the help of God's grace to sing out of the heart.

PRINCIPLE: Grace is the basis of the Christian's song.

APPLICATION: We can tell much about an individual or a church by their singing. We can tell not only by what they sing but how they sing. We can tell by the singing whether the Bible is honored or whether the Savior is preached. If we want John Westley's preaching we must have Charles Westley's music. If we want D. L. Moody's preaching we must have Ira Sankey's music. If we want Billy Graham's preaching we must have Cliff Bar-

row's music. These things go together. Dead music goes with dead preaching. A recognition of the grace of God's provisions is the basis of true singing.

"But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth" (Jas. 3:14). If we have a bitter, envious, striving attitude toward someone else we cannot sing with grace in our hearts. A heart full of animosity and criticism cannot sing. We have gone sour and our heart goes off key.

Colossians 3:17

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

"And whatever you do in word or deed"

There is an implied imperative in that everything we do it is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus.

There is no division between the spiritual and secular. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31). Everything we do at home, play or work, God wants us to do it for his glory.

"do all in the name of the Lord Jesus"

Whatever we do whether by lip or life, creed or conduct, we do it with a given norm in mind.

The "name of the Lord Jesus" means under the authority and approval of Jesus.

Everything we do must fall under the motivation of the approval of Jesus. This will clarify any doubt of selfishness in our service to him. The approval of Jesus gives dignity and purpose to all that we do for him.

What is in the name of Jesus? When a product carries a name it indicates the standards of quality. If we hear "Ford" that is one standard. If we hear "Lincoln" that is another standard. We make purchases by the name of the product (if we can afford it!). The name makes the difference.

In Christianity it is the name of the Lord Jesus that makes the difference. He is the standard by which we measure life. Jesus never had to recall anything he ever said. He never confessed any act of aber-

rance. His name stands for integrity, quality, perfection and honesty. So whatever we do, it must be done in his name.

"Do all" -- nothing is exempt from this standard of action. God does not want us to treat anything as insignificant or without value. The smallest act has significance in the Christian life. Nothing is too small. Nothing is too ordinary. God does not want us to treat anything we do indifferently.

Notice that Paul does not give a rule for every situation. He gives an overarching principle. He says simply that we measure every motive on the norm of the criterion of Christ. Whatever we do at work or home or play, if we do it with this standard then it will have blessed eternal consequence.

PRINCIPLE: Jesus is the norm by which we measure the direction of our lives. Everything we say and do are to be put under the Lordship of Christ.

APPLICATION: If God were to give you a report card on the motives that compel your deeds, what grade would God give you? Living for the name of the Lord Jesus clarifies our motives.

Each one of us is responsible to live under the name of Christ. There is no abridging this contract out to someone else.

Jesus is the norm for conduct; he is our standard. Everything we do must be done in the authority and strength of Christ. Everything we do is motivated by our relationship to him. Every act can be an act of worship.

God wants us to do all things in the name of our Lord Jesus. My name stands for my person. Our name represents us. Jesus name represents him. Whether we wash dishes, sweep the floor, paint the house or do our job at work, we represent Jesus there. We need to make sure whatever we do it is worthy of his name.

"giving thanks to God the Father through Him"

Three times in three verses (vv. 15, 16, 17) God asks us to give thanks.

The added thought here is that we give thanks through him (Jn. 14:6; Rom.1:8; I Tim. 2:5). There is no way to relate to God except through his son. If

you have never accepted Christ as your Savior you cannot relate to God.

The capacity to give thanks depends upon our recognition of God's grace both provided in the Word and in his acts in our lives. If, for example, we do not recognize the love of God for us, we obviously cannot give thanks for that love. We can emotionally gush from a void of knowledge but that is not true thanksgiving.

The gift is not the important thing but the Giver. Thanksgiving is true love response to someone who loves us. God can provide anything for us. He can provide more than we can ever receive. God never runs out of money, ideas, the capacity to intervene for us. The problem is that we get our eyes on the gift rather than the Giver. A believer properly oriented to God never loses track of the Giver. The gift is almost inconsequential.

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to give thanks on the basis of the Giver rather than the gift.

APPLICATION: Here is the difference between a person who recognizes the Gift rather than the giver. Suppose a girl receives two gifts from two different men. One man gives her a better gift than the other. If she orients to the gift rather than the giver then she will make a great mistake. She will fall for a man who may have less capacity of soul to love her. True biblical thanksgiving always focuses on the Giver rather than the gift. If we focus on the Giver we will have capacity to enjoy the gift no matter what it may be.

Colossians 3:18

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."

Paul now turns to relationships within families. The Bible shows us how to relate within the family. First, the role of the wife. This is not going to be the greatest day for feminists! There are no loopholes for feminists here. This is not a Swiss cheese day!

A couple riding the car had not spoken for some time. Riding Sunday afternoon in the country side the husband spotted two mules and says, "Some of your relatives?" She was equal to the occasion and said, "Yes, on my husband's side!!" Sometimes holy wedlock becomes holy deadlock! The biblical

answer is for the partners in marriage to function in their roles.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands"

We live in an egalitarian age. The assumptions of this philosophy are so strong that it is difficult for people to think objectively outside this system in our culture. The idea of a wife submitting to her husband is foreign to freedom, democracy and any sense of fairness to our generation.

God does not limit this command to the first century because he states it as a principle without qualification. The idea of submission is not derogatory to our persons because Jesus himself submitted himself to the Father (I Cor. 11:3). It obviously does not mean inferiority but merely relates to the function of role. Also, Paul goes back to the principle of divine institution in creation (I Tim. 2:13).

"Submit" is the same word used to express our duty to government officials (Rom. 13:1). "Submission" is an issue of respect (Eph. 5:24,33). Adam was the first in creation and last in transgression (I Tim. 2:13,14). This creation principle is also found in I Cor. 11:3,8,9 where the male is set forth as head of the wife by the will of God. This submission is not to a rigorous tyrant but to her own husband.

The word "submit" was a military term meaning to rank under. In this case the wife is to arrange her life under her husband's. Other uses outside of the husband-wife relation are found in Lk. 2:51; 10:17,20; Rom. 8:7, 20; 10:3; 13:1,5; I Cor. 14:34; 15:27,28; 16:16; Eph. 1:22; 5:24 (the church); Phil. 3:21; Tit. 2:5,9; 3:1; Heb. 2:5; 2:8; I Pet. 2:13, 18; 3:22; 5:5.

The word "submit" does not mean to obey but rather to surrender one's rights or will. The idea of voluntary subordination (e.g. of Jesus to his parents, Lk. 2:51). The word does not convey inferiority of personhood. It means to maintain God's order. It does not connote a misogynist idea of forcing women to make accommodations. This attaches ideas foreign to the meaning of the word and adds more to the meaning of the word that is warranted.

The command "to submit" is based on the positive volition of the wife. Paul is challenging wives to

defer to their husbands. The wife is no slave. She is not to be ordered about by her husband. The Bible views her as a partner (Gen. 2:18-23). She is the husband's complement. They make decisions together.

PRINCIPLE: Role is a matter of position, not person.

APPLICATION: In government authority of role is important for the administration of the country. Even the trinity functions under roles. The Son submits to the Father and the Holy Spirit to the Son.

A woman may have greater IQ or personality. Capacity is not an issue of role. Both male and female hold equal position before God (Gal. 3:28). Role relates to the organization of the family.

A person who exercises their will voluntarily is in a place of power. The wife's ultimate authority is God. If the husband requests her to do something outside of God's will for her, she has the biblical right to reject the husband's request.

She does what she does for the sake of the Lord. She does not submit to avoid a fearful situation such as her husband's anger, silence or criticism. Nor does she submit to her husband for appearance sake; she does it for the Lord. If he beats her or threatens her life, she obeys a greater command to protect her body. She must leave him under that situation because it is the Lord's will that she respect her body.

"as is fitting in the Lord"

The qualification to submission is "as it is fitting in the Lord." The Bible does not command submission under all circumstances. Her first priority is to the Lord. There is an analogy here to government. The Bible limits the wife's obedience to government (Rom. 13:1; Tit. 3:1; I Pet. 2:13) to her priority to God. Scripture does not bind the wife to her husband if he asks her something that disagrees with Scripture.

It is a becoming relation to submit to a husband because it is obedience to the Lord. The word "fitting" means what is proper or right. It is fit; it is right; it is proper. Submission of the wife is self-evident from reason. This is true without appeal to experience. This is essential to social and domestic

order and welfare. There is an order of authority in creation. The Father obeys it. The Son obeys it. All nature observes it.

"In the Lord" -- If you do not like this command, take your complaint to the Lord. Note Ephesians 5:22 "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." How much is the wife to submit? As she would submit to the Lord! If a wife is not submissive to the Lord she will not submit herself to her husband. The ratio is "as to the Lord." The wife may say, "Well, I don't know why I should do this. I am smarter than he is." "So let the wives be to their husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:23). The girl says, "Everything? I think I will stay single!"

PRINCIPLE: It is befitting to God's order of things that a wife fulfill her God-given role.

APPLICATION: Submission does not mean that a woman is not equal to the husband. God addresses the word "submission" to men as well as women. Thus it is not a sexist word in the Word of God. God wants all Christians to submit to one another. Jesus submitted himself to the Father. Therefore, submission has nothing to do with inferiority. If the wife does not uphold and support her husband and recognize his leadership role in God's order, chaos will result.

God makes this command to wives, not husbands! God has his command to the husband in the next verse.

Whether the marriage is good or bad it is still part of God's established order. Both husband and wife enter it with their free will. Freedom is the basis for entering marriage. Ignorance is never an excuse, "I did not know he was such a monster."

The husband is the established authority under the laws of divine order. Any woman thinking of marriage should think twice before she agrees to marry any man. She should ask herself the question, "Do I want to be under this man's authority for life?" She should deceive herself by his superficial handsomeness or scintillating personality. Most girls do not have the judgment to make this decision early in life. She should make sure she knows what he is really like. If she says yes to an emotional child, her life will become intolerable slavery.

Colossians 3:19

"Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them."

God gives both positive and a negative responsibility to the husband in this verse.

Most people feel their marital problems are due to an exceptional misfortune. This is error. It is naive but sincere belief by many.

"Husbands, love your wives "

God never gives leadership the prerogative of authoritarianism. Leadership is never an excuse for brusque neglect or thoughtlessness. The standard for leadership in the home is love.

In this passage Paul puts his finger on the primary role of the husband in marriage. Males are born but men are made. It takes a man to adequately relate to his wife. Every man is ultimately responsible for what his marriage becomes. This responsibility revolves around his primary role -- to give his wife security in his love.

The Greek has three words for love. The first word means to love passionately; sometimes it means to lust. The second word refers to love of affection; this is the love of people who connect as people. The third word for love and the word found in this verse is the love that spends itself for others. It is a love that gives (Eph. 5:25). The hardest thing to give is -- "in."

Notice that this passage does not say "Make love." Sex is an important aspect of love. However, it is not the key to marriage. The key is a love where a husband respects, values, cherishes and honors his wife.

The Greek tense indicates that this love is to be an ongoing attitude and action. We love our wives, not until she says or does something we do not like. God wants us to keep on loving our wives. He wants us to establish a propensity, a trend, a manner of life, a habit of life of loving her.

The role of the husband is to love his wife to such a degree that she feels secure in that love. Jesus loved us with a sacrificial love. He was under no illusions. He saw us for what we were yet he loved us (1 John 3:16). Jesus loved absolutely. His love was without limitation, without condition and without reserve. Love takes the lover out of

himself. Love gives of his interest, time, pleasures, ambitions and friends.

Often husbands give everything but themselves. We cannot rephrase the hymn "Take my wife and let her be!" When we first fell in love we treated our wives with such respect. We rushed her off her feet. We dated her; we bought her flowers; we treated her with respect. What has happened now that you are married for a few years? "Now that the honeymoon is over, let her shift for herself."

How much should the husband love his wife? Eph 5:25. God wants us to love our wives like Jesus loves the church -- he died on the cross for the church. If we do not love our wives enough to die for her we do not love her enough.

PRINCIPLE: The biblical role of the husband is to make the wife feel secure in his love.

APPLICATION: Do you live with your wife as a business partnership? Is that marriage to you? Your children will absorb that cold attitude. They will form their view of marriage from their experience with you. They know that there is no communication or love between you and your wife.

Invariably when husbands and wives do not love each other they make up for it through throwing attention upon the children. That will not make up for the privation in the relationship. Children know the games parents play.

Make a fuss over your wife. Kiss your wife in front of your children. Walk down the street holding hands. We need to work at loving our wives. But we are too busy making a living. We do not court any more. We have bought and paid for her (and we are still making payments!). If we would power up some of the systems we used to win her in the first place, it would make a big difference in our current love for her. We are so self-centered and selfish that we expect our wives to pay attention to us all the time. What do we give in return? When we take each other for granted, then love begins to wither. Withered love is sickly love. It gets increasingly anemic until it dies.

Dad, your boys are going to be the same kind of husband that you are. They will treat their wives in a similar way that you do. They will be a chip

off the old block. Begin loving your wife biblically now.

"and do not be bitter toward them"

Verse 19 expresses the second command negatively. God does not want us to become cross with our wives. He does not want us to resent them. Our wives can be handy scapegoats for our frustrations. It is so easy to shrink from taking responsibility for our own actions. It is easy to blame our wives, "It's her fault."

The verb "bitter" means to embitter, irritate, or to make bitter. It comes from a root meaning to cut, prick; hence it comes to mean something pointed, sharp, pungent to the sense of smell. Then it came to mean painful to the feelings and bitter to the taste. The verb has the idea of provoked to the point of anger and bitterness.

This specific negative command is a vulnerability in men. Men have the tendency, if they are angry about something the wife said or did, to become hard or overbearing. Love will counter this proclivity to harshness.

The New Testament uses the noun "bitter" literally for a spring of water that is bitter or brackish to the taste (James 3:11). James 3:14 describes jealousy as bitter. Hebrews 12:15 quotes Dt. 29:17 to show the harm bitterness can do to the church. Bitterness heads the list of vices in Ephesians 4:31 and is used in the sense of resentment.

Psalms 64:3 uses the word "bitter" for cruel or biting words. It is used of the misery of forsaking God (Jer. 2:19) and of a life of sin (Jer. 4:18).

II Samuel 17:8 uses "bitterness" for the fierceness of disposition. It is used of the Chaldeans "that bitter and hasty nation" (Hab. 1:6). This nation was ready to take offense and act with impetuous fury (Compare Judges 18:25). Deuteronomy 32:32 uses bitterness of the moral depravity of the corrupt Canaanites. Isaiah uses this term of the subversion of the distinction between right and wrong as putting "bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter" (5:20).

Bitterness can lurk in our hearts toward our wives. We resent our wives because they criticize us. They may not respect our thinking or actions. She may not agree with us on a close and dear subject

such as how to discipline the children. You cannot find an answer and become frustrated. As a result you become resentful (Eph 4:31; Hebrews 12:15; James 3:14).

PRINCIPLE: The husband's role is to love his wife in a way that is free from mental attitude sins.

APPLICATION: It is harder to live the Christian life at home than elsewhere. Husband can be more courteous to other women than his wife. Wives can give more deference to other men than their husbands. Familiarity breeds contempt or at least disrespect. We take each other for granted.

How sad that we treat those closest to us with the greatest harshness. God has not called the husband to dominate the wife. God created Eve out of Adam's side (Gen. 2:18). God did not take the woman from man's feet to be trampled upon; nor did he take the woman from his head so that she might dominate him; he took her from his side to be his partner.

Resentment is a serious handicap in the function of marriage. This will cause great unhappiness in the wife. Her unhappiness in turn will cause more unhappiness in the husband. This is two reactions reacting against each other. There will be misery as long as they live if they do not address the attitude of bitterness.

Bitterness means resentment. Resentment withdraws and isolates from the wife.

The reason women criticize and nag is that they do not feel secure in their husband's love. Womanly perseverance comes to the fore. A man comes home and makes some seemingly innocent statement and his wife blows up. This explosion is the symptom and not the cause.

PRINCIPLE: The husband's central role in marriage is to make his wife feel secure in his love no matter if she is a nag.

APPLICATION: It makes no difference if the wife is a nag. A wife with good horse sense never becomes a nag! A wife who is a nag is not female at all. But even if she is a nag, that nagging will never change by bitterness from her husband. Bitterness adds to the confusion.

Love preempts bitterness. If you have bitterness toward your wife you no longer love her. You no

longer have the capacity for love. Love and bitterness are mutually exclusive. Either we have mental attitude sins or we love but not both. We cannot love and be bitter at the same time. If the husband carries bitterness around in his soul then obviously he does not love his wife.

A wife is not a slave. She has volition. If she is going to submit it must be at her volition. Submission is response. If she responds to the husband with her volition he has something beautiful. He has the goose that lays the golden egg. If he violates her he loses the goose that lays the golden egg. If a man has a slave he does not have a wife. All he has is a big ego which means he has nothing.

The male world is filled with jackasses who think of themselves as God's gift to their wives and disrespect the volition of their wives. Once the husband destroys the volition of his wife, she is no longer a human being. She is nothing but a zombie. That is what some men have at their house -- nothing! It is amazing how many men are stupid enough to want a zombie for a wife. Men use the word "submit" for their own inadequacies and weaknesses.

The Christian home is the outpost of Christianity. God places us in this environment to represent him/her on earth.

Marriage is an institution where a man loses his bachelor's degree without acquiring a master's degree!

Are you as a husband worthy of a wife's submission? The crux of the whole problem for men is not "Am I in charge of my family?" but "Am I in charge of myself?" The most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother. Do you hold tightly the central need of the wife in your mind which is to feel secure in your love? If she has that, she will not nag. You will have a happier life.

The husband is responsible for the marital climate. The wife needs to find understanding in her husband. A woman can bear almost any anxiety if she feels supported by her husband. Your wife has an immense need to be understood. This is marital fellowship.

Colossians 3:20

"Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord."

Chapter three begins in the heavens and ends in the home. It comes right down to husbands, wives and children. God expects a difference between a Christian home and a non-Christian.

In this verse God introduces us to another principle in the divine institution of marriage -- obedience of children. All divine institutions need order. The security of all institutions depends on obedience.

Children have a role in the family. The security of the family depends in part on the obedience to parental authority.

"Children, obey your parents"

Obedience means there is a higher authority. Implicit in the word "obey" is the idea of give attention in order to answer, give ear or heed. This implies respect for one in authority. Obedience is yielding one's self and will to authority.

Obedience is a form of guidance. Through it the child learns to adapt behavior to proper standards. Obedience is the foundation for character. The one in authority should know what is best to do.

The ultimate design for obedience is the independent maturity in the young person. All through life we must adjust to people. Other people have rights that we must consider as well as our own. Prisons and mental health institutions are filled with people who will not submit to authority. We submit to authority all of our lives. We submit to the authorities at school, work, government and military.

Obedience to parents is God's design for order for children. Disobedience is rebellion (Ex. 21:17; Lev. 20:9). The word "obedience" literally means to hear under and comes to mean to listen, attend. Here it means to obey, to obey on the basis of paying attention to the parents. This principle applies as long as the child is under the roof of the parents. Jesus set an example of obeying his parents (Luke 2:51).

Parents possess basic authority. This authority has the responsibility to train children to function on

the principles of life and the principles of the Word of God.

PRINCIPLE: The primary role of the young person is to obey.

APPLICATION: If you are a Christian young person then you have certain responsibilities before God. It may come as a shock to you that you have responsibility in the family. Most children think that they have no responsibility at all. They say, "I didn't ask to be born." That is true. But now that you are here, why not make the best of it? The world does not owe us a living. The world can be brutal.

To children, fairness is not the issue. Obedience is the issue. Just because you have old fogies for parents that does not justify disobedience. Children are not their own person while under their parents roof.

This is basic authority. The breakdown of the authority of the family will break down society. Parents are not always right but they are always your parents. If children resent their parents because they are not easy going, they are on their way down.

The issue for parents is fairness. For parents, the issue is not to demand obedience. Nor is the issue winning the love of the child. The love of children amounts to very little because they have little capacity for love. Some parents try to buy love from their children. When they do, they get little in return. Parents cannot buy affection from the child. A child will resent the parent who makes them eat properly. What difference does that make? Does the child see the value of eating properly? No. We need to learn to say "no" and make it stick. The child will love us in the long run but probably not the short run if we execute discipline. If we do not do what is right for them, they may not love us, or at least not respect us, in the short run.

Communication between parents and teens rests on three principles:

- the willingness of the teen to accept a biblical role in the home.
- the willing of the teen to accept the necessity of the family context for growing up.

- the necessity of the teen to accept himself with sufficient respect and understanding.

Disobedient children are the cause of much of the strife and division in the home. Some teens become very rebellious in their late teens. If they cannot accept the authority of their parents then they need to hit the road! When children leave their home then they establish a new home and authority.

Without divine institution there is no freedom. There is no freedom without principles. To maintain freedom we need law. If there is no traffic light there is no freedom to drive with safety. Law protects freedom. Children need to learn respect for authority so that a maximum number of people can operate in freedom. Respect for authority and property are basic concepts of life.

The two principles of freedom and authority are not separate. Without authority of divine institutions there is no freedom. Children mistake exercise of authority for thwarting of their freedom to do things for themselves.

Parents who gossip and malign authority destroy the principle of authority to their children. Even if the President does not follow biblical principles, respect for the office is crucial. This principle carries over in many phases of life whether it be athletics, education or any form of administration. They learned the principle of disobedience from their parents.

If children do not respect the authority of the parent, coach or teacher, then one day the police officer may bring him to the door. The parent has not taught the principle of authority.

Children who attend church must learn to respect the authority of the church. If the parents gossip and malign those in authority, then how can they expect their children to do differently?

The first chapter of Romans sets before us the devolution of mankind. One characteristic of this devolution is disobedience to parents, " 29being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents" (Romans 1:29,30).

II Timothy 3:1,2 warns that a characteristic of the last days is disobedience to parents, " 1But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy."

Authority gives the child something to stand upon. It gives him security. The parent cannot yield to the authority of the child. Much authority has shifted in our generation to children who do not have the maturity to make sound judgment. That is why so many children are insecure.

PRINCIPLE: Disobedience violates divine institutions.

APPLICATION: There are children who assume superiority over their parents. They flaunt independence from their parents. Unregulated lives can lead to destructive behavior patterns.

No where does it say in the Bible, "Obey if the parents comply with the children's plans." Children must submit to the policies of the parents if they operate under the divine institution of the family properly.

In every young person's heart is a spirit of rebellion. We are born that way. We are born with an anarchistic spirit. We want to reign on the throne. "I will do what I please and the devil take the hindmost. No one is going to tell me what to do."

If we do not learn how to submit to authority when we are young, then big trouble lies ahead. If we do not obey our parents then we will not obey the coach. We will not be a team player. If we do not obey our parents we will not obey the law or law enforcement authorities.

It is natural for us to disobey authority because we want our own way. We want to be our own God. No one likes authority. Today people hate authority. Much music of our day express the value of independence and freedom.

If you want security and order in your life, obey your parents.

"in all things"

There is no exception to obedience to the parents - - "in all things." The Greek implies that this means "according to the standard of all things." Obedi-

ence to the standards (policies) of the parent should be without exception. God expects total obedience.

PRINCIPLE: God expects total obedience to the parent.

APPLICATION: Partial obedience does not please God for it leaves margin for us to do own thing. God wants all loopholes plugged.

It is easy to obey parents when the demand is agreeable to our desires and it is convenient for us. What if Jesus obeyed the Father in all things except the cross? Our sins would not have been forgiven.

"for this is well pleasing to the Lord"

Obedience is the key to a young person's relationship to the Lord. If a young person disobeys his parents, he will experience a deep discontent for he will break his relationship with the Lord.

God marks obedient young people with special approbation or favor. Obedience within the divine institution of the family pleases the Lord. In Ephesians 6:1 God calls obedience to parents "proper," "just" or "right."

Ephesians 6:2 adds that it is not enough that children obey their parents but that they honor them. Children must esteem their parents if they please God. This is the first commandment with promise (Eph. 6:2), that is, it will be well with children and they will live long on the earth. This is the fifth of the ten commandments.

Obedience to parents is commendable to the Lord. The child should not worry about justice or injustice or malpractice. The child should do this as unto the Lord.

The words "well pleasing" is translated "acceptable" in Romans 12:1 " 1I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." This word is also found in Hebrews 13:21 " 21make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." If you really want to please the Lord, obey your parents. This is one of the few

places in Scripture that the Bible states something as pleasing the Lord.

One reason obedience pleases the Lord is that parental authority gives security to the child. If a child does as he likes, there is no security in that. If a child does as he ought, that brings the security he needs. We are free from disease when we obey the laws of health. We cannot expect mental health if we violate the laws of mental hygiene. Authority serves the young person's best interests. Mastery of self is possible only through yielding to authority.

Children should grow progressively out from under the absolute authority of the parents if the home is healthy. As a baby, the child should be under the absolute authority of the parent because the child has no capacity for decision making. As the child gains some understanding of the laws of life, the parent gives away some authority. Later as the child learns to independently apply these laws as managed by himself the parent gives more authority to the young person.

Parents who are healthy welcome the use of healthy authority in the young person. Eventually the young person may develop his own authority (by character) in a number of areas of his life. The older a young person becomes the more independence he should have if all things are equal.

PRINCIPLE: Obedience to parents is a commendable ideal to God.

APPLICATION: Do you want the special favor of God? Obey your parents.

Colossians 3:21

"Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."

"Fathers, do not provoke your children"

"Fathers" in this context means parents.

The word "provoke" means to exasperate, to become disheartened and hence lack motivation, to become discouraged, to be disheartened. Parents are not to exasperate their children. "Provoke" carries the idea of bitter, irritate. Ephesians used a different Greek word meaning exasperate (Eph. 6:4).

Parents can provoke their children by perpetual censure or fretful anger. They may nag their children about inconsequential things. They rub them the wrong way.

Parents possess authority in their role. God does not want them to exercise uncontrolled authority. Sever discipline makes children bitter and exasperates their personhood. Poor judgment in the exercise of authority hinders the development of their children.

This does not mean that the parent is never to do anything that might irritate their children. Discipline often irritates children. The word "irritate" is in the continuous tense in the Greek. "Do not keep on irritating your children." If parents nag their children it will dampen their spirits.

PRINCIPLE: If parents irritate their children they will demotivate them; if they commend them they will encourage and strengthen them.

APPLICATION: Here are some principles that may help parents avoid exasperating their children:

Too little discipline causes exasperation.

- Unannounced rules make known after the child breaks them causes exasperation.
- exasperation is caused by too many rules; a rule should be followed through the stated punishment
- rules should be clearly stated; rules should not come out of disaster
- under discipline is caused by divided authority
- under discipline creates frustration resulting in yelling and other false systems of correction

Too much discipline causes frustration as well. Some Christians over react to the permissiveness of society and flaunt authority to their children.

Unfair punishment causes exasperation. When a parent fails to distinguish what a child must learn on his own and what must be enforced as a rule, the parent will punish the child capriciously.

Withdrawal of affection causes exasperation in the child. There must be a balance between discipline and love. All discipline should be done in love

and not out of personal injury. Discipline is not the same as punishment. Discipline seeks the welfare of the child in correction.

Sentimentality, not love, withholds discipline. If we do not believe in discipline we do not believe in standards and judgment.

Discipline strengthens the moral bonds between parent and child. Sentimentality thinks that fear and love cannot coexist together (Dt. 6:4,5,13).

Parents must not simply threaten as a way of discipline.

- Discipline should be an event. This ends scolding, nagging and swatting.
- Discipline brings a spirit of authority to the home.
- Discipline maintains an atmosphere of stability in the home.
- Discipline should be reserved for disobedience, not discord. Rebellion to authority is the issue.

After discipline, express forgiveness to the child.

Obedience has to do with outlook.

Parents are to encourage their children. Ephesians warns against discouraging our children. Discouragement means to lose heart. It is important to give the child a sense of belonging, worth and confidence. They need to understand their needs and fears. Children need supervision and help.

"lest they become discouraged"

The word "discouraged" means to become disheartened and hence lack motivation. This is the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament. One of the reasons for rebellion in some teenagers is that they are discouraged by most of things they have done in life. They have not had much encouragement from their parents.

God wants us to encourage our children. He wants us to praise them for what they do right. Constant criticism will discourage them. They may become disheartened in their attempts to please their parents.

There are two ways to ruin children in a hurry.

1. Some parents make children feel guilty for something they are not doing. That is no way to get your way in anything much less with our children. This tampers with the soul of the child. Instead of operating on proper norms for life, children will operate on guilt feelings. These children will grow up with guilt complexes. It is important to control children without making them feel guilty.
2. Other parents nag their children for just about everything. They will nag about any little thing...nag, nag, nag. Then, when an important issue comes the child will not hear the parent because he is dulled by constant nagging. When the big issue comes the parent has to shout so loud the child cannot hear them. This is especially true with teenagers. "Comb your hair Susie! Comb..." When the big issue comes she will not hear her parent. It is the same old stuff. She will not pay her parent any attention. Some parents are natural born naggers. They lose all effectiveness in parenting.

PRINCIPLE: God's primary role for the parent is to encourage their children.

APPLICATION: Parents, are you encouraging your children?

"lest they become discouraged"

PRINCIPLE: Parents can discourage their children.

APPLICATION: Some parents train their children indirectly that it is not important to go to church. It is more important to go to the lake than to go to church. Children soon learn our evaluation of things. They know what is important to us by our actions rather than by what we say. They can tell if spiritual things are truly important to us.

If parents sit around and have roast preacher for supper, children will understand the parents view of the church. We wonder why children do not respect the pastor or the church. All they ever hear about the church is what is wrong with the church. When they get old enough they will not want to become involved with an outfit like that. They see the hypocrisy of the parents because they have listened to the criticism of the parent for so long. Their parents criticized the board, the staff and the music program. Children absorb this.

They grow cynical of the church. Then they drop out.

All the weeping in the world will not change it. By the time our children reach their teens there is little we can say to bring them back. If you still have little ones around, be careful how you criticize God's servants and God's church. Those little ears are listening. We put a great deal of time in those little lives. To have them grow up and reject Christianity, how ironic! If they go on to reject Christ, marry an unbeliever, we will look back and say, "Was it worth it to criticize the cause of Christ?"

Colossians 3:22

"Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God."

"Bondservants"

In Paul's day there were 60 million slaves. They were the work force of that day. Paul never commanded that slaves rise up and revolt against the institution of slavery. He asked that they be the best where they were in the situation they found themselves. Often slaves were the leaders and managers of the Roman empire.

God has geared Christianity in such a way that it can work in any situation, under any government and in any culture. There was no society for the prevention of cruelty to slavery. A slave owner could do whatever he pleased without fear of prosecution from the law. They bragged about their roads but slavery was rampant everywhere. Christianity flourished in an environment of slavery. Environment was no hindrance to the dynamic of Christianity. In that atmosphere the gospel flourished.

Christianity was a new, small and upstart institution in the first century. The influence of Christianity over time put an end to slavery.

When these slaves heard that there was hope in Christ, thousands turned to Christ as their Savior. They had a purpose and someone to live for. The gospel has always appealed to the underdog. They are humble enough to hear it. The self-sufficient have no need of the gospel.

Many slave owners came to Christ as well. Evidently some wealthy people did not view themselves as self-sufficient. Thank God some of them come to Christ. When they do they often are great leaders in the cause of Christ.

Today the application to this passage would be to the employee in most parts of the world.

PRINCIPLE: There is hope in Christ no matter what the circumstance.

APPLICATION: Do you find yourself in a situation where you deem there is no hope? Have you considered Christ? He will give you a sense of purpose and peace.

A person can become a Christian by 1) recognizing that his sin violates a holy God, even a sin such as pride or anger; 2) by understanding that Jesus Christ paid for that sin by his death on the cross; and 3) placing faith personally in Christ's death for your sin. Will you do that today?

"obey in all things your masters according to the flesh"

The central command to the employee is to "obey." They are to obey their "masters" (employers). The quality of the Christian employee should be different from those without Christ. An owner should see the difference immediately.

We would think that it would be sufficient that these slaves simply obey but they are to obey "in all things." God does not want us to justify sloppy work.

These masters are only masters "according to the flesh." Our true master is Jesus Christ.

"not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers"

"Eyeservice" means to serve with a view to impressing others. This person serves his boss in order to call attention to himself. He keeps his eye on the clock. He tries to get by with as little work as possible. God wants us to do our best.

"Menpleasers" means to fear the boss. God wants us to work in fear of himself, not men.

God wants us to go beyond the watchful eye of our employers. Some people only do a good job when their boss is watching.

This is service performed only to attract attention. This is not for its own sake, nor to please God or one's own conscience. This pleases men at the sacrifice of principle. When the boss is not watching, they loaf on the job.

God wants us to work under his watchful eye. The employee that keeps his eye on the boss and does only enough work to get by, is not the biblical ideal. God wants us to put in a good day's work.

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to work at our jobs with faithfulness and efficiency.

APPLICATION: God wants us to do our jobs with a sense of significance. This significance comes from service of God. The boss is irrelevant in this kind of motivation. Our job should never become dreary or monotonous with this philosophy of life. God is our ultimate employer. We serve a higher cause.

The eye of God is always upon us. It should make no difference if the eye of the boss is upon us. God's eye should govern all that we do at work.

"but in sincerity of heart"

"Sincerity of heart" means simplicity, sincerity, uprightness, frankness. "Sincerity" first meant "simple" and then it came to mean "open." It means no ulterior motive. God wants us to work out of a motivation of a genuine heart. This goes beyond working to impress the boss. This person operates with pure motives, singleness of purpose (Eph. 6:5).

"fearing God"

"Fearing God" means we work out of a respect for God. God wants us to work at our employment as if we were working for God.

We are under the surveillance of God every moment. The quality of our work should reflect that God is watching. One of the names of God in the Old Testament is El Roi, "the God who sees." He is watching whether your employer is in sight or not.

PRINCIPLE: The Christian serves his employer from an inner monitor, the monitor of character.

APPLICATION: The Christian works from character; he is reliable and trustworthy under any circumstance whether anyone is watching or not.

That is what makes the difference between a Christian and a non Christian at work.

Colossians 3:23

"And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men"

"And whatever you do, do it heartily"

God wants the employee ("bondslave") to serve diligently, not carelessly. God does not want us to attend our employer with displeasure no matter the nature of our employment.

"Heartily" means out of the soul. Whatever we do we do it with a genuine attitude originating from our soul. This labor comes from essential character that comes from within. We do not serve out of show. Our work then is not mechanical or perfunctory. We will exert power from the soul at our job or place of employment. We may hate our job but God wants us to look at it as an opportunity to serve him enthusiastically.

The Greek uses two different words for "do" in this verse. The first means to work or labor the second word is an advance meaning to work diligently. There is a double stress in this verse upon diligence: 1) "heartily" or out of the soul and 2) "do" with diligence. God expects us to put in whole-hearted day's work at our employment.

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to discharge our job with enthusiasm.

APPLICATION: Ultimately we honor God when we faithfully do our job. If we do not work with enthusiasm then we are not in God's will. God wants us to do everything at work with a sense of enthusiasm. No work is dreary with this perspective. What a difference from trying to get by with as little effort as possible!

Whatever job to which God called us, he wants us to serve him with it. Our work may subsist as a menial job; we may dislike our work. Still God wants us to serve him heartily in that job. He wants us to throw ourselves in our work.

Serving the Lord at our job gives dignity to what we do. We may sweep floors, wash dishes, change diapers or empty the trash. We may work at an office where everyone cuts corners and takes long coffee breaks but we break that standard. The

Christian does not operate on the same standards as the herd. Our boss is in heaven. Therefore, we throw our heart into our work.

All work is sacred before the Lord. Nothing is unimportant that we do when we serve him.

"as to the Lord "

When we do our work as unto the Lord, it sets it apart as eternal work. Our true boss is the Lord. We work for him. This gives our work eternal dignity. The Lord is the motivation for our service.

"and not to men"

God does not want us to serve our earthly boss exclusively.

PRINCIPLE: God is our ultimate employer.

APPLICATION: We do not do our job unto the Lord when we take miserable attitudes to work or when we make noises like we are unhappy with the boss and environment. We do not serve the Lord when we loaf when the boss is not looking. We do not serve the Lord when we undermine another employee to get him into trouble with his boss so that we can have his job. We want to move up, so we drop a little negative note about him into the suggestion box.

When the boss comes around, we patronize him. Licking the boots of the boss is not the best way to serve the Lord. Kicking people in the teeth below you is not the best way either! Scripture does not recommend these things!

If we keep God in view in everything we do at work, we honor God at our place of employment.

Colossians 3:24

"knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ."

"knowing that from the Lord "

The phrase "from the Lord" is emphatic in the Greek. The ultimate reward comes from God, not from our employer. This is crucial knowledge ("knowing") if we are going to live a qualitative Christian life.

"you will receive the reward of the inheritance"

Whether our boss pays us properly or treats us properly, God will reward us in eternity. "Inheritance" means properly an inherited property, an inheritance. In a few cases in the Gospels it means the possession that an heir receives on the death of an ancestor. In this passage, our inheritance is the prospective condition and possession of the believer will receive in the future when Christ returns (Acts 20:32; Eph. 1:14; 5:5; Col. 3:24; Heb. 9:15; I Pet. 1:4). Ephesians 1:18 says that the Christian will be an inheritance to God in eternity.

The word "inheritance" implies that reward comes from grace. It is a debt that God will pay because he promised this reward.

"for you serve the Lord Christ"

Whatever we do for the firm for which we work we are to count it as service to the Lord Christ. He is the ultimate judge. All our employment is in his sight. He sees whether we loaf on the job or not.

This is the only place in the New Testament where Jesus is called "the Lord Christ." This title would have had great meaning to a slave of the first century. The slave serves a person of great dignity. Think of this -- a slave with dignity!! People today go to work and they view it as a rat race. They hate every minute of it. When it dawns upon the Christian that he serves the Lord Christ, his perspective changes entirely. There will be a new quality to his work.

PRINCIPLE: The believer will receive full justice in eternity.

APPLICATION: We will never receive full justice in this life. We may put in a good day's work and receive no recognition for it. That's life. The standard is still binding that a Christian is to put in a good day's work regardless of the situation. A pay check is just remuneration under our system. However, it is the reward of the Lord that counts.

God will spiritually reward believers for faithful employment at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Any thing we do full time is our full time service. There is no such thing as full time Christian service for a few professional Christians. There is no such thing as a second class Christian or a "lay-

man." On the other hand there may be some Christians who "lay" down on the job!

Colossians 3:25

"But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality."

"But he who does wrong "

If the Christian employee does not put in a good day's work, then he must reckon with his God. He may hide his sloppy work from his boss but he cannot hide it from God.

"will be repaid for what he has done"

Any time we are out of fellowship with God we are not eligible for reward.

"and there is no partiality"

God is impartial. He treats people equally whether it be the boss or the employee. Both will stand upon a level playing field before him.

PRINCIPLE: God treats his children fairly and without partiality.

APPLICATION: God does not possess the fault of one who, when responsible to give judgment, has respect to the position, rank, popularity, or circumstances of men. He respects their intrinsic worth and never respects their conditions, preferring the rich and powerful to those who are not (Rom. 2:11; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; Jas. 2:1).

God will straighten out all wrongs in eternity. God will not favor the employee over the employer or the employer over the employee.

Colossians 4

Colossians 4:1

"Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven."

This verse has a poor chapter division. 4:1 belongs to chapter three with its focus on various roles in the Christian life.

"Masters"

The "master" in our society is the employer. give your bondservants what is just and fair

Paul places his finger upon the supreme issue for the employer. Disregard for fairness and justice is the vulnerability of the employer.

The issue here is not social equality but fair dealing with employees. Paul is not asking that the employer treat all employees alike. God does not want us to care more for money than employees.

The employer is not to think of his employees in an impersonal manner. His paycheck should reflect that he is a human being! Reciprocity is God's norm.

This is not equality of condition but brotherly equality.

knowing that you also have a Master in heaven

One day all employers will stand before God in heaven. God will have the last word.

Employers should treat employees like they want God to treat them. The employer will stand accountable before God. This phrase commits the Christian businessman to Christian standards in business.

PRINCIPLE: God expects employers to treat their employees in a just and fair manner.

APPLICATION: Are you even handed with your employees? Do you treat your employees partially?

The principles of justice and equality on the employer side have their bases in the person of God. God uses the employer who operates like in his business.

Colossians 4:2

"Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving"

"Continue earnestly in prayer"

The word "continue" means steadfast and denotes to continue steadfastly in a thing and give unremitting care to it (e.g., Rom.13:6 of rulers).

"Continue" first meant to be strong towards, to endure in, persevere in. It came to mean adhere to, persist in, to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of despite difficulty. It means to devote oneself to, to

keep on, to persist in. Literally, it means to set our face toward a goal with strength.

Acts 1:14 and Romans 12:12 uses "continue" of persisting in prayer with others. Acts 2:42,46 uses "continue" for continuing in the Apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42,46).

Romans 13:6 uses "continue" of the persistent activity of the tax collector! If we had the tenacious dedication of the tax collector in prayer, we would probably have revival in our lives.

The present tense of "continue" further emphasizes the idea of persistence of prayer.

It is remarkable how often the Bible talks about the necessity of daily exercise in Christian disciplines. The Bereans were said to be "noble" because they daily searched the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-12). The psalmist cried unto the Lord daily (Ps. 86:3). Paul challenges the believer to "pray without ceasing" (I Thes. 5:17). Jesus said to "take up our cross daily" (Lk 9:23).

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to guard against irregularity in our prayer life.

APPLICATION: Prayer is a task from which other things can easily deflect us.

We will slip in our prayer life unless we develop persistence in prayer. Have we fallen asleep in prayer? If we have, we need to wake up.

Prayer prepares us for whatever we may face. It prepares us for ministry. Everything we do we must bathe in prayer. That is why we need to continue in it. Prayer is no luxury or something to use in emergencies. A Christianity that operates only on emergencies is not true Christianity. Prayer is no convenience for a crisis. God intends prayer as a method of constant fellowship with himself.

God wants us to persist in prayer no matter what may come our way. God sustains our prayer life by his promises (Ps. 116:1,2; Jer. 33:3; Isa 65:24; Mt. 7:7,8; 18:19; 21:22; Mk 11:24; Jn 14:13,14; Heb. 4:16). Prayer is an important expression of faith. The Christian life calls for great exercise of faith. Prayer is an important exercise of faith. Faith utilizes the promises of God. Faith reaches into the 7,000 promises of God, picks up these promises and uses them in spiritual warfare. Prayer is an extension of faith.

God has installed a line whereby we can have direct access to him at any time.

It is remarkable how often the Bible talks about the necessity of daily exercise in Christian disciplines. The Bereans were said to be "noble" because they daily searched the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-12). The psalmist cried unto the Lord daily (Ps. 86:3). Paul challenges the believer to "pray without ceasing" (I Thes. 5:17). Jesus said to "take up our cross daily" (Lk 9:23).

Note how often God enjoins us to pray on a continual basis:

I Samuel 12: 23 "Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way."

Psalm 55:17 "Evening and morning and at noon
I will pray, and cry aloud,
And He shall hear my voice."

Psalm 119: 164 "Seven times a day I praise You,
Because of Your righteous judgments."

Luke 18: 1 "Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart."

Acts 6: 4 "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Romans 12: 12 "Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer."

I Thessalonians 5: 17 "Pray without ceasing."

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to acquire a habit of prayer.

APPLICATION: This does not mean that God wants us to do nothing but pray. God does expect us to develop a habit of prayer. God wants us to keep the receiver off the hook. He wants us to keep in touch with heavenly Headquarters. He wants us to keep in touch.

"being vigilant in it "

The word "vigilant" here means to be in continuous readiness and alertness to pray -- to be alert, to be watchful, to be vigilant. It was sometimes used as a military term for a century keeping alert on duty.

"Being vigilant" is in the present tense placing added emphasis upon the need to continue in a state of alertness.

"Vigilant" means to watch and is used 1) of keeping awake, (Matt. 24:43; 26:38, 40, 41). The idea is to rouse from sleep and can mean to arouse the conscience and attention of the person who prays. It is also used 2) of spiritual alertness, (Acts 20:31; I Cor. 16:13; Col. 4:2; I Thes. 5:6, 10; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 3:2, 3; 16:15).

I Thes. 5:10 uses "vigilant" in contrast to sleep. In this passage it has the meaning of vigilance and expectancy as contrasted with carelessness. All believers will live together with Christ from the time of the rapture (chapter 4) All have spiritual life now though their spiritual condition may vary. Those who fail to watch will suffer loss (I Cor. 3:15; 9:27; II Cor. 5:10) but the Apostle does not deal with that aspect of the subject in I Thessalonians 4. What he does make clear is that the rapture of believers will depend solely on the death of Christ, not upon their spiritual condition. The rapture is not a matter of reward, but of salvation. God will reward believers after the rapture.

When the enemies of Nehemiah tried to stop him from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem he did not throw in the towel. He commanded his people to watch and pray (Neh. 4:9). We need to guard against anything that might weaken our effectiveness in prayer. Apathy, negligence or unbelief can detract from our prayer life.

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to keep awake to the importance of prayer.

APPLICATION: God expects 1) perseverance and 2) alertness in prayer. Three apostles fell asleep during a prayer meeting (Mt. 26:41-43) in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus told them to "watch and pray." They did neither.

How would you describe your prayer life? Vibrant, dynamic, wide-awake? Do you watch to confess your sins on a regular basis? Is prayer nothing but an empty form to you? Beware of thoughts that might distract us from prayer.

Prayer ought to hold a central place in our lives. "Vigilance" in prayer stresses the danger we face in spiritual attacks. Satan would nothing more

than to put us asleep spiritually. May God deliver us from a lethargic prayer life.

A number of passages in the New Testament connect prayer and vigilance:

The Lord Jesus connected the ideas of prayer and watching in Matthew 26:41 "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." It is abundantly clear that the flesh is weak when it comes to prayer!

Ephesians 6:18 "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."

I Peter 4: 7 "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers."

Watch that you do not fall asleep while you pray. Watch so that your mind does not wander.

PRINCIPLE: God wants the believer to be vigilant in prayer.

APPLICATION: When a believer goes to prayer he becomes a special target of the Devil. He will suggest evil thoughts while you are at prayer. He does not want us to pray so he will cause us to fall asleep. He puts anxious thoughts in our minds while we pray. We can fret, stew and worry in prayer although that is what prayer is supposed to alleviate (Phil. 4:6,7). The Devil is a supernatural foe to prayer.

One of the earmarks of carnality is prayerlessness (James 4:1f). Carnality is a disease that only a Christian can catch. Because we are reluctant to pray, God brings adversity into our lives. We are perfunctory in prayer until some crisis comes along. No one is sick, our finances are in place, so why should I pray? When the crisis comes we can pray very eloquently!

"with thanksgiving"

Thanksgiving is a recurring theme in this epistle (1:3,12; 2:7;3:15,17; 4:2).

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

1:12 "Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light."

2:7 "Rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."

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

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

4:2 "Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving."

The Greek indicates that thanksgiving is an association of being awake to spiritual things. If we are awake in prayer thanksgiving will follow.

Thanksgiving is expression of joy Godward. It is a statement of appreciation to God. If we accept God's blessing as a matter of course it will dry up our spiritual life.

PRINCIPLE: Thanksgiving is a reflection of our capacity of soul to appreciate God in our lives.

APPLICATION: It is surprising to find how much for which we can thank God if we just look around. God's sustaining grace keeps us from illness, accident, etc. We should thank God for his providential care. Have you thanked God for sparing you from trial?

It puzzles parents that their children are so ungrateful. However, we are just as ungrateful to God or maybe more so. We ask for God's blessings on a ministry and never stop to thank him for blessing us. Someone may help us repair our house and we never thank them for it. We rob ourselves of blessings by not thanking God for what he has done for us.

Ephesians 5: 20 "Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I Thessalonians 5: 18 "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." We give thanks for the good things that happen to us but do we give thanks for all things.

Colossians 4:3

"Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains."

"Meanwhile praying also for us"

"Meanwhile" -- Paul is giving them an actual opportunity to pray for him.

Paul often requested prayer (Rom. 15:30; Eph. 6:19; I Thes. 5:25; Heb. 13:18; II Thes. 3:1). Do you pray for your pastor? Pray that he would have the courage to preach with freedom. Great Christians recognize their need for prayer.

Paul was carrying the ball but he needed guards and tackles out front praying for him. No running back makes it on his own. Neither does any minister or pastor make it without prayer.

PRINCIPLE: Prayer warriors are necessary for the work of God to advance.

APPLICATION: When we ask people to pray for us they usually nod their head and affirm that they will. They usually immediately go out and forget about it. People do not usually pray for us unless they are relative, good friends or prayer warriors. This is an area of dishonesty among evangelicals.

Any believer walking in fellowship with the Lord can offer an effective prayer. Some people think that they have to ask a professional Christian worker to pray for them. They believe these prayers are more effective sense they are closer to God. However, God does not hear the prayers of professional Christian workers any more than anyone else. We cannot use depending on special types to pray for us as a crutch. Our lives do not depend on the prayers of Christian workers. If they did, we would all be in trouble!

Some people make a fetish out of prayer. They become superstitious about prayer. They think

that things are going to go better because special people are praying for them.

"that God would open to us a door for the word"

Paul's request for prayer revolved around God opening the door of opportunity for the gospel (cf. I Cor. 16:9; II Cor. 2:12). Pray that God would afford an opportunity to present the gospel.

Paul is presently sitting in jail for preaching the gospel. Now he is asking his friends to pray for him that he would continue doing what put him in prison! Sitting in a Roman jail has a tendency to discourage a person! Paul asks for prayer that he would not become discouraged in presenting the gospel. You would think that Paul would pray that God would spring him from prison.

God must open the opportunities to preach the gospel. We cannot force the door. God must open the door. If we force the door, that is the energy of the flesh. When God opens the door, he will give us what we need to go through the door.

God closes some doors. There is no sense knocking on that door. All doors are not open all the time. The missionary expeditions of the book of Acts clearly show how it is God that opens the doors of opportunity. Revelation 3:7,8 demonstrates how God both opens and shuts doors of opportunity,

" And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,

These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens": 8 "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name."

We see both sides of the truth here. There are times when God shuts a door. If so, we need to accept the fact that God is finished with that ministry (for a time at least). God raises up men and movements for a time. He opens wide the door. He supplies money and personnel. When he finishes, he closes the door. God does not design all movements and work to perpetuate forever. When they serve their purposes then God closes the door.

PRINCIPLE: The best opportunity for ministry is when we pray that God would open the door to that ministry.

APPLICATION: God opens the door. When he does this we need to be sensitive to God's will. This is God's guidance. This is the category for which Paul is praying. He is asking the Colossians to pray that God will open the door of opportunity to preach the gospel.

I Corinthians 16: 9 "For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

II Corinthians 2:12 "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord."

"to speak the mystery of Christ"

"Mystery" does not mean something that is mysterious or spooky. It means that which is known to the initiated (Phil. 4:12, "I have learned the secret"). The "mystery" was that which is known outside unassisted natural perception. In the New Testament, God makes this information known by Divine revelation.

The English usage of "mystery" means knowledge withheld. The biblical idea is that of truth revealed. Colossians 1:26 indicates this sense, "The mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints."

The New Testament uses "mystery" of:

1. truth as revealed in the gospel (I Cor. 13:2; 14:2).
2. of Christ, who is God Himself incarnate (Col. 2:2; 4:3) and submitting himself to death (I Cor. 2:1) and raised from the dead (I Tim. 3:16) and the universe will be subject to him (Eph. 1:9) and is declared in the gospel (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 6:19).
3. of the church which is Christ's body (Eph 5:32, the union of redeemed men with God in Christ).
4. rapture of believers into the presence of Christ (I Cor. 15:51)
5. the hidden forces that retard or accelerate the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 13:11; Mk 4:11).

6. the present condition of Israel (Rom. 11:25)
7. the spirit of disobedience to God (II Thes. 2:7; Rev. 17:5,7; cp. Eph. 2:2).
8. the seven local churches and their messengers seen in symbol (Rev. 1:20).
9. the way of God in grace (Eph. 3:9).
10. a comprehensive way (I Cor. 4:1).
11. the secular Greeks used this term for their religious rites and ceremonies in their secret societies. Those initiated into these societies possessed certain special knowledge

PRINCIPLE: God did not reveal the idea of the church until the New Testament with all of its operating assets.

APPLICATION: The mystery pertains to the church. No one in the Old Testament was baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ (church). The Holy Spirit did not permanently indwell all believers in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit indwelt a few such as Samson and David. Every believer in the church is a full time priest.

"for which I am also in chains"

It was the preaching of the mystery that put Paul in jail in the first place. The gospel compelled Paul to preach. He felt a burden of "woe" if he did not (I Cor. 9:16; cf. Acts 4:20).

Paul was not only in jail but he was in chains. It is easy to preach the gospel when the circumstances are comfortable. Comfort did not affect whether Paul preached or not. Paul sits in chains and is asking the Colossians to pray that God would give him an opportunity to preach even in adverse circumstances. Paul saw a potential convert in every human being. We just see people, antagonistic people, weak people, negative people. All Paul saw was souls for whom Christ died.

Paul often spoke of his imprisonment (Phil. 1:7, 13-14,16; Col. 4:18; Phile. 1, 9-10,13). The gospel is why Paul is sitting in jail. He took a negative circumstance and turned it into blessing. While sitting in prison in Rome, he writes epistles with which the Holy Spirit blessed Christians for 2000 years.

PRINCIPLE: Paul always took his negative circumstances and turned them into blessings.

APPLICATION: Do you complain about your circumstances or do you pro actively turn your curses into blessings?

Colossians 4:4

"That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak."

"That I may make it manifest"

"That" introduces a purpose clause. We are about to hear the purpose of Paul's life.

"Manifest" means make clear or bring to light. Paul wanted to expose the gospel in such a way that people can see it clearly. He wanted them to pick it up in a hurry. He wanted to make it plain. He wanted the Praetorian Guard chained to him to see the gospel so clearly that there would be no mistake about the gospel message. He wanted the ability to communicate the gospel in simple terms.

Paul's concern was that he would not share his faith as he ought. He wanted to make the gospel clear, not tiptoe around the message so that no one could pick up the true meaning. He wanted to declare his wonderful message clearly.

PRINCIPLE: God is calling us to make the gospel clear to those he brings across our path.

APPLICATION: We should begin our day with the prayer, "Lord, open doors for me to share the gospel. Bring people who need you across my path. Help me not to bungle the job. Give me courage and may I not play the coward. Help me to make it clear. Put a divine imperative upon me."

"as I ought to speak"

The word "ought" means necessary -- "As it is necessary for me to speak." Paul wanted to meet the need for getting the gospel out to the world. There is a divine imperative or necessity upon Paul.

Acts 4: 18 "And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20"For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

Romans 1: 14 "I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. 15So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. 16For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."

I Corinthians 9: 16 "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel! 17For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship."

Note the words "to speak." Words are necessary to communicate the gospel clearly. Life is not enough. There is a place for life-style evangelism but lips are crucial to make the gospel known.

I Thes. 2: 4 "But as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts."

Eph. 3:8 "To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ."

PRINCIPLE: God has placed upon us a divine imperative to share the gospel.

APPLICATION: The door may shut to an opportunity to preach the gospel before we clear our throat (by the time we get ready to witness). We need to be alert to opportunities to share our faith. We need the wisdom to recognize those opportunities.

In football there is something they call a "hole in the line." The interference opens that hole for a brief second. The ball carrier must go through that hole in that split second. If we debate while that hole opens we may lose the opportunity. We must

hit the hole precisely at the right time. If we hit the hole too soon, we force the play and the hole will not open. If we hit the hole too late, the opportunity disappears. Timing is crucial.

If salesmen were as quiet as we are about the gospel as we are, they would starve to death. The best kept secret in the world is that God loves sinful people and that Jesus died for them on the cross.

Colossians 4:5

"Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time."

"Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside"

When it comes to sharing our faith, God expects us to exercise wisdom. How we share our faith could cause them to further prejudice their ideas toward Christianity. The witnessing style may give them an occasion to reject Christ.

The Christian has an obligation to live responsibly ("wisdom") before non Christians. God expects us to be sensitive to their bias. Matthew 10: 16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves." What possible hope does sheep have against wolves? Wolves are non Christians here. Without wisdom the Christian is not going to win them to Christ. God says he will give us wisdom that we need,

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 6:9).

"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to use wisdom in our dealings with those who do not know Christ.

APPLICATION: If we are going to win non Christians to Christ we must approach people on their positive side. A wise walk before the non Christian will speak volumes to their view of Christianity.

The word "walk" means to walk around and has the idea of course of life. It is the manner of life of a consistent walk. What we are speaks so loud that people cannot hear what we speak. We are long on talk and short on walk.

Romans 6: 4 "Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Romans 13: 13 "Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy."

Ephesians 5: 8 "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light."

Colossians 1: 10 "That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

PRINCIPLE: Our walk is the capital for our talk.

APPLICATION: Our walk is our capital and our operating assets. Our testimony is like money in the bank. We dare not write checks if we have no money in the bank. We dare not talk for God if we do have a walk for God. Before people accept our talk they need to see our walk.

Non Christians will discount everything we say about Christ if our walk is inconsistent. They will believe our message if our lives back up what we say. Otherwise, they will put a question mark behind everything we speak.

We discount everything some people say because they exaggerate everything. They are guilty of gross overstatement. We put up with mild amusement what they say; we do not take them seriously. Non Christians will discount Christians who do not back up their talk with their walk.

Our walk must match our talk. The life must equal our lip. Christians go to extremes. We are either all walk and no talk or all talk and no walk.

Note the phrase "those who are outside."

This idea occurs in I Thessalonians 4:12 "That you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing." This is our testimony to those who do not know Christ.

Again, I Timothy 3: 7 "Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside."

Ephesians 2:12, 13 says that non Christians are "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants

of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." They are without but of what are they outside? They are outside Christ because they have not been brought near to God by the blood of Christ."

PRINCIPLE: Those who do not trust the blood of Christ as sufficient to pay for their sin are outside God.

APPLICATION: Are you outside God? Do you know how to get inside? If you depend upon your well-heeled life, you stand outside God.

The sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross is the only way to get on the inside with God. We must come to trust his death for our sins if we are going to be right with God. If we do this, God will let us into his heaven.

Here is a summary of getting on the inside with God:

Recognize that you have not measured up to the standard of God's righteousness (Rom. 3:10,23).

Accept by faith the fact that Jesus died on the cross for your and forgave you eternally (Rom. 4:5; 5:1).

"redeeming the time"

"Redeeming" means seize the opportunity, buy up an opportunity. It comes from two words "out" and "to buy" and in this passage means to buy up for oneself (Eph. 5:16).

A Christian operating in wisdom seizes opportunities to share his faith. He takes the best advantage of the situation.

"Time" means opportunity. The Greek word here means a time in which something is seasonable. Evangelism is seasonable! We need to seize on the season! God wants us to take advantage of the opportunity when it comes along. We cannot recall the opportunity if we miss it.

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to make the best use of our witnessing opportunity.

APPLICATION: Are we making the most of every opportunity? There is a favorable time to preach the gospel.

We can mark time, waste time and kill time. Only a Christian who walks in wisdom can redeem time. In sharing our faith, God wants us to "Strike while the iron is hot" or "Make hay while the sun is shining."

We squander so many opportunities. God places opportunities at our disposal but we waste the moment.

Colossians 4:6

"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."

"Let your speech always be with grace"

Grace here means winsomeness or graciousness (cf. 3:16). God wants us to carry on conversation of courtesy, appropriate to the people involved. This is wise communication (v.5) of pure, bright and wholesome talk.

Grace speech does not imply that a Christian is always to be agreeable or pleasing. The word "grace" in secular Greek meant charming or gracious. The meaning here is beyond that. Whatever we say it much be characterized by the grace of Christ (Lk 4:22). A spiritual charm lives in the person influenced by the grace of Christ.

PRINCIPLE: Speech is a test of a soul influence by the grace of Christ.

APPLICATION: Speech tests our approach to life. It was said of Peter "Your speech betrays you." Speech does not only indication nationality but it is an index of character.

God expects us to approach people on their approachable side. Our style of talk can make a difference. This is far more than human charm. It is speech that reflects the grace of Christ in our lives. God wants us to be pleasant but firm in what we say to those without Christ.

Are you easy to live with? Do you antagonize people rather than win them?

"seasoned with salt"

The secular Greek used "salt" in the sense of witty. If this is the usage here then God wants pizzazz in our speech.

Grace is salt that seasons speech. Grace makes our speech palatable and keeps us from venom talk. It makes our communication discreet.

Talk seasoned by salt is like well-seasoned food -- it is tasty and savory. We make our message palatable when we use salt. Salt is also a preservative. It preserves us from corrupt talk. Salt loses its flavor when we use worthless talk (Mk 9:49f).

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to create a taste for the gospel.

APPLICATION: God expects our speech to be more than sloppy sentimentalism. Our speech should cease from corrupt talk. Our speech should whet the appetite so people will want a second helping. It is sad that we can talk with animation about football, hockey, business and politics but when it comes to the gospel we bore people to death.

If resistance to decomposition or adding flavor is the meaning here, then wholesome speech is the idea. Ephesians 4:29 speaks of "corrupt speech," "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." Today we talk of speech that is "salty." These are people who throw coarse talk into a conversation.

God wants us to communicate with people in a way that makes our ideas attractive and appealing so that it stimulates the interest of the listener.

"that you may know how you ought to answer each one"

God wants us to flavor our speech with grace (pleasant, kindly) and salt (not insipid). We answer one person one way and another person another way,

"Do not answer a fool according to his folly, Lest you also be like him. Answer a fool according to his folly, Lest he be wise in his own eyes" (Prov. 26:4,5).

We need wisdom to discern the difference.

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (I Peter 3:15).

Plutarch of Greece used grace and salt in the sense of charm and wit. This is light years from Paul's point here. Paul wants people to know how to win people with grace and savor. We need to know what is appropriate to each person. Paul himself was firm yet conciliatory at the same time in his speeches. He remained loyal to truth. He did not compromise any principle, yet he spoke with grace.

PRINCIPLE: God wants Christians to give informed answers to the real questions people ask of us.

APPLICATION: We cannot explain the gospel clearly if it is muddy in our mind (II Tim. 2:15). God wants us to design and tailor our speech to the need of individuals specially those without Christ.

God wants us to give his viewpoint in all our conversations. The point is not to gain the ascendancy with others. Winning a debate rarely wins anyone to the Savior. It is important to be relaxed and winsome yet faithful to truth in presenting the gospel.

To "answer" means that they have asked us something. They have studied our life or listened to our comments. They want to know what makes us different. At that point we need the know-how to answer them (Isaiah 50:4; I Pet. 3:15). We need to know when to use the "soft-sell" or when to use the "hard-sell," that is, when to press for a decision. It is not good judgment to press for a decision when the timing is not right.

Colossians 4:7

"Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me."

This verse begins the conclusion to the letter to the Colossians. It is a very lengthy conclusion for such a short letter.

The close of Paul's epistles demonstrate how much involvement he had with people. He was a people person concerned with mature interper-

sonal relations. Verses 4:7-18 give final greetings to his friends.

Paul lists ten people in the conclusion to Colossians. Eight of which are associates of Paul and the other two are individuals in Colosse.

"Tychicus "

Tychicus traveled widely with the apostle Paul. He joined Paul from Ephesus to Jerusalem at the end of the third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). He joined Paul's team on the final visit to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4-5; cf. I Cor. 16:1-4; cf. II Cor 8:19ff). Tychicus was with Paul in his first Roman imprisonment and carried the epistle of Colossians from Rome to the believers in Colosse. He was from the Roman province of Asia (Acts 20:4).

At the close of Paul's life Paul sent Tychicus with Trophimus on a missionary journey to Ephesus to take Timothy's place (Tit. 3:12; II Tim. 4:12). Tychicus was dispatched to Ephesus during the second Roman imprisonment (II Tim. 4:12). This would free Timothy to rejoin Paul who wanted to see him before he met his fate as a martyr (II Tim. 4:9,21). He may have been sent to relieve Titus in the oversight of the churches on the isle of Crete as well (Titus 3:12).

Tychicus was one of those no-name servants of God in the New Testament who made a big impact for the cause of Christ. He was Paul's servant to the churches of the Lycus Valley. He bore both the epistles of Colossians and Ephesians to their destination (4:7-9; Eph. 6:21-22). He may have also carried II Timothy (4:12). Titus 3:12 says Paul planned to send Tychicus or Artemas to Crete to free Titus to join Paul at Nicopolis. These commissions reflect the trustworthiness which Paul places in him (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7).

Tychicus was a fellow servant with Paul (cf. Eph. 6:21). Paul sent him to Colosse with the express purpose of informing them about his state of affairs to encourage them.

Paul repeatedly sent Tychicus somewhere. He sent Tychicus because he had confidence in him. It is a great asset to have confidence in those with whom we work. He was not suspicious of him. He knew he was loyal.

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to develop a cadre of companions toward maturity in Christ.

APPLICATION: Tychicus was a simple mailman yet the mighty apostle Paul depended upon him. He carried the mail of the first reading of the book of Colossians. Small unseen parts of the motor of our car are crucial to the operation of our car. We may never know the name or their function but we depend on them to run the car. Without the service of Tychicus the Colossians would have not read the Word of God.

Are you the kind of person people can place their confidence in ministry?

Paul describes Tychicus in three ways. First he calls him "a beloved brother."

"a beloved brother"

A "brother" is the basic relationship among Christians. Tychicus was more than just a "brother" he was a "beloved brother." He had endeared himself to the apostle in prison. It is one thing to be a brother it is another to be a beloved brother.

Philippians 4:1 "Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved."

II Thessalonians 2:13 "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth"

Those close to Tychicus loved him. When it came to fellowship he was "beloved."

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to love our colleagues in ministry.

APPLICATION: Paul loved his colleagues greatly. God expects us to love those with whom we serve in ministry.

The second description of Tychicus is that he is a "faithful minister."

"faithful minister"

The second depiction of him is a "faithful minister." He was not only a brother but a beloved brother; he was not only a minister but a faithful minister. He was true to the service of the church at Colosse and to the apostle Paul.

Tychicus was not a well-known member of Paul's team. He was not famous or a name person on the team but that does not mean that he was not successful. The emphasis here is upon his character rather than his personality.

God does not require that we be brilliant or clever in the ministry. We do not have to be original. God does not expect us to be famous or popular. He does not even expect success from us. He does expect us to be faithful (I Cor. 4:1,2).

By the use of "faithful" Paul describes the quality of Tychicus' work. When it comes to our ministry God's values faithfulness more than anything else. He was "Mr. Ordinary" on the team. He lived a monotonous life. No one wrote him up in the Christian magazines of the day. There was no Madison Avenue blood in his body. Our generation of Christianity loves to focus on personality, not character. It seems to make no difference whether a person is off doctrinally as long as he has a pleasing personality. It is one big brotherhood at the expense of truth.

It was not a popular thing to be a Christian in the first century. To be a Christian was not fashionable. To be friend of a man in jail for preaching the gospel was not very popular position to take. That might cost a Christian something. Tychicus was willing to pay the price.

Tychicus was no scintillating personality. He was steady, solid, stable and faithful. He did the little jobs as unto the Lord. He did not deem it below him to carry the epistle of Colossians to Colosse. He took up the slack. It takes a big man to do the little jobs. He did them day in and day out. No one patted him on the head and told him how great he was. No one interviewed him for a publication.

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to be faithful in our ministry.

APPLICATION: Tychicus was a man Paul could count upon. That is what God expects of us. He wants faithfulness. Many today are faithless.

How would someone describe your ministry? Faithful? Faithless? Can people count on you? Can people trust you to deliver the goods?

Today it costs us relatively little to minister the gospel faithfully. No one persecutes us. No one puts us in jail for preaching the gospel. No one ostracizes us for our witness for Christ today. Yet there is more unfaithfulness in ministry today than in Paul's day. God is looking for people upon whom he can count to do his ministry.

God has a plan for your life right where you are. It is more difficult to live the Christian life in the day-to-day humdrum of life. No one goes to the Christian wife who washes dishes day in and out to get her testimony about how she lives the Spirit-filled life. No one asks her how difficult it is to face the boredom of washing dishes every day. No one interviews her about the thrill of sweeping the floor every day. However, she is in the plan of God and all God expects of her is faithfulness. When she does her housework as unto the Lord, she is a person with purpose.

The third description of Tychicus is a "fellow servant."

"and fellow servant in the Lord"

The word "servant" here is slave. Tychicus was a fellow slave with Paul.

You can tell something about the capacity of soul of someone by the way he treats his associates. The eight individuals listed in his paragraph are Paul's associates. None of them were as gifted as the apostle Paul. Yet we see the size of Paul's soul by the way he treats his colleagues. We do not read of any sermons that Tychicus preached, or books that he wrote or churches he founded yet Paul calls him a "fellow slave."

"will tell you all the news about me"

Paul does not give a full account of his present estate in jail because Tychicus will do that personally when he arrives in Colosse.

Even though the Colossians had never met Paul (2:1) they cared about him. They knew he was in prison. They knew his impact on the Roman world. Therefore, Paul sent Tychicus from Rome to tell them the latest news about Paul. The Colossians were exercised about the condition of Paul in jail. Tychicus will allay that concern. He will tell them how he is doing physically, materially and spiritually.

PRINCIPLE: There is a greatness in inconspicuous service.

APPLICATION: God uses people who are not conspicuous or spectacular. Tychicus was a man of great importance to the apostle Paul.

The use of the term "fellow servant" indicates how Paul viewed his status among his coworkers. He viewed them as his equals.

Paul never told "religious lies" about his colleagues describing them more than what they were. He never exaggerated their accomplishments. However, he did give them their due. He accurately estimated their abilities and qualities. This thumbnail sketch of Tychicus was accurate. He not only was a brother; he was a "beloved brother." He not only was a minister; he was a "faithful minister." He not only was a servant; he was a "fellow servant."

Colossians 4:8

"I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts"

"I am sending him to you for this very purpose"

Paul's purpose was to have reciprocal concern for them as they had for him.

"that he may know your circumstances "

In order to comfort others we need to know their situation.

"and comfort your hearts"

Tychicus was a heart specialist. The parallel passage in Ephesians 6:21,22 says the same thing. He had the capacity to comfort others. This is a specialty of the Holy Spirit as well,

"Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied" (Acts 9:31).

"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you

and will be in you. 18 "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (Jn 14:16,17).

"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:1,2).

There is another source of comfort for the Christian - the Word of God:

"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thes. 4:17,18).

Paul sent Tychicus to Colosse to minister to hearts, not heads. Paul does not write, "When Tychicus comes he will inspire your mind."

PRINCIPLE: God wants us to comfort others like he does through the Holy Spirit and the Word.

APPLICATION: When we become discouraged it is our hearts that need comfort. God will put someone in our path to encourage us when we need it.

Has God given you the gift of encouragement? Maybe God is putting people in your path to be an encouragement to them. They may need a warm handshake, a cup of coffee. Someone else may need help during a time of bereavement. Someone else may need you to take care of their children during a crisis. Are you that cold drink of water on a hot day?

God will also comfort with the Holy Spirit and Scripture.

Colossians 4:9

"With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here."

Now we turn to Tychicus' traveling companion to Colosse.

"With Onesimus"

Rome attracted drifters from all over the empire. It was to Rome that the fugitive slave Onesimus came. He found new place in life there by the gospel. Paul sent Onesimus back to Colosse from Rome with Tychicus.

The Bible names Onesimus twice in two books. He was a person of inauspicious beginning but glorious ending. In the beginning he fled from Colosse as a run away, the slave of Philemon. He absconded money from his master Philemon and fled from Colosse. We learn nothing of this in Colossians, only in the epistle of Philemon (Philemon 10).

There is no call reinstatement to his master or to the church in Colossians. It says only here that he is a "faithful and beloved brother."

"a faithful and beloved brother"

Though a run-away slave, Paul calls him a "faithful" brother (Phile 16). He ran away as a non-Christian and came back as a Christian. That is a moderate description of the man. Paul does not describe him as a great teacher, a flaming evangelist but simply "faithful" and "beloved."

He is faithful, not a thief. Paul says, "I lead him to Christ (Philemon 10). He is an ex-thief. I lead him to the Savior" (cf. Philemon 9-19). He is an example of the transforming power of the gospel.

There is no way to discern whether the Colossians read Philemon or Colossians first. It would be nice if he read Philemon first. His blood pressure would have remained low in that case.

"who is one of you"

Colosse was his home (cf. v.12).

The run-away slave, now converted, holds equal privileges with free men spiritually (Rom. 3:22; Gal. 3:28).

They will make known to you all things which are happening here

The "they" in this sentence is Tychicus and Onesimus. They will tell the Colossians about what has happened in Rome to Paul and his colleagues. They will update the church at Colosse on Paul's

health, prospect of release from jail and something of his hopes for the future.

PRINCIPLE: There is transforming power in the gospel.

APPLICATION: Here is a man who proved himself. He was unprofitable in the past but God made something of him.

God will transform your life if you respond to the gospel as did Onesimus. Are you fed up with your life? Have you tried psychological techniques, new age and other self-help systems? Why not give Jesus a crack at your life?

All you need to do is to acknowledge that you have violated a holy God and believe that Jesus paid the price for that violation (Rom. 4:5). God will then transform your life.

Colossians 4:10

“Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)”

This is an intensely personal section of Colossians. Paul mentions eight people with him in Rome and two in Colosse.

"Aristarchus"

Aristarchus was from Thessalonica. He attended Paul on his third missionary expedition. Aristarchus' name occurs five times in the New Testament.

Acts 19:29 “So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul’s travel companions.”

Paul’s friends kept him from going into this situation. Acts calls Aristarchus here a traveling companion of Paul. Maybe he was an assistant of Paul. He was a native of Thessalonica who joined Paul on his third miss journey. In Ephesus this mob seized him and almost killed him. Nothing good ever comes from a mob.

20:4 “And Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia—also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.”

This is the third missionary expedition. Paul is on his way back to Jerusalem. 20:3 says that Aristarchus came from Thessalonica, a city in Macedonia. The church in Thessalonica was a remarkable church to which Paul wrote two epistles.

27:2 “So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us.”

By chapter 27 Paul is in prison. He is unfairly treated and appeals to Rome. The authorities decide to ship him to Rome. Aristarchus is mentioned as his companion here as well.

Paul refers to him in Philemon 24 where he is called a “fellowlaborer,” “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers.”

Not only is Paul a fellow jail mate but a fellow laborer. The Bible does not tell us of any sermons he preached or any of his great accomplishments. No, he was one of the little people. He had no sensational gift but he got his name in the Bible five times. He may have simply run errands for the apostle.

"my fellow prisoner greets you"

Not only does Paul call Aristarchus a “fellow worker” but here he says that Aristarchus is simply my cell-mate.

PRINCIPLE: God uses little people.

APPLICATION: May people feel that they do not count. They think that they are little people of no significance. They downplay the place that God has given them upon the earth. They seem to think that this will get them off the hook of serving God. They excuse themselves with the statement “I am of little worth to the kingdom of God. I am not gifted. I am not talented. I can’t do anything well.”

God has a plan for every person no matter how small their gifts.

Mark is another of those circle of men with whom Paul served. All these men had a deep sense of

mission. Most were Paul's liaisons to the churches he founded.

"with Mark the cousin of Barnabas "

Barnabas was a "good man," "Spirit filled" and a man of "faith" (Acts 11:24). This was the man who endorsed Paul after his conversion. The church would not trust him until Barnabas intervened for him.

This is the Mark who wrote the gospel. The New Testament names him 10 times. He traveled with Paul on the first missionary expedition because Barnabas was his uncle (Acts 12:12,25).

Mark was their "assistant" (Acts 13:5). That word means "underrower." It means he was their "attendant." He carried the briefcase and the notebook computer. He was the chief cook and bottle washer. He carried the bags. He made the reservations.

When the going got difficult, Mark all of a sudden remembered that he had an appointment with his mother. As he walked down the street people would say, "How are the clean sheets? How's mom's cookies? Did you see any pirates in Pamphylia?" He was the subject of public ridicule.

Mark defected from the missionary enterprise. He turned quitter (13:13). Paul and Barnabas quarreled over Mark because he left Paul in the lurch on the mission field. Because of this desertion, Paul did not want him on any future team (Acts 15:36-39).

An added complication was Mark's blood relationship to Barnabas. This also caused the breach to widen. Paul and Barnabas went their separate ways. Paul took Silas on his missionary expeditions and Barnabas took Mark.

Mark later became Peter's associate ("my son," I Peter 5:13; cf. Acts 12:12-13).

Though Mark deserted Paul on the first missionary journey (Acts 15:37-39), Paul here commends him (cf. Phile. 24) as a "fellow laborer," as he did later in II Timothy. Now Paul commends Mark because he got on track again. His commendation of Mark is without qualification, "he is useful to me for the ministry" (II Tim. 4:11).

(about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)

"Received instructions" indicate that Mark was under a cloud. He had a poor beginning. He was a failure at the beginning but he made a comeback.

Paul not only reconciled with Mark but he charges the Colossian church to "welcome him." "Don't hold it against him." Paul truly forgave Mark for deserting him on the field.

The word for "welcome" means hospitable reception (Mt. 10:14; Jn. 4:45). Paul's recommendation of Mark is unreserved. He says in effect, "Welcome him with open arms."

Mark's dropout caused people to look upon him with suspicion. Therefore, Paul instructs the church at Colosse to welcome him. He had been discharged as useless for the work of Christ.

PRINCIPLE: Initial failure does not mean ultimate failure.

APPLICATION: There is no such thing in biblical Christianity as the "bird with the broken pinion will never fly so high again." No failure is fatal as long as we are alive upon the earth. If we are alive, God has a purpose for us. It is possible to make good again.

Maybe you have played the coward at some point in your life. It is possible to make good again. Your first attempt at Christian work may have been a failure. Your first try at leading a small group may have not been the right match. You may have been a round peg in a square hole. Just because you failed the first time does not mean that you will always fail.

Colossians 4:11

"And Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me."

David had his "mighty men." Here are Paul's mighty men.

"And Jesus who is called Justus"

This is the only occurs of this person in the New Testament. "Jesus" is the Greek name for the Hebrew Joshua. Jesus was a common name among Jews of this day.

It may be that this Jesus was called Justus in deference to Jesus the Lord. Justus means "righteous." Justus was a common name (Acts 1:23; 18:7).

Paul does not disclose this man's service. However, in the next phrase he calls him a "fellow worker."

"These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision"

A fellow-servant, a fellow-prisoner and Justus a fellow-worker were fellow Jews advancing the kingdom of God with Paul. So Aristarchus, Mark and Justus were Jews.

"they have proved to be a comfort to me"

Friendship in ministry is one of the great side benefits of kingdom work. These colleagues were a source of great comfort to the apostle. This comfort came to Paul by their loyalty to him under times of duress.

The Greek for "comfort" here is the only occurrence in the New Testament. It is a medical term meaning the comfort that relieves both mind and body. The word here means to kill pain or alleviate pain in suffering. Some believers are a pain in the neck. Others relieve pain.

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to alleviate pain in others.

APPLICATION: We cannot relieve the sufferings of others if we are legalistic. Pseudo spirituality always causes pain. If we are tied up in knots, we will not spiritually refresh other people. People who have illusions about themselves cannot bless others. They think that others cannot get along without them.

The Christian who runs around trying to impress others cannot bless others. They intrude into the private affairs of others. Sometimes the reason people are so antagonistic toward us is that we are such a jerk. We are self-righteous prigs. That is why people are down on us.

Are we a comfort to people or are we a headache to them?

Colossians 4:12

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."

"Epaphras"

Epaphras is an eminent Bible teacher from Colosse (1:7,8; 4:12). He was with Paul when he wrote Colossians in Rome. Paul mentions him in Philemon 23 where he calls him "my fellow-prisoner." Epaphras was Paul's cell-mate.

Epaphras' made a long, hazardous journey to Rome. His report concerning the conditions in the churches of the Lycus Valley caused Paul to write Colossians (1:7-9).

Paul's esteem for Epaphras is seen in the terms he applies to him: "Our beloved fellow servant," "A faithful minister of Christ on our behalf" (1:7), "A servant of Christ Jesus" (4:12), "My fellow prisoner" (Phile 23).

Epaphras' unique distinction is Paul's praise for his fervent intercession for the churches of the Lycus Valley (4:12,13).

who is one of you

Along with Onesimus (v.9), Epaphras was a Colosse Christian. He belonged to the church at Colosse. He was probably their pastor.

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to appreciate our colleagues in ministry.

APPLICATION: How would you describe those with whom you serve? Do you have the capacity of soul to affirm their strengths?

"a bondservant of Christ"

Evidently when Epaphras came to Rome to visit Paul, the Romans arrested him as well. He was a "bondservant of Christ." The word "bondservant" means a slave. He was not a slave of Rome but a slave of Christ (Rom.1:1; Gal. 1:10; Eph. 6:6).

There were more slaves in the Roman empire than free men. A slave had no rights. Epaphras waved all his rights for Christ. He totally dedicated himself to the person of Christ. He was consumed with the cause of Christ.

Epaphras was a slave of Christ. Christ came first, not his church. Christ came first, not his denomination. Christ came first, not even his family. These things came in their proper order.

"greet you"

The Colossian church was his congregation (1:7).

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to serve him unre-servedly.

APPLICATION: Most of us are Christians of convenience. Christianity is a value to us but there is some question if we would be willing to give our life for it.

When we are willing to give our life for Christ, that is when Christianity means something. Christianity is more than ethics, civil rights, political rights, better housing or sanitation. These things do not constitute Christianity; they are the by-products of Christianity. We confuse by-product with the real thing. We cannot tell the real thing from imitation.

Christianity is a vital relationship with a person.

"always laboring fervently for you in prayers"

Here is a person who prayed for fellow believers in his church. While in captivity in Rome, he "agonized" in prayer for his church back in Colosse.

Note the two ways in which he prayed for them: 1) laboring and 2) fervently.

"Laboring" means wrestling (cf. Jacob in Gen. 32). He wrestled in prayer for the Colossians. "Laboring" is from the Greek word to agonize. It is an athletic term involving personal struggle. We can translate "laboring" by "wrestling." It means to exert the last ounce of strength to win the match. Agony comes at the end of the match where strength is spent.

Paul uses this term of himself in 1:29 and 2:1. Jesus also was in "agony" in the garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:44). Great struggle in prayer is a great need of the church today. We need to agonize in prayer more than to organize programs.

Epaphras is still keeping up with his congregation in prayer. He could not hop on Alexander Gram Bell to find out how they were doing. He did have

a direct line to God, however. His direct line was prayer. He prayed with a headache; he prayed when he was tired; he prayed when he was sick; he prayed chained to the guards. No matter how tired, sick, or exhausted he might be, he prayed.

"Fervently" -- It is the effectual, fervent prayer that avails with God (James 5:16,17).

Epaphras was the pastor of the church at Colosse. Now he is in jail. He has a new ministry, the ministry of intercessory prayer. He served God in prison by praying for the Colossian church.

PRINCIPLE: Every Christian has recourse to fervent prayer.

APPLICATION: Epaphras labored in prayer that people in his congregation might stand firm and not fall victims to false teaching.

When we are separated from our loved ones who need spiritual help, the one thing we can do for them is pray. We can pray that God will introduce friends, circumstances, blessing, bane into their lives. God can create a positive volition toward himself by sovereignly managing the events of their lives. My wife and I have recently seen God work mightily in the life of someone close to us.

Most of us do not know anything about agonizing in prayer. We know how to pray or say prayers except when we face the death of a child. We learn how to agonize in prayer very quickly then.

Now we come to the content of Paul's prayers for them.

"that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God"

Paul prayed with purpose - "that." He prayed that the Colossians might have stability ("stand") in the will of God with two characteristics: 1) perfect and 2) complete.

"May stand" - The Greek indicates that we receive the power to stand. We do not stand in our own ability or strength. We do not stand in our natural strength but in God's ability.

Standing "perfect and complete in all the will of God" means that we understand and apply the principles of the Word to our experience. The prayer is that the Colossians might stand instead of being swept away by false doctrine.

"Perfect" means mature. This word means the ability to carry a full measure. This person is mature and equipped for service. He wanted them to stand firm in maturity of the Christian life. Maturity is essential to stability in the Christian life.

"Complete" means fully assured (Rom. 4:21; 14:5) or fulfilled. The word "complete" may mean "convinced." Paul's concern was that the Colossians might develop conviction concerning the truth in the face of doctrinal aberration expressed in the earlier part of the book.

Paul wanted Epaphras to stand "in all the will of God" instead of speculative doubt. Epaphras prays that they will grow into maturity North, South, East and West - in "all" the will of God. He did not want the Devil to shortchange them. He prayed that God will give them all that he has designed for them. He coveted all the will of God for them (1:9; 4:12). He was willing to do "all" the will of God, not half of it. The Lord demands 100% obedience.

"And when He had removed him, He raised up for them David as king, to whom also He gave testimony and said, 'I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will do all My will.'" (Acts 13:22).

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom.12:2).

PRINCIPLE: We should seek the highest good of all believers.

APPLICATION: God wants us to pray for fellow believers so that they will grow out of their spiritual infancy and pass through adolescence into spiritual adulthood. God's burden is that we might stop playing with spiritual dolls. We play church today making religious daisy chains while the world goes to hell. We occupy ourselves with the incidental, the petty and trivial.

After we have know Christ for a number of years, we realize that doing "all" the will of God is the very best thing we can do. There is nothing better for our well being than to do all the will of God. There is nothing better for us than doing all the will of God. The will of God may hurt; it may be an uphill battle.

Heartache is part and parcel of the will of God. None of us gets through life without tears, scars, reverses and difficulties. The Spirit of God will use every problem to sharpen our testimony, enlarge our vision and expand our character. It makes no difference whether we face physical, financial or domestic difficulty.

Colossians 4:13

"For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis."

"For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you"

Paul went on record to testify that Epaphras possessed a great zeal for the Colossians, the Laodiceans and those in Hierapolis.

"Zeal" here means "labor." Epaphras underwent intense pain and suffering for his church back in Colosse. "Zeal" is hard work with accompanying pain and distress. He wanted them to become spiritually self-sustaining. His goal was that they would depend on the Word rather than upon their pastor (4:12).

"and those who are in Laodicea"

Laodicea was located in what we call Turkey today. This city was ten miles from Colosse. It lay on the same road but was larger and richer than Colosse. Today it lies in a heap of ruins.

"and those in Hierapolis"

Hierapolis was the city of the mythical Amazon queen Hiera. This city was situated near Colosse and Laodicea in the Lycus River valley of Phrygia. It was a wealthy dyeing center. This city was five miles north of Laodicea and it also lies in ruins.

Epaphras was interested in the local churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis as well. Although God has given us a local church, he expects us to be interested in other local churches as well.

PRINCIPLE: The child of God should have a great commitment to the local church.

APPLICATION: We hear little of our responsibility to have zeal for the local church. Along with our zeal for God and those without Christ, God wants us to have a great zeal for the local church.

We invest thousands of dollars in the local church. Others send their children to the mission field from the local church. This is the commitment God expects toward the local church.

God has raised up para-church organizations in addition to the local church. These organizations are no substitute for the local church but they are an arm of the church. Often these organizations are on the cutting edge of advancing the gospel. Without aggressive evangelistic organizations that take the gospel across national lines, the gospel will remain within the confines of the local church. The gospel will not get beyond the city limits. However, it is the local church that supports these enterprises of the gospel. May we, like Epaphras, care about other churches.

Some churches never miss a month in financially supporting their missionaries. That is because responsible people band together to further the gospel. These are people who have a sense of welfare for both the home church and the cause of Christ throughout the world (Gal. 6:10; Heb. 6:10). Every Christian needs other Christians to rally around them in time of need.

Colossians 4:14

“Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you.”

"Luke the beloved physician"

This is the Luke that wrote Luke and Acts. He was Paul's associate on two missionary expeditions. He joined Paul on the second missionary journey at the city of Troy (Acts 16:10).

Here we learn that Luke is a physician. Luke was not only a physician but a “beloved” physician. Paul loved his personal physician. Luke ministered both with the hand and the heart.

Paul specifically does not name Luke among the Jewish Christians just listed. He was a Gentile convert (cf. II Tim. 4:11; Phile. 24) and probably a Greek. He may have been a student at the University of Tarsus. Luke wrote both the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

It is interesting that two of the writers of the gospels are with Paul during this prison confinement. They both have already written their gospels. No doubt Paul would have read them by now.

PRINCIPLE: Faithfulness under duress is true friendship.

APPLICATION: Demas had the same advantages as Luke. Both were companions of the apostle. They had the same teaching and example. Two children brought up in the same family can turn to different directions. One will follow Christ, the other will deny him. One will rebel, the other will yield to the teaching of the Word.

We can attribute the fall of Demas to love of the world (II Tim. 4:10). Luke remained true to Paul in his difficulties. This is an issue of character. Would your character stand under pressure?

"and Demas greet you"

This is the Demas who two years later forsook Paul because he loved this present world (II Tim. 4:10). Demas probably did not forsake Christ (cf. Philemon 24). Luke, however, remained with Paul in his hour of danger.

Paul gives no commendation of Demas. There may be a suggestion that even at this time he was not sure of his stability.

Demas' supreme passion was the world (II Tim. 4:10). Diotrophes' supreme passion was to have the pre-eminence (III Jn. 9). Demetrius' supreme passion was the truth (III Jn. 12). These three men were characterized by their supreme passions. The difference lay in their commitment.

PRINCIPLE: Many make a grand entrance and later fade from dynamic Christian living.

APPLICATION: It is sad to see a person fail toward the end of their career. In this verse we see contrasting examples of faithfulness and unfaithfulness. Luke the faithful physician remained with Paul during his difficulty - “Only Luke is with me” (II Tim. 4:11). Everybody else left Paul in his dire moment of danger. Demas unfaithfully preferred his skin to his conscience.

May not God allow us to finish our lives in famous fashion.

Colossians 4:15

"Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house."

Now we come to the salutation of the epistle to the Colossians (4:15-18).

"Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea"

Laodicea was located near Colosse. Paul sends salutations to them as well.

"and Nymphas"

Paul names Nymphas as an outstanding Christian. She was outstanding because she held an upstanding reputation. It is possible to translate this sentence "Nympha, and the church which is in her house." If so, she is the only woman mentioned in this chapter. She opened her home to hold a church there. No church can operate very long without women.

"and the church that is in her house"

Christians were forced to worship in houses since public worship was dangerous (Jn 20:19; cf. Acts 28:23,30). It may be that the church at Laodicea met in Nymphas' house. Meeting in houses was the common practice (Acts 12:12; 16:40; Rom 16:5; I Cor. 16:19; Philemon 2). Church buildings came later.

The church met in homes while the heathens met in temples. There were no church edifices before the third century. Christians met in homes for the first 250 years of the church's existence. Some churches met in gravel pits, caves, fields or forests.

PRINCIPLE: All God expects of us is to do what we can with what we have.

APPLICATION: Nympha may not have been able to preach, sing or play, but she could open her house to be used of God. She did what she could with what she had. This is all God expects of us.

Colossians 4:16

"Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."

"Now when this epistle is read among you"

Paul expects that Colossians will be read publicly in the assembly both in Colossians and Laodicea. This stipulation for reading the Word publicly gives some indication of how the early church practiced worship.

"Read" means to exegete Colossians. Few churches expound the Bible verse by verse. God wants us to study the Word.

"see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans"

Paul also expected that Colossians would be read publicly in the church of the Laodiceans as well. New Testament churches shared the books of the Bible. Colossians was obviously intended for other churches as well. It was intended for the church of today.

"and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea"

The Epistle from Laodicea is now lost. It did not belong to the authorized books of the Bible known as the "canon." The canon is those books which the church as deemed inspired.

Not all epistles that Paul wrote were inspired. However, the Laodicean letter may be the book of Ephesians.

The first and seventh of the churches of Revelation are Ephesus and Laodicea. The letter was sent first to Ephesus then to the other churches on that circuit ending up at Laodicea. Therefore, this epistle may be Ephesians.

Circular letters written by Paul were to be read by all the churches in that area.

PRINCIPLE: God has designed the local church as the place for growth in the Word of God.

APPLICATION: Local churches are geographically pinpointed. Born again people make up the local church. These people support the missionary

enterprise around the world. That is where they should study the Bible from a gifted pastor.

Do you attend a church where you are taught the Word of God?

Colossians 4:17

"And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.'"

"And say to Archippus, 'Take heed to the ministry'"

Archippus was a minister at Colosse. Paul challenges the church to admonish him to be diligent about doing his work. Evidently he was sidetracked with things of less moment.

Archippus may be the son of Philemon (Phile 2). He may have ministered in Colosse at Epahras' absence. In Philemon, Paul asks Philemon to free his slave Onesimus. Now he chastises his son for not staying sharp in the ministry. Philemon still remained his friend, however!

"Take heed" means to watch out. The ministry is not the ability to balance a cup of tea or make proper clucking noises at any kind of party. "Take heed" in this context means to concentrate on ministry. Some ministers do everything but teach the word. Here Paul says "Get with it." (Cf. I Tim. 4:16; Ac 20:28; II Tim. 4:5; I Tim. 1:12; Acts 20:24).

"Ministry" is used 3 ways in the New Testament: 1) leader of the national entity (Rom 13:1,2) 2) universal priesthood of the believer (II Cor 3:6-4:1) and 3) pastor of the local church (Eph 3:7; 6:21). Here the idea is the pastor of local church.

"which you have received in the Lord"

All true ministry is "received in the Lord." It comes from God's appointment and leading.

A person does not get into the ministry because he is holier than anyone else. You will never believe this, but it is true. A true minister does not go into some secret sanctuary where the touch of the world never quite reaches him. He does not go into the ministry because he is sheltered.

The reason anyone is in the ministry is because of the grace of God. We have a tendency to put the ministry on a pedestal. Every minister is a mem-

ber of the human race as well – if he is a normal person! He is no monastic who lives in a hypothetical, esoteric, abstruse life on cloud 30. He is a very normal person like anyone else. He has a gift from God by grace and that is it.

"that you may fulfill it"

Paul also challenged both Archippus and the Colossians to complete their ministry. This may be an indication of the later declension of the church (Rev. 3:14f).

God expects us to complete our ministry.

PRINCIPLE: God expects us to finish what we start to do ministry-wise.

APPLICATION: God gives to every single Christian a ministry to equip the saints (Eph. 4). God expects us to carry on the work of ministry. God does not want us to simply meet to worship and learn. He wants us to leave something behind.

Do you want to accomplish all that God has designed for you? Phil 3:12

Colossians 4:18

"This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen."

This verse is Paul's specific salutation.

"This salutation by my own hand – Paul."

Paul dictated the Colossian letter to someone else and they wrote it down. Paul writes the salutation by his own hand (cf. 1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; 2 Thes. 3:17; Phile. 19).

The salutation by Paul's own hand is an indication of its authenticity. It may also indicate that he had poor eyesight and needed a secretary to write most of the epistle.

"Remember my chains."

Finally Paul makes a request for himself. It might do well for us to remember his chains today. He was hounded and oppressed in most cities where he ministered. He spent many months in jail. We should give thanks to God for the contribution this man made to Christianity.

This is probably a request for prayer.

"Grace be with you"

"Grace" means God bestows benefits. This is a prayer that God will give his daily operating grace upon the Colossians.

Every epistle that Paul wrote he closed the same way - with an emphasis upon the grace principle. It was his spiritual trademark (II Thes. 3:17,18).

"Amen"

"Amen" means "I believe it." Paul affirms that daily operating grace is necessary for a consistent Christian walk.

PRINCIPLE: We need grace daily to live the Christian life.

APPLICATION: Do you think that things are going hard for you? Think of what Paul faced in his life for the cause of Christ. "Whenever you become discouraged or disillusioned, think of me in my chains. Remember that I am a living example of daily drawing upon grace from God."

Are you daily drawing upon the grace of God?
