A BRIEF INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY ON PAUL'S EPISTLES TO THE COLOSSIANS AND TO PHILEMON

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All Scripture is quoted from the New King James Version of the Bible, unless otherwise noted.

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PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

INTRODUCTION

The book of Colossians has been called the most Christ-centered epistle in the New Testament. In this letter to the church at Colosse, Paul exalts Christ as the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He does so to counter the false doctrine threatening the church at Colosse. [See notes on “What was the Colossian Heresy?”] The antidote to the false teachings of men is seen in Paul’s statement in 2:9: “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (New King James Version).

The City of Colosse

The ancient city of Colosse was destroyed by earthquake about a year after the supposed date of the epistle. It was a noted city of Phrygia in Asia Minor, in the southern part of the province, about 100 miles from Ephesus. This area is now part of Turkey. Colosse was about 1,000 miles from Rome by the route that ships had to follow. It was near two other prominent cities, Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 2:1; 4:13; Rev. 3:14). Colosse was built on the Lycus River, which was also known as “Little Meander.” Mountains surrounded the city, and it was important in ancient times because it commanded the roads leading to the mountain passes. Its rich volcanic soil made the area around Colosse profitable for raising sheep.

Almost every known pagan religion could be found in the region of Phrygia. The Syrian king, Antiochus the Great, imported 2,000 Jewish families into Phrygia about 170 B.C., and it is believed that about 50,000 Jews lived in the area in New Testament times. The presence of so many Jews may explain why the Colossian heresy included some Jewish ideas and, also, why the nearby Galatian Christians were so threatened by Judaism.

The gospel was probably first preached at Colosse by Paul and Silas, accompanied by Timothy (Acts 15:40, 41; Acts 16:1-3, 6). Paul’s second visit to Phrygia is mentioned in Acts 18:23. Since Phrygia’s chief cities were Colosse and Laodicea, many believe Paul would have preached there during his visits to the region. However, some contend that Paul never visited Colosse. They base this contention upon a statement in Colossians 2:1, where Paul mentions those who had not seen him “in the flesh.” This statement, however, in the opinion of this writer, would not necessarily refer to all those in the church at Colosse, nor would it preclude Paul’s having started the church there. Of course, it would make no difference who began the church at Colosse. The authenticity and genuineness of the epistle have never been seriously questioned.

Date and Author of the Epistle

Colossians was written from Rome about A.D. 62, while Paul was in prison there. The epistle was written by Paul with his own hand and delivered by Tychicus, accompanied by Onesimus (Col. 4:7, 9). The Ephesian letter was delivered at the same time (Eph. 6:21, 22). Colossians is one of four epistles commonly called "the prison
epistles.” The others are Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon. They were written during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:16-31).

**The Purpose of the Epistle**

Paul learned from Epaphras of a threatening situation in Colosse. The church was being disturbed by false doctrine, later referred to as “the Colossian Heresy.” Paul wrote: (1) to guard and protect the church against both Judaism and pagan philosophy; (2) to commend Onesimus to the church since he was soon to return to Philemon in Colosse, and (3) to recommend Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12, 13). These letters were circulated to be read among the churches (Col. 4:16).

**What Was the Colossian Heresy?**

Based on Paul’s criticism of some current practices among the people, it appears the heresy he confronted in this epistle was a mixture of Jewish, Greek, and Pagan ideas. In Col. 1:15, 19, Paul stresses the supremacy of Christ. In Col. 2:2-3, Paul speaks of the wisdom of God and Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” We conclude from such statements that some were denying Christ’s equality with God. Thus, Paul attacks the heresy by describing Christ’s true nature and glory.

This heresy apparently denied Christ’s part in creating the material world. Paul counters this in chapter one, verses sixteen and seventeen. It is also thought some denied Christ came in a physical body. Paul deals with this in 1:22 and 2:9.

The heresy included many Jewish teachings such as circumcision (2:11) and Jewish laws concerning meats, new moons, etc. (2:16). Those involved in the heresy also exalted human wisdom and knowledge.

**Outline of Colossians**

I. Introduction (1:1-12).
   A. Address and greeting (verses 1-2).
   B. Paul’s prayer for the Colossians (verses 3-12).

II. The doctrinal section (1:13-2:3).
   A. The nature of redemption (1:13-14).
      1. Deliverance from sin and translation into the kingdom of the Father (1:13).
      2. Forgiveness of sins in the kingdom, in Christ (1:14).
   B. The description of Christ (1:15-19).
      1. He is the image of God and the firstborn over all creation (1:15).
      2. All things were created through Christ (1:16).
      3. Christ existed before all things (1:17).
      4. Christ is the Head of the church (1:18).
      5. God placed all things in Christ (1:19).
   C. The work of Christ (1:20-23).
   D. The apostle Paul’s part in the work of Christ (1:24-2:3).
III. The defense section (2:4-3:4).
   A. Warning against false philosophy (2:4-8)
   B. The all-sufficient Christ answers the false teachers (2:9-15).
      1. The completeness of Christ (2:9-10).
      2. The process of purification from sins through Christ (2:11-13).
      3. The end of the Law of Moses and His ultimate victory through
         the cross (2:14-15).
   C. The conclusions drawn from Paul’s answers concerning the all-
      sufficient Christ (2:16-3:4).
      1. Warnings against ritualistic prohibitions and against angel
         worship.
      2. These warnings are enforced by the fact that they had died with
         Christ (2:20-23).
      3. Fellowship with the resurrected Christ is the motive for the new
         life (3:1-4).

IV. The practical section (3:5-4:6).
   A. The application of Christ’s death and resurrection in personal living
      (3:5-17).
   B. The application of Christ’s death and resurrection in reciprocal
      relationships (3:18-4:1).
   C. The application of Christ’s death and resurrection in relation to the
      world (4:2-6).

V. The personal section (4:7-17).
   A. The mission of Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9).
   B. Greetings from Paul’s fellow workers (4:10-14).
   C. Paul’s own greetings (4:15).
   D. The message to Laodicea (4:16-17).

VI. Concluding comments (4:18).
   A. Paul signs the letter with his own hand.
   B. Paul asks to be remembered in his affliction.
   C. He closes with his characteristic phrase, “Grace be with you.”

A Final Introductory Comment

It is the hope of this writer that, when this study is concluded, the reader will have a
greater love for Christ, as Paul presents Him in this inspired epistle. The purpose of
Paul’s ministry was to make known the mystery of God “which is Christ in you, the hope
of glory” (Col 1: 27). Unless we are in Christ, Christ is not in us; and, if Christ is not in
us, we have no hope of glory!
COLOSSIANS: CHAPTER ONE

Col. 1:1-2: Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 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.

Paul identifies himself here, as in other of his epistles, as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Here he adds “by the will of God,” an expression he also used in the beginning of 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, and 2 Timothy.

It was God’s will that Paul become an apostle. The appearance of Jesus on the Damascus road was to qualify Paul for that office. [See Acts 9.] For a man to be an apostle, it was necessary for him to have seen the resurrected Lord. Paul had not seen Jesus after His resurrection and prior to His ascension. Therefore, the appearance of Jesus to Saul, the persecutor of Christians, was necessary to qualify him to become Paul, the apostle.

However, Saul’s conversion did not take place on the road to Damascus, as many mistakenly believe. Saul became a Christian only after he had followed the instructions of Ananias, whom the Lord sent to him in Damascus. Those final instructions are recorded in Acts 22:16: “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Saul of Tarsus had to believe in Jesus as the Christ, repent of his sins, confess Jesus as the Christ, and be baptized for the forgiveness of his sins. This is the same process all must follow in order to become Christians. The special appearance of Jesus to Saul had nothing to do with converting him. It was to qualify him to carry out his apostolic mission.

Timothy, mentioned in verse one, was Paul’s son in the gospel, which simply means Paul converted this young man, who was from Lystra. Timothy was a faithful companion and constant source of encouragement to Paul, and to him Paul wrote two of his epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy.

Paul refers to Timothy simply as “our brother,” a term which suggests the special bond that exists between fellow Christians. When Paul used the word “brother,” he did so with a warm affection and appreciation that today should be characteristic of all Christians toward other Christians. There is no relationship as special as that of being brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul addresses his letter to the “saints” and “faithful brethren in Christ.” These two phrases do not refer to two different groups of people. They simply show two ways of referring to the Christians at Colosse. The word “saint” means one who is set apart for a holy use. All Christians are saints and all saints are Christians. It is sinful to exalt one saint above another and to assign one a special status after death, as the Catholics do. Paul here makes it clear that the saints at Colosse were simply the members of the church, not some special class of Christians.

“Faithful brethren” is an expression that further describes the saints. Saints are faithful, and the faithful are saints.

“Grace to you and peace...” is an expression used frequently by Paul in his epistles. Grace is the unmerited favor of God. Without grace no one may be saved, because no one deserves to be saved. However, God extended His grace toward man by sending Jesus
Christ to die on the cross. When man shows his faith in God and Christ by obeying the commands of the gospel, he has forgiveness of sins and enjoys the peace that Paul mentions here. It is a peace which surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7) and comes from “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

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

Much of Colossians chapter one is a prayer from Paul for God’s people. In verses 4-8, we find the things that prompted Paul’s prayer. Then, in verses 9-12, Paul reveals the specifics of his prayer for the Colossians. In verse 12, Paul returns to the theme of thanksgiving to God for the greatest blessing of all—salvation that qualifies us to receive the eternal inheritance.

The giving of thanks is a very important part of prayer to God. Paul was one of the most “thankful” people who have ever lived. He taught thanksgiving and he practiced it in his daily life. [Cp. Php. 4:6, 7.] This may tell us how Paul could endure all his sufferings for the cause of Christ. He always looked for things which to be thankful, and he found many. If a man who sacrificed and suffered so much could always find reasons to be thankful, should not all Christians today find reasons to rejoice? Has anyone suffered more than Paul? Yet he rejoiced in his sufferings (Col. 1:24) and remained thankful that he was counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.

Col. 1:4-5: since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; “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,

In verses 4 and 5, Paul reveals the specific things about the Colossians for which he gave thanks to God. He was most thankful for their faith, love, and hope. In verse 4, he speaks of their “faith in Christ Jesus” and of their “love for all the saints.”

How did Paul know of the faith and love of the Colossians? It was by their actions! Faith, in order to be pleasing to God, must be seen. In Galatians 5:6, Paul wrote: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.” This is an excellent summary of the Christian existence. Christianity involves a working faith that is motivated by love. Jesus said: “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Love causes us to keep His commandments.

The faith that will not work is not true faith. James made this clear in his great teaching on faith in James 2. There he declared that “faith without works is dead” (James 2:24).

Paul heard of the faith of the Colossians by hearing of their “works of faith.” In fact, he used that expression in his letter to the Thessalonians, when he wrote: “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” (1 Thess. 1:3). Faith must “work” and love must “labor” in order to be acceptable to God. It is not enough to tell others we believe, or to tell them of our love for God and for our fellow man. John wrote: “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John
3:18). John teaches us to love not only in word, but also in deed.

In verse five, Paul gives "hope" as another reason for giving thanks to God on behalf of the Colossian Christians. What is hope? It is Biblically defined as "desire coupled with expectation." It is not wishing for something. A wish may involve something one wants, but something one has no realistic expectation of receiving. However, hope is desire and the expectation of receiving what one desires. In the case of the Christian, he desires to be in heaven, and he expects to be there. His hope is based upon the certainty of God's promise to the faithful to give them eternal life (Rev. 2:10b).

Later in this same epistle, Paul encourages Christians to "... seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1). The Christian must keep his eyes on heaven; otherwise, the world around him will overcome him. This is why hope is called the anchor of the soul; it keeps our attention where it needs to be--"on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2). Satan's purpose is, first, to distract us from our hope and, then, to destroy us through our attachment to the things of this world. It is not surprising that Paul would place so much emphasis on his thankfulness for the hope of the Christian.

Also emphasized in this verse is the fact that the "word of the truth of the gospel" brought this hope to those who heard and obeyed. Throughout the New Testament, the Word of God is held up as the all-sufficient power to save man from his past sins and to guide him to the fulfillment of his hope--heaven. It is called here the "word of the truth" because it is nothing but truth, absolute and unchangeable. The word "gospel" means "good news." Could there be better news than the news that Jesus died on the cross to make forgiveness of sins possible to those who obey His Word?

**Col. 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;

The gospel that was preached to the Colossians was the same gospel preached everywhere. There is one gospel for all men, Jew and Gentile. In another of his epistles, Paul warned against preaching any other gospel than the one he had preached (Galatians 1:6-9). This gospel, which Paul received by revelation, was the unchangeable gospel preached to all the world in Paul's time. That same gospel must be preached to the entire world in this present time if men are to be saved from their sins.

This gospel is to bring forth fruit from the first day of a person's obedience to it. People are saved to serve from the first day of their obedience. Obviously, those who are new Christians are as newborn babes (1 Peter 1:2). However, they are to desire the milk of the word, feed upon it, and grow stronger each day. During this time, they are to use their talents to their fullest extent, as they grow in grace and knowledge of God's Word (2 Peter 3:18).

"The grace of God in truth" is an expression that reminds us of God's favor that has been shown through the revelation of His Will to man. The grace, or favor of God, is seen in His giving the gospel, the good news of salvation, to all mankind through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son. God's grace is given through the truth, and His grace must be accepted by man's obedience to the truth. Man cannot expect to receive grace in the final judgment unless he has accepted God's offer of pardon through the gospel.
Col. 1:7: as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf,

Epaphras, it is believed, was with Paul when he wrote this letter to the Colossians. He is mentioned in verse 23 of Philemon, where Paul calls him his “fellow prisoner.” Here, in verse 7, Paul refers to him as “our dear fellow servant,” and “a faithful minister.” There are many compliments that could be given to men in this life. However, there are none higher than those bestowed upon Epaphras by the apostle Paul. The highest tribute a man could receive is to be deemed a faithful minister, a dear fellow servant, and one willing to be a prisoner with Paul for the cause of Jesus Christ.

Col. 1:8: who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

“Love” is the crowning characteristic of the Christian. It is the quality that ties together all other Christian graces. In fact, Paul discusses the spiritual clothing of the Christian in chapter 3, where he writes: “But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.” [See notes on that verse for a more detailed discussion of love.]

The phrase “in the Spirit” shows that love must be connected to the revealed Word of God, which is what is involved here. “In the Spirit” means in the revealed will of the Spirit, the teaching of the Spirit, which, today, is in its complete and final form in the written word of the New Testament. Therefore, one cannot contend that love does not require the keeping of God’s commandments. Just the opposite is true. One cannot truly love God without keeping His commandments (John 14:15), and one cannot truly love his fellow man without telling him of those commandments.

Col. 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;

The prayer of Paul now becomes more specific, as he reveals the things for which he prays on behalf of the Colossian Christians. It is important to notice that “knowledge of His will” is first mentioned. One cannot begin his pleasing obedience and service to God without first knowing God’s will. Then, Paul adds the phrase, “In wisdom and spiritual understanding.” These words show that knowledge of facts alone will not be sufficient. There must be the proper understanding and application of those facts before one can “walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him,” as the next verse begins.

Col. 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;

The life that is pleasing to God is often described in Scripture as a “walk.” It is first said of Enoch in Genesis 5:24: “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Genesis 5:24). It is interesting to compare this statement with what is said of Enoch in Hebrews 11:5: “By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death,
and was not found, because God had taken him; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”

Enoch walked with God and this pleased God. However, Hebrews 11:6 adds: “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Thus, we conclude that to walk with God is to please God by a faith that shows itself in action. In other words, faith must be a “walking faith.”

Paul, in Galatians 5:6, reminds us that faith is a “working faith,” as he writes: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.” Faith must move us to action, the point clearly taught throughout the Scriptures. Galatians 5:6 also reminds us of the motivation for our working faith— that is, love.

Another Old Testament character, Noah, is described as one who “walked with God.” “This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God” (Genesis 6:9). The preceding verse (Gen. 6:8) tells us that Noah received grace, or favor, from God. Verse nine tells us why Noah received God’s favor: he was one who walked with God by demonstrating his obedient faith.

The principle of salvation by grace through faith has never changed. If we are to be saved today, it must be by an active, obedient faith that responds to the gracious offer of salvation by God through Jesus Christ. Later, in chapter two of Colossians, Paul describes the process by which faith responds to the grace of God.

“Fully pleasing Him” is a phrase relating to walking worthy of the Lord, in the manner we have just outlined. It also relates to the next phrase in the verse: “being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Pleasing God involves walking worthy of the Lord by “being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” Faith produces fruit, and by that fruit we show that we are disciples of the Lord. “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples” (John 15:8). “Much fruit” will result when we increase our knowledge of God’s Word and apply it to our lives.

**Col. 1:11:** strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;

“Strengthened with all might” is another of the specific things Paul desired for the Colossians, and for all Christians. This strength comes from “His glorious power” and results in making the believer patient, longsuffering, and joyful. We must be strong to be patient, or steadfast, under the trials and difficulties of life. God’s power enables us to stand the trials of life with joy. God’s power is deposited in His Word, which gives us everything we need (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Paul wrote in the Philippian letter: “Rejoice in the Lord always.” The knowledge that we are in the Lord produces a joy that no circumstance of life can alter. Such knowledge also leads us to be thankful to the Father, as Paul points out in the next verse.

**Col. 1:12:** giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.
“Giving thanks” is a participle that indicates thanksgiving is to be a continual process in the Christian life. Thanksgiving is a vital part of the prayer life of the Christian. Paul emphasized this fact in Philippians 4:6,7, where he wrote: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” The phrase “with thanksgiving” indicates the continual thankfulness that should be present in the Christian.

Here, in Colossians 1:12, Paul reminds the Christians of the greatest cause for thanksgiving. The Father has “qualified” us to be partakers of the eternal inheritance that belongs only to those who are saints, or Christians. How has the Father “qualified” us to partake of the inheritance? He has done so by making us His children. How has he made us His children? Paul explains the qualification process further in the next two verses, where he speaks of the deliverance from the darkness of sin and the translation into the kingdom, the church of Christ. Verse fourteen declares that, in Christ, “...we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul summarizes the process by which this is done in another passage, Galatians 3:26, 27. There he writes: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” The qualification process is one of obedient faith. The process begins with belief that must cause us to repent of our sins, to confess Jesus as the Christ, and to be buried in the waters of baptism for the remission of sins.

It is not belief alone that makes us children of the Father. Belief is the beginning point after we have heard the truth. However, we must then act upon our belief in obedience to be saved. John 1:11, 12, is a passage that makes this very clear: “He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.” In this passage, John tells us Jesus was rejected, for the most part, by the Jews. However, to those who received Him, to them He gave the right to become His followers.

Notice that those who received him are identified as those who believed that He was the Christ. It was to these people Jesus gave the right to become Christians. They were not Christians the moment they believed. Their belief had to lead them to repent, confess Jesus as the Christ, and to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins. This is the plan of salvation taught everywhere in the New Testament. This is the obedient belief all must show to be pleasing to God.

Col. 1:13: He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

Christ is our deliverer. He has delivered us from the power of darkness by His victory over the devil. Hebrews 2:14,15 describes that victory in the following way: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

Christ became flesh, lived among men, and died the death of the cross to make salvation possible. His resurrection was the bruising of Satan’s head, first mentioned by
God in Genesis 3:15, just after the fall of man. Satan bruised the heel of Christ in the crucifixion; but, in coming forth from the grave, Christ dealt the devil a fatal blow, described in Genesis 3:15 as bruising Satan’s head.

Here, in Colossians 1:13, is undeniable proof that the kingdom of Christ is in existence now. Some claim the kingdom is yet future and that the church, a different institution, exists now until such time as Christ can come again to set up His kingdom on earth. However, the kingdom and the church are one and the same institution (Matthew 16:18, 19). Jesus said some of those living when He was on the earth would not die until the kingdom came with power (Mark 9:1). Jesus promised the apostles they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:6-8). The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the first Pentecost day following Christ’s resurrection and ascension to Heaven (Acts 2:1-4).

The Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to preach the gospel for the first time in languages they had never learned, and some three thousand souls obeyed the gospel and were added to the kingdom. Thus, the kingdom came into existence that day, almost two thousand years ago. Acts 2:47 reads: “praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” What took place on that day was a deliverance from the power of darkness and a conveyance of some three thousand souls into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Col. 1:14: In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

The word “redemption” carries the idea of a ransom. The ransom price for mankind was the precious blood of the sinless Christ. Without the shedding of His blood, there could be no forgiveness of sins, as Paul clearly states here.

Hebrews 9:22 establishes the principle that all things all cleansed with blood, and that without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins. However, the Hebrews writer makes clear, also, that the blood of animals could not take away sin. The blood of Christ had to be shed to redeem man from his sins. The writer of Hebrews further states: “For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:13, 14)

Forgiveness of sins is the greatest blessing man could ever receive. Without forgiveness there is no hope of salvation. How grateful we should be for the forgiveness that is possible through the sacrifice of Christ. How tragic it is that most people living today do not recognize this blessing that is available through the blood shed on the cross!

Many who do claim to see this great blessing of forgiveness do not seek it in the manner prescribed in the New Testament. They seek to obtain forgiveness through the doctrines of men rather than the doctrine of Christ. Faith alone does not save, but faith that obeys the commandments of God does save. Man must hear the Word, believe that Jesus is the Christ, repent of his sins, confess Jesus to be the Christ, and be baptized, buried in water, for the remission of sins. It is only in the water of baptism that the blood of Jesus is applied to cleanse the sinner.
Col. 1:15-17: He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 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. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

No man has seen God at any time, but the Son has revealed Him to us. In John 14:9, Jesus declared: "... He who has seen Me has seen the Father..." The word "image," in reference to Christ, means an exact likeness. Jesus is not inferior to the Father; He is one with Him (John 10:30). Jesus is the visible image of the invisible Father. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul also refers to Christ as the image of God. And in Hebrews 1:3, the writer declares: "Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high."

The expression, "the firstborn of all creation," does not mean Christ was a created being. Paul makes that clear in the following verse, where he declares Christ to be the creator of all things. The term "firstborn" is obviously one that suggests Christ's preeminence over all creation. He has authority and power and dominion in every realm, as verse sixteen further declares. Furthermore, in verse seventeen, Paul makes the clear declaration that Christ existed before all things. Therefore, the phrase in verse fifteen, "firstborn over all creation," cannot suggest that Christ was a created being.

The reader should remember that the Gnostic heresy was threatening the Colossian church. This heresy denied the possibility that Deity and humanity might dwell together in fleshly form. Thus, it denied the very doctrine of Christ's incarnation. However, John, in John 1:1-4, clearly asserts that Deity became flesh and dwelled among men in the very person of Jesus Christ.

As stated earlier, verse sixteen removes any doubt that the meaning of "firstborn" in verse fifteen could refer to Christ as the first of created beings. On the contrary, He is the creator of all beings, heavenly and earthly. Since the Gnostic heresy involved angel worship and relegated Christ to the status of an angelic being, Paul's statement here is most significant.

Paul clearly asserts that Christ is God--omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent creator of the universe. All things were created through Him and for Him. He brought all things into existence for Himself. This statement alone shows that Christ cannot be less than God, for only God could do what is said to have been done here.

The preexistence of Christ is clearly stated. While Jesus walked on the earth, He asserted his preexistent state: "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." All creation is held together and continues to exist by the power of the Creator.

Col. 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.

Here Paul shifts his attention to the church, another area in which Christ is preeminent. The church here, as in other of Paul's writings, is called "the body." Later in
this chapter, Paul, in verse 24, refers to his sufferings for the sake of Christ’s body, “which is the church.”

A body can have but one head, and a head can have but one body. Therefore, Christ cannot be head over the “churches,” but over the church! Paul makes this clear in the epistle to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 1:22, 23, he declares: “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Then, in Ephesians 4:4, Paul writes: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.” In Ephesians 5:23, the apostle asserts: “For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.”

We thus learn that Christ is head over the church, which is His body. There is but one body, and Christ is the Savior of that body. Therefore, one must be in the body to be saved. One must be in the church of Christ. Later, in the Colossian letter, Paul will remind the Christians at Colosse how they were made a part of the body through their belief that led them to repent, to confess Christ and to be buried with Him in baptism (2:12, 13).

Christ is the beginning of salvation through His work in redeeming man from sin by His sacrifice of Himself: He proved Himself to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead. The phrase, “firstborn from the dead” is also used by John in Revelation 1:5. Christ’s preeminence over death is seen in this statement. He was raised from the dead by the power of God and ascended to the right hand of the Father, where He reigns now over His kingdom, the church. Here, in this verse, the church is called His body.

Col. 1:19 – 23: For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 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. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—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.

Verse nineteen continues the idea of Christ’s preeminence. There are no angelic beings equal to Him. They are, in fact, subordinate to the Son, as are all other created beings in heaven or earth. Christ’s “fullness” shows His sovereignty over all. He is Deity. He is not a part of the angelic order, but He is above the angels. He is God. [Cp. Hebrews 1:1-4.]

The reconciliation process purposed by God culminated in Christ through His death, burial, and resurrection. There is no reconciliation except through the blood of His cross. Both earthly and heavenly beings are within the apostle’s view here. The mention of peace indicates enmity existed between God and man because of man’s sins, and the blood of Christ was the only solution to the problem. [Cp. Ephesians 2:14.]

In verses 21-23, Paul addresses the Colossians situation specifically. The phrase “And you” refers to them and reminds them of the alienation from God they had
experienced through their “wicked works.” However, now they were reconciled to God (verse 21), and the next verse reveals the manner in which the reconciliation was made possible.

The means by which the Colossians had become reconciled to God was through Christ’s coming to earth in human form and in His dying the sacrificial death of the cross. Paul’s statement makes it clear that Christ took upon Himself human form. He did have a fleshly body, while at the same time, maintaining His Deity. Here again is a statement that counters the Gnostic contention that no reconciliation could be achieved between God and man by any being possessing a human body. Paul states the purpose of the reconciliation process and expresses his desire that the Colossians would ultimately be presented to God in the final judgment in a saved condition. However, this ultimate, final presentation of the Colossians, and of all Christians, is conditioned upon continual faithfulness, as the next verse points out.

Verse 23 is one of hundreds in the New Testament clearly declaring the possibility that one may be lost eternally after becoming a Christian. Paul preached the same gospel in every place, and those who obeyed it were taught the necessity of continuing in the faith, even until death, to receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

The expression “moved away from the hope of the gospel” is a clear reference to losing one’s salvation. Hope is desire coupled with expectation. Hope is the anchor of the soul. How can one cast away his spiritual anchor without drifting away into apostasy? Elsewhere in the Colossian letter, Paul issues warnings that clearly show the Colossians could lose their salvation by following false teaching (Cp. Col. 2:8, 18).

Paul refers here to his being made a proclaimer of the glorious gospel that he, as a Pharisee before his conversion, had persecuted. Paul considered it an exalted privilege to preach the unspeakable riches of Christ to the world. Paul writes of the gospel’s being preached to “every creature under heaven,” a similar expression to the one made in verse six of this chapter, where he used the phrase “all the world.” As was noted in the comments on that verse, the gospel that was preached to the world in Paul’s day must be preached to the world today, if man is to have the hope Paul speaks about in this passage.

While we concede the world of our day is much larger than that of Paul’s time, the methods of getting the gospel to the lost today make it possible to reach every creature. There is no doubt that the church has been given the charge to carry the good news of salvation to the world. [Cp. Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-15; 1 Tim. 3:15.] God would not give His people a command they could not possibly obey. Therefore, those who are Christians must make every effort to evangelize the world in every generation. Motivated by the love of Christ, the church can achieve this goal!

Col. 1:24-26: 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, 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, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.
Paul could rejoice in his sufferings because they resulted from his following Christ. Paul was in prison when he wrote these words and was suffering, even at that time, for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul was suffering for the sake of others, not for himself. He wrote to the Philippians about those who had been made stronger and more courageous by his suffering. He wanted the Colossians to take heart and not to be discouraged in any sense by his imprisonment. He was glad to suffer for them.

What does Paul mean by the phrase “the afflictions of Christ”? Paul is not saying Christ’s afflictions were continuing or that Christ, in His death on the cross, did not suffer supremely and fully for mankind. Christ suffered as no one has ever suffered; and His suffering, which was once for all, was completed. Paul is simply saying it is His time to suffer the afflictions that come to those who live godly in Christ Jesus. Paul’s sufferings were not yet complete, his cup of suffering was not quite full, but he rejoiced that he was able to suffer for Christ and was fully prepared to “fill up” the cup of suffering by dying for Him.

There is also a sense, even now, in which Christ is afflicted when His people are afflicted. This may also be involved in the meaning of the phrase “the afflictions of Christ.” When Paul was first confronted by the Lord on the Damascus road, the Lord asked him: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” This question reflected the fact that to persecute the Lord’s people is to persecute the Lord, in the sense that Jesus is fully sympathetic with His suffering saints. This knowledge should comfort all who suffer ill treatment at the hands of the enemies of the cross. The Savior knows and sympathizes with their suffering.

Paul identifies his suffering as being for the sake of the body, the church. Here, as in Colossians 1:18, is another reference to the church as Christ’s spiritual body. Paul is not saying that His suffering is like that of Christ in that it possessed any atoning power. Christ’s sacrifice made possible the redemption of man in the church, which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). However, Paul is stating that his sufferings were for the advancement of the church, the spiritual body of Christ. Again, in Philippians 1:12, Paul wrote: “But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel.” All children of God should be willing to suffer to advance the kingdom, the church. The church is the precious spiritual body of Christ, for which every member should be willing to die, as was Paul.

In verse 25, as in verse 23, Paul refers to his work as a messenger for the church in proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom everywhere. Paul was a steward of the gospel. The word “steward” means one who has been entrusted with another’s property or goods. In 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2, Paul wrote: “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.” Paul understood the serious nature of his work as an apostle. He had been given the greatest work on earth--to make known the mystery of God in its fullness. In the next verse, he writes more about this “mystery” that was entrusted to him to make known to the world.
What is the "mystery" which had not been made known to the saints? "Mystery," as it is used in Scripture, does not indicate something unknowable, but rather something secret that had to be revealed to be known. This was the case with the gospel of Christ. God planned to send Christ to earth long before the plan of redemption was fulfilled, but He did not make the plan known fully in former ages and generations. There was a gradual unfolding of the scheme of redemption that included the salvation of the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

**COLOSSIANS: CHAPTER TWO**

Col. 2:1-5: 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, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

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

In this chapter, Paul warns the Colossians about being deceived by the "persuasive" words of false teachers. His warning would apply, no doubt, to the Gnostics, whose doctrine he discussed previously. Paul also reminds the Colossians about the process by which they became Christians. In doing so, he presents to all of us a picture of purification from sin that applies to all men everywhere.

In the final part of the chapter, Paul exhorts the brethren, on the basis of their being in Christ, not to be led astray by the false religious teachings of the Gnostics or of anyone who would deceive them. The phrase "in Christ" and expressions equivalent to it are used repeatedly in this chapter, again emphasizing the fullness and completeness of the blessings in Christ Jesus.

Verse one reveals Paul’s deep and genuine devotion to the brethren to whom he writes this epistle, including those in Laodicea who would also read it. He describes his feelings as "a great conflict." The idea involved is a battle, or contest, in which Paul was struggling to save the Colossians, and all men, from the devices of the devil. All who seek to live godly in Christ Jesus are in an ongoing contest, or battle, with the devil.

The phrase "and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh" is taken by some to mean that Paul had never seen the Colossians face to face. Therefore, some contend he could not have been the one who established the church there. However, others do not view this statement as necessarily indicating that Paul had never been to Colosse. Rather than referring to all the Colossians, the phrase may simply be a reference to those of them whom he had not visited personally. [See notes in the introduction about the establishment of the church at Colosse.]
Paul's "conflict" (verse one) for the Colossians and Laodiceans, as stated earlier, may have involved his conflict in prayer on their behalf. Epaphras labored fervently for them in his prayers, and here Paul specifies some of the things he desired for the brethren. He wanted them to be encouraged, or strengthened, in their faith. Paul desired that love would run through the church like thread runs through a garment to bind it together. To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote: "And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you" (1 Thessalonians 3:12). Love is to increase in the heart of the Christian every day. To the Philippians, Paul wrote: "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment." The Philippian letter reminds us that love is tied to knowledge and discernment, and Paul makes that connection in the next part of Colossians 2:2.

Paul's fervent prayer for these Christians was that they would attain the riches that come to those who understand the knowledge of the mystery of God, the gospel. Those who have obtained these "riches" in obeying the gospel, and who are living according to the gospel, have an assurance that only comes through knowledge. Knowledge comes through the Word of God and must be not only learned, but applied, if we are to know the riches that come to those who know the Father and the Son through such obedience. This is a wonderful passage depicting the unspeakable riches of the knowledge of the gospel. It is tragic that most people never discover or come to appreciate the priceless treasures that, as the next verse reveals, are hidden in Christ.

The statement "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" is another strike at the Gnostic teaching threatening the church at Colosse. Paul affirms that "all," not just a part of wisdom and knowledge is found in Christ. Paul's use of the word "hidden" does not mean that man cannot discover such wisdom and knowledge. The thought is simply that all such wisdom and knowledge is contained in Christ and in no other being or group of beings, such as angels.

The word for "knowledge" here is gnostis in the Greek, the word from which the Gnostics took their name, believing they had a superior knowledge. Here Paul denies this and tells us that in Christ there is all wisdom and knowledge.

Paul's warning to the Colossians in verse four gives further evidence that Paul had in mind the heresy that threatened the church at Colosse. He was aware of false teachers who, by their persuasive words, were trying to deceive the minds of Christians. This shows that some who teach error may lead others away from the truth by their ability to entice men to follow them. We must always hold truth to be the most important thing in our lives, and we must always compare the content of what we hear with the clear teaching of the New Testament. The persuasive talents of men must never become as important as the truth of God's Word.

Paul could not be with them bodily at this critical time in their Christian walk, but he wanted them to know that his thoughts and prayers were with them, and that he rejoiced over the steadfastness of their faith. How could Paul "see" their faith in Christ if he was absent from the Christians at Colosse? No doubt, he had received word from Epaphras about their "order" and "steadfastness," as Paul expresses it here. The Colossians were conducting themselves in an orderly fashion, and they were firm in their faith, presenting a solid front. The picture here is much like a group of soldiers arranged in orderly fashion and well prepared for battle against the enemy. In this case, the enemy was the heresy set forth by some around them.
Col. 2:6-7: As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

Men speak today about the need to “receive” Jesus as their Savior. However, much of their teaching is not in harmony with the teachings of the New Testament. It is true that we must receive Jesus or we will be eternally lost. However, we must see what the New Testament says about how one receives Jesus as one’s Savior. The Colossians received Him in the same way we must receive Him today. They believed in Jesus as the Christ, repented of their sins, confessed Jesus to be the Christ, and were baptized for the remission of their sins. Later, in this chapter, Paul reminds them of their burial with Christ in the water of baptism. [See notes on Col. 2:11-13.]

Once we have “received” Jesus in the manner taught in the New Testament, we must continue to “walk in Him.” Our faith must continue to move us forward in living according to the teachings of the New Testament. It is not enough to be forgiven of our sins by obeying the gospel. We must then live for Jesus every day of our lives, in the church, to which the Lord adds every obedient believer. In Chapter one, verse 23, Paul wrote of the possibility of being “moved away” from the hope of the gospel. This and hundreds of other New Testament passages tell us a Christian may lose his salvation, if he does not “continue in the faith,” as Paul stated in 1:23.

To be established in the faith, our spiritual roots must go deep to give us support and strength. We are to be like the tree planted by the rivers of water (Psalm 1), nourished by the water of life, the Word of God. We are to be “built up in Him.”

This statement reminds us of a structure built upon the right foundation. In this case, the foundation upon which we are to build is Christ (1 Cor. 3:11); there is no other. “The faith” in Scripture often refers to Christianity itself (Jude 3; Eph. 4:5). It is the system of faith, or Christianity, in which we are to be firmly planted or established. Therefore, in this phrase, Paul uses the figure of a tree and of a building to remind the Christian of his need to be strong in the faith, once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

Here, also, is a reminder that one is taught the faith. In John 6:44, 45, Jesus declared that those who come to the Father through the Son must all be taught by God. That teaching is done through the Word, the all-sufficient and all-powerful Word (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

The Christian is always thankful for the privilege of being in the faith, and his life will “abound” with thanksgiving, because he realizes that all spiritual blessings are found in Christ (Eph. 1:3). The idea of the word “abounding” is overflowing. Our thanksgiving to God and Christ should overflow each day in hearts filled to overflowing with love for Him who first loved us (1 John 4:19). Thanksgiving is continually urged upon the Christian by Paul and other New Testament writers. [Cp. Php. 4:6, 7.]

Col. 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.

Here, from Paul, is a word of warning indicating a very real danger. He specifies the danger and, in doing so, again demonstrates the possibility that a Christian may lose
his soul after he has been saved from sin through obedience to the gospel. There is much false teaching in the world today that claims otherwise, but the New Testament is very clear in this and many other passages, some of which we have already studied in Colossians. The word “beware” means to look at something very carefully. Paul wants the Colossians to see clearly the danger of being cheated of their eternal reward. The word “cheat” literally means “to be carried away as a captive.” It is the idea of kidnapping, as the modern term expresses it.

The next phrase in the verse tells what it is that carries men away captive spiritually--philosophy, the love of wisdom or knowledge. However, the philosophy to which Paul refers is one that contains no wisdom from above, but rather the empty and deceitful wisdom of men. Proverbs 1:7 states that true wisdom begins with the knowledge of God. The teachings of the Gnostics and other false teachers contained no divine wisdom and, in fact, would rob the Christians at Colosse of the real wisdom from above.

The religious world today is filled with the traditions of men. Traditions can be good or evil. Inspired traditions are certainly good. Paul wrote of such inspired traditions in 2 Thessalonians 2:15: “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” However, the traditions to which Paul refers in Col. 2:8 are traditions of men that seek to subvert the inspired teachings of the New Testament.

Jesus, in Matthew 15:9 and Mark 7:7-9, also referred to the traditions of men that oppose the Word of God. Many in the Lord’s time were rejecting the Word of God and holding to their own traditions. Such is still the case today throughout the world.

The reference to the “basic principles of the world” suggests the elemental principles of something, like the letters of the alphabet are the elementary principles of the language. In Galatians 4:3, Paul referred to the “elements of the world,” which, in that context, indicated the teachings of the Law of Moses. It is possible that here in Colossians Paul’s reference to the basic principles of the world also includes the elements of the Law of Moses. Later, in verse sixteen, Paul refers to certain practices and observances that are obviously related to Judaism. Therefore, that could be the meaning here in verse eight. Pagan philosophies, also, may have been in Paul’s mind. Regardless of what is included in Paul’s meaning here, it is clear from the next phrase that all of this false philosophy and tradition was not according to Christ.

This is all that a person needs to know to oppose any teaching. If it is not according to the revealed Word of Christ, the New Testament, we must oppose it. The New Testament is our perfect and final authority and furnishes us completely with all we need to know to be saved and to remain saved.

Col. 2: 9-10: For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

This statement gives further insight into the nature of the false philosophy and tradition threatening the church at Colosse. Paul exalts Christ as the fullness of the Godhead bodily. False teachers were apparently contending that Christ was not all-sufficient. They were teaching that one needed to worship angels or to observe the Law
of Moses, including circumcision and other aspects of the former covenant. However, Paul denies all such teaching in one powerful declaration.

The word “Godhead” involves the “Godhood” of Christ. Christ was not bestowed with the qualities of Deity; all the inherent characteristics of Deity are in Christ. These inherent qualities “dwell” in Christ. They reside permanently in Him as a part of His very nature. Christ has always been, and will always be God, a member of the Godhead. He did not give up His divinity when He became man. Paul makes this clear by his use of the word “bodily.” Jesus lived among men as both man and God; and, as one who perfectly understands both sides, He ever lives to make intercession for man with God. Thus, as Paul wrote to Timothy: “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).

The word “complete” is from the same word translated “fullness” in verse nine. Therefore, Paul is saying that, because there is in Christ the fullness of the Godhead bodily, the Christian is made full “in Him.” John makes a similar statement in John 1:16: “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.” The only way for a man to be “filled up” spiritually is by being “in Him.”

Here again is a statement that strikes directly at the false teachers at Colosse, who were contending for the ordinances of the Law of Moses, the worship of angels, and other such practices. Christ is all one needs to be full, or complete, spiritually. The principalities and powers may include those in heaven and on earth, for it is certainly the case that Christ is the sovereign ruler of them all. He is above the angels.

Col. 2:11-13: 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, 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.

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,

Colossians 2:11-13 could be considered a more detailed description of what it means to receive Christ Jesus, as Paul expresses it in verse 6: “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” How had the Colossians received Christ Jesus? It was not by prayer, but by obedience to the teaching of the gospel that they received the Lord. That obedience was completed in their burial with Christ in baptism, as Paul now reminds them.

The whole process of conversion to Christ is referred to here under the analogy of circumcision. The comparison is between the putting off of sin through obedience to Christ with the literal cutting away, or putting off, of a part of the fleshly body in the case of circumcision. Paul does not teach here that circumcision was a type of baptism.

Circumcision under the Old Covenant was a cutting away of part of the flesh of the male. However, Paul refers here to the circumcision made without hands. What is that? It is a cutting away of sin from the individual who obeys the gospel through belief, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ. The old man of sin has been crucified, as Paul expresses it under a different figure elsewhere, and all things are new.
This "cutting away" process is completed when the penitent believer, who has confessed his faith in Christ, is buried in baptism. This is what Paul mentions in verse twelve.

Paul makes it clear that baptism is a burial. This is the very meaning of the word in the New Testament. It never refers to sprinkling or pouring. [See Romans 6:3, 4.] When one buries something, one does not simply pour a small amount of dirt over the thing being buried; one covers it completely. Thus, baptism, as a burial, is a complete covering of the body in water.

As Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God, the one who goes into the water of baptism is raised out of the water, having been cleansed of his sins by the blood of Christ that is applied as one is buried in the water. Paul, in Romans 6:3, 4, taught that a person is raised from the water of baptism to walk in newness of life. There can be no new life until one has submitted to a burial in water, where one reaches the blood of Christ.

Paul declares that one goes into the water with "faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." This shows that baptism is not for infants, but for those who are able to express their faith in the working of God. The working of God refers to the process by which God cleanses the sinner in baptism. One must believe that Jesus is the Christ, proved to be so by His resurrection from the dead. The omnipotent God who raised Jesus from the dead has the power to forgive all sin through Christ's blood applied in baptism. The candidate for cleansing, however, must go into the water with faith in God's power to cleanse him from his sins.

In verse thirteen, Paul refers specifically to the Colossians, who were Gentiles, called the uncircumcision by the Jews. Their former state was one of hopelessness without Christ. However, through their belief, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism, they had been made alive spiritually, as the next phrase indicates.

There can be no doubt as to when sins are forgiven. It is when one is "made alive together with Him." This refers to the fact that all those outside of Christ are dead in sin. However, through the cleansing process Paul describes in verses eleven through thirteen, they are made alive spiritually. As Christ was made alive physically while in the tomb, the penitent sinner is made alive "together with Him" in the watery tomb of baptism. The objective student will conclude that baptism, a burial in water, is the final step of obedient faith that places one in Christ, where all spiritual blessings are found. Baptism is essential to salvation.

Col. 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.

Here is a clear reference to the fact that the Law of Moses, including the Ten Commandments, has been nailed to the cross. In this verse, the Law is called "the handwriting of requirements." Paul declares it was "against us," because it could not make a person spiritually complete by itself. The Law was designed to point out the terrible nature of sin and the need for a Savior to completely free man from sin. In Galatians 3:26-29, Paul calls the Law our tutor, or schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ. It was a law given to Israel and was never intended to be the final revelation of God to man.
Jesus is the “end,” or purpose, of the law (Romans 10:3). Tragically, many of the Jews refused to accept this fact. Rather than receiving Jesus as the Christ, they rejected and crucified Him. They wanted to hold on to the Old Law and the many traditions and teachings they had wrongfully added to it. Most of the Jewish religious leaders viewed Jesus as a threat to them and not as a Savior.

**Col. 2:15-17: Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.” So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, “which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.**

Paul’s statement in verse fifteen is a declaration of the decisive victory Christ won over all powers, whether they are viewed as spiritual or earthly. It may be that both are in view here. Christ won the victory over the earthly rulers, both Jewish and Roman, who crucified Him. He also won the final victory over Satan and his hosts through the resurrection from the dead. The phrase “in it,” associated with the triumph of Christ, likely refers to the cross, including the death, burial, and resurrection.

The word “So,” in verse sixteen, refers to Paul’s statements, in verses fourteen and fifteen, concerning Christ’s victory through the cross. Paul is saying that, since Christ has nailed the Law of Moses to the cross through His death, burial, and resurrection, they should not let anyone tell them they must still keep those things pertaining to the old law. The things specifically named in this verse are Judaistic in nature, clearly showing that, while Gnosticism was threatening the Colossian church, there were Jewish elements associated with the heresy being taught by false teachers.

The reference to food and drink, festivals, new moon observances, and Sabbaths, is clearly Jewish in nature. It is evident that part of what was being urged upon the Colossian Christians by false teachers was the observance of things of the Law of Moses that had been abolished by Christ. Under the Old Law certain meats were unclean, and there were prohibitions against drink in some instances. For example, the priests were not to drink wine before entering upon their service in the tabernacle. Those who took the Nazirite vow could not partake of any product of the grapevine. Under the New Covenant of Christ, no such prohibitions exist. All meats are clean. Of course, the New Testament teaches against the use of alcoholic beverages of any kind. However, the prohibitions mentioned by Paul here are peculiar to the Old Testament law.

This is further seen by the next reference in the verse to festivals, or “holy days,” as the King James translates this. These festivals were the Jewish feasts, including the three annual feasts at which all males were required to be present—Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. Since the Old Law had been nailed to the cross, there was no further requirement for the Christian to observe these festivals, or feasts. Paul warns the Colossian Christians not to be influenced to keep them.

The “new moon” observances were also a part of the Old Covenant practice, in which the Jews observed the beginning of the month by the blowing of trumpets and the offering of additional sacrifices. However, nowhere in the New Testament is this practice commanded. In fact, this is the only time it is referred to in the New Testament. In the context in which Paul mentions it, it is clear that it is not to be bound upon the Christian.
The word “sabbaths” is an obvious reference to the seventh day observance and shows that the Christian under the New Covenant is under no obligation to remember the Sabbath day. In fact, the first day of the week is clearly shown to be the day upon which the early church came together to observe the Lord’s Supper and to worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1, 2). While the early Christians met at other times, there was special significance given to the first day of the week as the only day on which the Lord’s Supper was to be observed. It was the day upon which Christ arose from the tomb, as well as the day upon which the church of Christ came into existence (Acts 2:1ff).

Those who seek to bind the Sabbath observance upon men today do so without authority from God and, thus, violate the teachings of the New Testament. The Sabbath, and all the other ordinances of the Old Covenant were shadows of things to come, as Paul next points out.

The teaching in verse seventeen is that the things mentioned in the previous verse were never intended to be lasting observances. They were types of that which was to come later, through Christ and His New Covenant. The study of types and antitypes is an interesting and enlightening one and is another evidence of the inspiration of the Scriptures. The writer of Hebrews has much to say about the Old Covenant simply foreshadowing what was to become reality in Christ (Cp. Heb. 8:1ff; Heb. 10:1ff).

Col. 2:18-23: 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, 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. 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—”Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 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.

The word “cheat” carries the idea of an umpire or a judge who renders a decision in the Olympic contests. Therefore, Paul is saying, in effect, “Don’t let one who sits as an umpire, or as a judge, take away your reward.” Paul gave a similar admonition earlier in this chapter at verse eight. However, the word “cheat” in that passage is not the same as in verse eighteen. In verse eight, the word translated “cheat” means “to carry one away as a captive” and conveys the idea of kidnapping.

The reference to reward here would obviously be to the heavenly reward that awaits the faithful. Therefore, here is another statement from Scripture that affirms the possibility that the Christian may fall away from God. Many falsely teach that such apostasy is not possible for the child of God. However, the Word of God denies such teaching in literally hundreds of passages in the New Testament.

Humility is a genuine quality that needs to be present in every child of God. However, false humility, also mentioned in verse 23 of the chapter, is something else.
Since the expression is joined here with the worship of angels, it no doubt refers to the contention made by some that one can only worship God through a series of angelic beings. While such a contention might appear to be humble, Paul calls it a false humility. The New Testament teaches us to approach God through Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).

This system of worshiping through angels was based upon the false idea that matter and spirit are opposed to each other and that humanity cannot directly approach Deity. This was the Gnostic contention that led them to conclude that Jesus could not have been God in human form, because they believed Deity could not dwell in a human body.

The phrase “Intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind” is generally thought to be the idea of being initiated into the so-called “mysteries” or cults. The initiates in these cults claimed they received visions. Even today there are those who claim they have had such visions.

Some of the things to which Paul refers are difficult to identify with complete certainty. However, they would have been very familiar to those to whom he wrote this epistle. The key to the problem with all of these practices is revealed in verse nineteen.

Christ is the Head, and all the beliefs and practices Paul mentioned in the preceding verses amounted to a failure to hold to Christ as the Head of His body, the church. This beautiful expression concerning the nature of the spiritual body in verse 19 reminds us of the wonderful harmony of the physical body created by God. David once exclaimed: “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well” (Psalm 139:14). However, here the application Paul makes concerns the spiritual body, the church, and its Head, Jesus Christ. Paul expresses a similar thought in Ephesians 4:15, 16. The body is clearly the church (Cp. Col. 1:18). Christ is the Head of His body, the church. Without the head, the body will die. Therefore, Christ is inseparable from His body. This defeats the claim of many today that one may have salvation in Christ without the church.

Christ purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). The spiritual life of this blood-bought institution is maintained by the continual application of Christ’s blood. A physical body cannot survive without blood, and the spiritual body of Christ, His church, cannot survive without His blood flowing through its spiritual veins.

The apostle John emphasizes the continual cleansing of those in the body, the church, when he writes: “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7-9). This cleansing is available only to those who are in the body, being “nourished and knit together” by God through Jesus Christ.

Here is a beautiful description of the manner in which God intends for the church to function. Every member is to do his part to contribute to the good of the whole. When the church functions according to God’s pattern, God will bless the church with an increase that is truly from Him. An increase in numbers alone may not indicate God’s approval. Man-made religions may increase in numbers by various methods that are not approved of God. Therefore, we must be certain we are following the New Testament pattern in all that we do (Col. 3:17). Otherwise, we cease to be Christ’s body, and He ceases to function as our Head. Christ’s messages to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation
reveal that some were in danger of having their lampstand removed because of their departures from Christ’s teachings.

Verses 20-23 conclude this section of the Colossian epistle with the reminder that the Colossians had died to all these pagan ideas, philosophies, and to the Law of Moses, when they obeyed the gospel (Col. 2:11-13). Therefore, they were freed from the past obligations concerning the eating of certain foods or other similar practices. These ordinances related to physical things that were all going to “perish with the using.” Paul calls them “the commandments and doctrines of men.” Elsewhere, Paul predicted that some would turn aside from the truth and be turned to fables (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Part of their apostasy would include imposing certain dietary restrictions upon others that God had not commanded.

In verse 23, Paul declares these things to be “self-imposed religion,” or “will-worship,” as the King James Version renders it. Religious practice is not determined by man, but by God. God has always revealed the manner of worship, and we must not depart from His Word in this or in any other matter.

Paul’s reference to “neglect of the body” involves the ascetic practices that later became more fully developed in Gnosticism. Those who afflicted themselves in this way— for example, the Essenes, who lived in the Qumran community near the Dead Sea, contended that the flesh was evil. By neglecting and, sometimes, abusing their bodies, even beating themselves, these ascetics thought they could bring themselves into a holier state of mind. However, the New Testament teaches the follower of Christ to dedicate his body and not to abuse it (Rom. 12:1, 2). We are to glorify God with our bodies. Obviously, the Christian is to refrain from putting into his body things that are sinful. However, refraining from things that God’s Word allows is of no value spiritually. To claim otherwise and to seek to bind such unscriptural regulations upon others is sinful.

**COLOSSIANS: CHAPTER THREE**

Col. 3:1-4: If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

This refers to Paul’s statements in the previous chapter, verses twelve and thirteen, where he reminded the Colossian Christians that they had been buried with Christ in baptism and raised with Him through baptism. It was by obedient faith, culminating in baptism, that the Colossians had been forgiven of their sins and added by the Lord to His church.

The phrase, “if then you were raised with Christ,” does not indicate doubt about their conversion, but expresses the idea of certainty. The word “if,” as Paul uses it here, carries the idea of “since.” Therefore, Paul is expressing the idea that, since they had been raised with Christ from baptism, they had become new creatures in Christ, with new affections, new attitudes, and new aspirations, or goals. He explains what these goals center upon in the remainder of this verse.
The Christian's citizenship is in heaven; therefore, his heart should be there also. While the child of God must live for now on the earth, his hope should be centered upon his heavenly home. Christ, the one who died to make heaven our ultimate home, is already at the right hand of the Father, reigning over His kingdom, the church. Those who are a part of His kingdom must surely seek the things above and set their attention upon the One who loved them and died for them.

The Christian does not attach himself to a world that is eventually going to be destroyed; he sets his affections on the heavenly things that shall never pass away. Here on earth there are times when we must be away from our earthly homes and families. If we have the proper love for home and family, then we do not desire to be separated from them. When such is necessary, we are always eager to return home; and, while we are away, we have pleasant thoughts of home and anticipate our return.

This should be especially true of the Christian's attitude toward the heavenly home that Jesus has gone to prepare for us (John 14:1-3). Satan's goal is to distract our thoughts from the heavenly home and to increase our attachment to the things of this world. Paul and the other inspired New Testament writers were keenly aware of Satan's efforts in this regard. Therefore, there are repeated admonitions, such as the one here in Colossians 3:1, to focus our faith and hope upon heaven.

The word "seek" in verse one is in the present tense, indicating continuous action. The Christian is to keep on seeking, or pursuing the things that are spiritual, rather than going after the things of this world--material possessions and honors.

Paul's reference to Christ's sitting at the right hand of God shows the authority that Christ now has as Head of the kingdom, the church. It is a further rebuke of the Gnostic heresy that denied the all-sufficiency of Christ. The writer of Hebrews, in Hebrews 1:1-4, made it clear that Christ, after He had purged our sins through his sacrifice on the cross, sat down at the right hand of the Father.

The inspired writer uses this point to show the superiority of Christ over the angels when he writes: "Having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." The Hebrews writer then declares that to none of the angels did the Lord ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You" (verse five), an obvious reference to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

What is the difference, if any, between Colossians 3:2, "setting" one's mind on things above, and Colossians 3:3, "seeking" those same heavenly things? As has already been noted, the word "seek" in verse one has the idea of continual pursuit of the things that pertain to the heavenly rather than the worldly. The same is true of the word "set" in verse two; it also means a disposition of mind that is constant in the Christian. The Christian is to "keep on thinking" about heavenly things. Therefore, the entire concept expressed in these verses may involve having one's mind constantly focused on the heavenly, in order to actively seek, or pursue, the things that will enable one to go to heaven.

The phrase "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" refers to the death to the life of sin that all must experience in order to become Christians. Paul has already described the dying process in Colossians 2:12, 13, where he reminded the Colossians that they had been buried in baptism, where their sins were cleansed by the blood of Christ. They were then raised with Christ from that burial in water. They left their old sins behind them, or died to them, as Paul refers to it here, and began a new life
in covenant relationship with Christ the Son and God the Father.

This phrase gives the first of three reasons in this text why the Christian should set his mind on heavenly things. It is because he has died to his life of sin. He has left the worldly life behind and is now living in hope of life eternal in heaven.

The second reason for seeking heavenly things is in the phrase “and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” The Christian’s life is hidden with Christ in God, but in what sense is the Christian’s life hidden? It is hidden from those in the world who cannot visibly perceive the Christian’s spirit that has been reconciled to God through his obedience to the gospel. However, God knows those who are His, and their names are written in His book of life in heaven.

The child of God whose life is hidden with Christ in God enjoys a sense of security no one can take away. John 10:27-29 speaks of the believer’s being in the hand of the Father, from Whom no one is able to snatch him. Of course, the believer may remove himself from the Father’s hand by ceasing to follow the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. The Bible is filled with warnings about the possibility that the child of God may lose his eternal salvation after becoming a Christian. However, as long as the believer is obedient, he enjoys spiritual security that produces a peace that is unsurpassed and a joy that is unspeakable.

The life now hidden from the world will be fully realized when Christ appears at the second coming. This is the third reason for seeking the things above. As Christ is now hidden from the world at the right hand of the Father in heaven, He will no longer be hidden when He comes again. Paul elsewhere wrote: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 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. (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

Those who have made Christ their life here on earth will appear with Him in glory. The bodies of the believers will be glorious incorruptible bodies (1 Cor. 15:50-53). John writes of this future glory in 1 John 3:2: “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

The importance of making Christ our life cannot be overstated. Christ cannot be a part of our life, but He must be our entire life. Paul wrote: “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Php. 1:21). This must be the attitude of every follower of Christ.

Col. 3:5-7: Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

The word “therefore” carries the reader back to Paul’s points in verses three and four. There he cited three reasons why Christians should continually seek those things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God: (1) the Christian has died to sin in baptism; (2) the Christian’s life is now hidden with Christ in God; and (3) when Christ appears, the Christian will appear with Him in glory.
Now, Paul gives admonitions that follow logically from those three reasons. The obedient believer in Christ must put to death the sins that are characteristic of earthly-minded unbelievers. If we do not kill sin, it will kill us! We dare not take lightly the deadly and destructive nature of sin. It will destroy our souls if we do not destroy it.

By the use of the word "members," Paul simply uses a term by which the members of the body itself are put for the sins committed in the body. Paul does not advocate the kind of asceticism that the false teachers at Colosse were advocating, nor is he saying that the body itself is evil. He simply uses a figure of speech in which the body is named while the sins of the body are meant. Paul is commanding the Christian to put sin to death. He then proceeds to mention some of these sins specifically.

Fornication is a sin often rebuked in the New Testament. It involves unlawful sexual intercourse of every kind, and it was prevalent in the time in which Paul wrote this epistle. Fornication was practiced as a part of pagan religion, and religious prostitutes were present throughout the lands where the gospel was being preached. There was also the false teaching of some Gnostics that the actions of the body could not affect the spirit, since body and spirit were totally opposed to each other. This belief led many to practice fornication under the guise of godliness, while, in fact, they were serving Satan in so doing.

"Uncleanness" is closely related to fornication and includes moral impurities of other kinds. "Passion" is also a term that involves unbridled sinful lusts which lead those who dwell on them to carry them out.

Paul next mentions "evil desire." The word "evil" is added to desire here to distinguish improper desire from that which God approves. There are certain desires that are proper and right and others that clearly are condemned.

In the phrase "covetousness, which is idolatry," Paul issues a strong condemnation against the inappropriate desire for money or other material things. Paul calls such desire idolatry, because the one who is guilty of it makes material things his god. One does not have to fall down and worship a golden calf to be guilty of idolatry. Compare Ephesians 5:5, where Paul again refers to this sin in the same manner.

These and all other sins will bring the wrath of God upon any one who is guilty of them, unless there is repentance. The judgment of God is certain (Hebrews 9:27). All people will stand before God and Christ at that time to give an account of the deeds done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10).

"The wrath of God" does not refer to some kind of emotional outburst of temper by God, but to the righteous punishment God will inflict upon all who are disobedient. God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), but He makes it very clear that those who reject His offer of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, will suffer eternal punishment from a just and righteous God.

In verse seven, Paul reminds the Colossian Christians that they had been among the "sons of disobedience" before they obeyed the truth of the gospel. They had been characterized by the sins of verse five; they had "walked" in them and "lived" in them. These terms show that one outside of Christ is one who is walking and living in sin. This is the difference between the Christian and the one who is not a Christian: the non-Christian is living in his sin. His life is characterized by ongoing sin because the blood of Christ has not cleansed him. The Christian still commits sin, but his life is not characterized by sin as it was before he became a Christian. The believer in Christ does
everything he can to avoid sin. However, when he does fall short of God’s standard, he has access to the cleansing blood of Jesus to provide forgiveness. Why? It is because he walks in the light of the gospel, and he confesses his sins regularly to the throne of heaven (1 John 1:7-9).

Col. 3: 8-11: But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Here Paul uses the figure of clothing to discuss the things the Christian is to put off. Later in the chapter, in verse twelve, he discusses the protective clothing the Christian is to put on. This section emphasizes the fact that the one who has been cleansed by the blood of Christ has put away his sin-stained clothing and has exchanged it for new robes of righteousness in Christ. As in the first four verses of this chapter, Paul is stressing the complete change that had occurred with the Colossians and that should also occur with all who obey the gospel of Christ. In the remainder of this verse and the next, Paul, as he did in verse five, lists specific sins that are to be “put off” by the Christian.

The first two sins mentioned are similar in nature. “Anger” is a word that indicates a continuing angry attitude. “Wrath” is from a Greek word (thumos) which means a sudden outburst of anger, as in the loss of one’s temper. Malice is the attitude of mind that seeks to do harm to others, and blasphemy is speaking against others in a hurtful manner. Filthy language involves the obscene and low speech characteristic of many in the world today, with their obscene language, sexual innuendo, and jokes.

One can perceive here a progression in these sins of the mind and tongue. An angry attitude will produce outbursts of wrath and may lead to an attitude of animosity, or malice, against others. This can produce slander, or blasphemy, against others that involves obscene language.

Paul adds lying to the list of sins of the tongue in verse nine, and indicates that one who has put off the old man of sin does not deceive his fellow man in any way. The idea of clothing is suggested in the phrases “put off” and “put on,” which Paul uses in this section of his epistle. Here, also, Paul indicates the need for constant renewal, or growth, in the new man, and he tells his readers this renewal is through knowledge. Knowledge here is the Greek word epignosis, which means “precise knowledge.” The Christian is one who strives for greater, more precise knowledge of spiritual things each day of his life.

The Christian seeks to be transformed more each day into the image of Christ, the One who “created him.” This creation seems to refer to the penitent sinner’s spiritual creation at baptism. [Cp. Eph. 2:10; Gal. 3:27.] Paul’s statement in verse eleven reminds us that, once a person becomes a new creation in Christ, all distinctions are lost. All Christians partake equally of all spiritual blessings in Christ. Paul expresses a similar idea in Galatians 3:28.
Col. 3:12-15: Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

In these verses, Paul describes the spiritual “clothing” of the Christian. He calls the Christians the “elect of God.” This election does not mean that God has a predetermined number of individuals who will be saved and that all others will be lost, regardless of their response to God’s commands. Such an idea is Calvinistic and is not taught in the Scriptures. In 1 Peter 1:1, 2, Peter also refers to Christians as the “elect.” The only election, or predestination, taught in the New Testament is that God has predestinated that only those who obey the gospel will be saved. Those who do obey the gospel are called the elect, for they have answered the call of the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). This, in no way, interferes with man’s free will.

These same individuals who have become the elect by obeying the teachings of the gospel are the “holy and beloved,” as Paul refers to them in verse twelve. They are beloved of God, and they are to put on the new garments of the Christian. Paul uses the figure of clothing to describe the qualities these “holy and beloved” are to show in their lives.

The Christian is to show mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering. Mercy involves compassionate action toward others. Kindness involves doing for others good deeds motivated by genuine concern for their feelings. Humility is an attitude of lowliness of mind. One who is humble does not elevate himself above others. In fact, the humble person genuinely considers the welfare of others before his own. The humble servant of God never loses his awareness that he is totally dependent upon God and that, without God and Christ, he is nothing. Jesus began the great Sermon on the Mount with the beatitude: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). Pride is the opposite of humility. The Bible contains many statements condemning pride. Pride goes before destruction, according to God’s Word. However, the one who genuinely humbles himself in God’s sight will be lifted up.

Meekness is another characteristic mentioned by Paul in this text. It has been described as gentleness and submission to proper authority. Of course, in the Christian, meekness leads him to submit to Christ’s authority as the Head of the church, “the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” We must understand that meekness does not suggest weakness. In Matthew 11:28-30, Christ described Himself as “meek,” or, as the New King James version reads, “gentle.” Christ was not weak. He was the perfect example of “strength under control,” which is how meekness is sometimes defined. The Christian must exhibit that same gentleness toward others, but without compromising the truth of God.

Then Paul mentions “longsuffering” as part of the new “spiritual clothing” of the Christian. This is the attitude that allows one to suffer a great deal of persecution, pain, and mistreatment without responding in the wrong manner. Longsuffering allows one to endure affliction, insult, or wrong for the cause of Christ, without returning evil for evil.
Closely related to the idea of longsuffering is the phrase in verse thirteen, “bearing with one another.” Christians should be patient with other Christians. This does not mean sin may be excused in others. However, the follower of Christ should always seek to build up his fellow Christian, to encourage and strengthen him in the faith.

Paul also writes of the attitude of forgiveness. The child of God must show a willingness to forgive a brother or sister in Christ who sins. He mentions Christ’s forgiveness of the Colossians’ sins as the basis upon which they should extend forgiveness to others. God, in His Word, shows us His willingness to forgive. However, we must understand that God forgives those who turn to Him in obedience. Therefore, the Christian is required to forgive on this same basis. The Christian is to have the attitude, or spirit of forgiveness always. However, he may only extend forgiveness when the sinner complies with the teachings of Christ. This is how Christ forgave, and it is how those who follow Christ are to forgive. Christ is the pattern, or model, of forgiveness.

Paul next mentions love as the crowning characteristic of the Christian’s life. Paul continues to use the figure of clothing in describing love as the central part of the spiritual garment of the Christian. It is the girdle, or belt, which ties everything together. This is what Paul means by the phrase “the bond of perfection.” The girdle, or belt, surrounded the garment and secured it. This is how Paul describes love in the Christian’s life.

Love should motivate all the activity in the Christian’s life. In Galatians 5:6, Paul wrote: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.” This verse reminds us that the only faith that pleases God is a working faith that is motivated, or prompted, by love. Therefore, love is the supreme motivation behind all that the Christian does in his service to God and Christ. If this is the case, then what Paul mentions next in Colossians 3:15 will follow; there will be peace in the Christian’s life.

Peace will rule in the heart of the one who is a loving follower of Christ. Such a person will always seek peace with others as far as possible. This is what Paul taught in Romans 12:18: “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” The Christian is to do all within his power to preserve peace. However, he must never compromise the truth of God’s Word to maintain peace.

In the church, again called the “one body” in verse fifteen, there should be peace among brothers and sisters in Christ. Christians are “called” by the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14). The gospel calls all people into one body, the church, over which Christ is the Head. Those who have answered the gospel call by believing, repenting, confessing Christ, and by being buried with Him in baptism, should be thankful continually for the blessings they enjoy in Christ’s spiritual body, the church. Their thankfulness and deep love for the One who first loved them should motivate them to serve faithfully all of their lives.

Col. 3:16,17: “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. 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.”
Verse sixteen is identical in thought to Ephesians 5:18-19, where Paul admonishes the Christians at Ephesus to be filled with the Spirit and to sing praises to God. Comparing that command with the command in Colossians 3:16 to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,” one sees that to “be filled with the Spirit” is equivalent to letting “the word of Christ dwell in you.” The Holy Spirit does not directly or miraculously influence the sinner or the Christian, but does so through the written word, the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). This is a very important concept for the Christian to understand, because there is much error in religion concerning the work of the Holy Spirit.

The second part of Colossians 3:16 describes the result of the word’s dwelling in the Christian. Among the things revealed through the Word is the command to sing praises to God from hearts filled with gratitude for God’s grace. Here, as in the parallel passage in Ephesians 5:18, 19, singing is clearly set forth as the only authorized music in New Testament worship. This command excludes the use of mechanical instruments of music, because singing is specific—it is vocal music, not instrumental music. Instrumental music was absent from the worship of the first century church. It was only during the apostasy of the church that instruments were introduced, without the authority of the New Testament.

Verse seventeen reminds us that whatever we do in word or action must be done in the name of the Lord Jesus. To do something in the name of someone else is to do it by that person’s authority. One cannot use the mechanical instrument in worship in the name of Jesus, because Jesus never authorized it. No apostle or other inspired writer in the New Testament ever sanctioned the use of instrumental music in worship. Therefore, the New Testament condemns its use, and to include it in worship is to violate the law of Christ.

The distinction between psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in verse sixteen is not very clear. The psalms, of course, would have included the inspired psalms written primarily by David. The Holy Spirit through miraculous gifts would have revealed initially to the early church the hymns and spiritual songs they sang. Today, of course, we have no hymns given by inspiration. However, we should be certain that the hymns used in worship are in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament. We should never teach error, either in the spoken word, or in our singing.

Col. 3:18-25: Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

In this section of the epistle, through the first verse of chapter four, Paul deals with relationships between husbands and wives, children and parents, and masters and slaves.
A portion of the Ephesian epistle is also devoted to these relationships. [See Ephesians 5:22-33.] This shows how important the Holy Spirit determined these relationships to be in the Christian’s life.

In verse seventeen, Paul admonished that all things, whether in word or deed, be done in the name of the Lord. To do something in the name of someone is to do it by that person’s authority. Therefore, all the Christian does is to be done with the authority of Christ. What Christ has authorized is found in the New Testament, the covenant to which all men, who are living now or who ever shall live, are subject. Paul’s discussion of these various relationships reminds the reader that Christianity is to affect every aspect of life, including, in this verse, the husband-wife relationship.

Here wives are not told to love their husbands. This is understood to be true. But, they are commanded here to be submissive to their husbands “as is fitting in the Lord.” In other words, it is appropriate and proper for wives concerned about pleasing the Lord to willingly acknowledge and submit to the husband as the head of the family. However, this submission is not oppressive or undesirable in any way. Paul noted in 1 Corinthians 11:3: “But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.”

Christ did not resent His submission to the Will of the Father. Man should not resent his subjection to the Christ, and the wife should not show resentment toward her husband’s authority over her. She is to submit willingly and lovingly, just as Christ submitted to the Father’s Will, and as all who desire to be pleasing to God must submit to the Christ. Besides, the next verse makes clear the husband’s reciprocal responsibility toward the wife.

In the Roman Empire, the husband had the right to sell, or even put to death, his wife and children, if he chose to do so. The wife had no rights whatsoever under Roman law. Christianity brought woman to an enviable position by teaching that husbands should love and respect their wives, never to abuse or mistreat them in any way. In fact, in Paul’s epistle to the Ephesian church, he gave this command to the husbands: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Eph. 5:25).

What wife would not want to be loved to the degree that Christ loved His church? Such a love is sacrificial in nature. It is a love that causes the one who possesses it to think about what is best for the one he loves, to sacrifice even his life for her. No woman could be in a better position in life than the one the inspired apostle depicts in the Colossian and Ephesian epistles. Yes, there is to be submission to the husband by the wife, but such submission that, in no way, detracts from the wife’s equality with her husband as an equal heir of salvation. Also, the relationship commanded by the New Testament between husband and wife benefits both and establishes the marriage bond in such a manner as to make the best possible family situation for all, including the children.

In the next verse, Paul turns his attention to the children in the home. He addresses children directly, indicating he expected the children to be in the assembly when this letter was read to the whole church at Ephesus. Of course, these children would be those old enough to understand and to follow the teaching.

The two key words in this part of Paul’s admonition are “obey” and “all.” Children are to be obedient to their parents “in all things,” and they are to render such obedience with a willing spirit, without resentment or rebellion. God, in His Word, has always made
it clear that disobedient children are displeasing to Him. The Old Testament called for the stoning of the disobedient child. In 2 Tim. 3:2, it is sobering to see the list of sinners among whom rebellious children are found: "...lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy" (2 Tim. 3:2).

Every child needs to recognize that his willing and loving obedience to his parents pleases the Lord. The younger members of the church may not be capable of doing many of the things that those who are older and mature can do. However, they may always obey their parents, regardless of other age limitations on their service in the kingdom. As is true of all Christians, they must grow in usefulness in the kingdom as they grow older.

Fathers are to be the spiritual heads of their families. It is their responsibility to guide the family in a way that will be most helpful to the spiritual development of every family member. The rearing of children is of vital importance. Parents are charged with the responsibility of instructing and nurturing precious souls in the ways of the Lord. If fathers make unreasonable and rash demands on their children, the children may become discouraged and begin to feel they cannot do anything that pleases the parent. Both parent and child can avoid this situation by recognizing and fulfilling their responsibilities to each other as Paul describes them here.

In verse 22, Paul turns his attention to the master-slave relationship, one that would be particularly important to Onesimus and Philemon. In the epistle to Philemon, Paul informed this brother in Christ that Philemon’s runaway slave, Onesimus, had been converted to Christ while in contact with Paul in Rome. Paul was sending Onesimus back to Philemon in Colosse and wrote the letter to Philemon to explain what had happened. Both the Colossian and Ephesian epistles contain sections dealing with this relationship of master and slave.

In today’s society, slavery has been abolished. However, the principles set forth here by Paul apply to the employer and employee relationship. No Christian should conduct himself in his work in such a way as to bring shame and reproach upon the church. The Christian should be the best, most reliable, worker any employer could have. This prohibits the slave to whom Paul wrote from working only when he was under the watchful eye of his master. Rather, he should be the kind of slave the master can trust to work hard at all times, whether or not the master is present. Again, the application today is to the Christian worker who should do his work diligently at all times, not only when the employer is watching.

The phrase “fearing God,” in verse 22, is a reminder to the slave that his reverence for God should guide his every thought and action. God is always watching, and the slave should recognize that his labors are seen and ultimately judged by his Master in heaven. This point concerning the slave is reinforced in verses 23-25.

In verse 23, the word translated “heartily” literally means “out of the soul.” Paul is teaching the slave to work from a genuine spirit of willingness, the kind of spirit one would have in working for the Lord Himself. In the following verse, Paul will make clear that the slave, in working for his earthly master, is actually rendering service that is pleasing to his Master in heaven.

Here, in verse 24, Paul reminds the slave that he serves the Lord. As a servant of Jesus Christ, all other aspects of his life, including his service to his earthly master, are guided by this relationship to the Savior. This is true of every Christian. Every aspect of the Christian’s life is controlled by his relationship to Christ. As Paul stated in the verse
preceding this section on relationships: “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” (Col. 3:17).

Also, it is important to consider the inheritance that is available to the servant of Christ. In the times in which Paul wrote these words, a slave could not inherit anything. In fact, most slaves were not paid for their labor. Occasionally, a benevolent master might put aside wages that ultimately might be used by the slave to obtain his freedom. However, this would have been the exception to the rule. Paul reminds the slave in this condition that he has a much greater inheritance awaiting him in heaven; because, as a follower of Christ, he is an heir who will one day inherit eternal life.

In the final verse of the chapter, Paul gives a sobering reminder that there will be consequences for the slave who fails to follow the inspired teaching. The fact that he is a slave in an unfavorable position in life will not gain for him the partiality of the Father in heaven.

In the next verse (4:1), Paul shows there is another side to the question. There he addresses the masters of the slaves and requires of them the kind of treatment of their slaves that, if followed, would make the slave’s life much better.

**COLOSSIANS: CHAPTER FOUR**

Col.4: 1: Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Paul now addresses the masters in this verse, and reminds them of their responsibilities to their slaves. They will answer to the Master in heaven for their actions, just as will the slaves whom Paul addressed earlier. All men and women will stand before the Master to give an account of their deeds done while in the body on earth. One’s prominence on earth will not secure the favor of the Judge of all the earth. The favor of God will be extended to those who have lived their lives as Christians, having regulated their thoughts and actions according to the standard of God’s Word.

Christianity did not seek to overthrow the institution of slavery in a sudden and violent manner. Its influence worked gradually like leaven in bread. Paul, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, must have known that, if both slaves and their masters applied the teachings of the gospel, the institution of slavery would be eliminated. However, what if the teaching of the gospel had required all masters to free their slaves the moment those slaves became Christians? Such a requirement might have tempted some slaves to embrace Christianity to obtain their freedom—an improper motive for obeying the gospel. However, the manner in which the gospel dealt with the institution of slavery was most effective when men’s hearts were receptive to its teachings.

Col. 4: 2-6: Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; 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, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.
Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

Prayer is never to become a mere ritual with the Christian. He is to be fervent in his prayers, as was Epaphras, mentioned in verse twelve of this chapter. The prayers of this servant were intense and specific. He prayed that the Colossians would “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” Epaphras is a wonderful example of a Christian who believed strongly in the power of prayer.

Paul’s admonition here, in verse two, to continue in prayer, is similar to one he gave to the Thessalonians in 1 Thess. 5:17: “Pray without ceasing.” Obviously, Paul did not mean that one is to pray continuously, which is not possible. However, here, as in all his writings, he emphasizes the need for regular prayer.

In Col. 4:2, Paul also mentions two qualities that must be present in the child of God as he continues in prayer. One is watchfulness. Paul urges the Colossians to “watch in the same.” This means to be on guard, recognizing the things about which we need to pray and being watchful in our walk as Christians. Paul also mentions thanksgiving in connection with prayer.

It has been said that, as the Philippian epistle is characterized by joy, the Colossian epistle is characterized by repeated calls for thanksgiving. In the previous chapter, at verse fifteen, Paul urged his readers to be thankful. The word “be” in that verse is in the present tense and, thus, means “keep on being thankful.” There is never a time when the child of God can say he has nothing for which to be thankful. Even in difficult times, the Christian has reason to be thankful. He knows adversity will make him stronger if he deals with it effectively, looking to God’s Word for comfort and guidance.

Paul’s reference to thanksgiving in prayer reminds one of his statement to the Philippians, in Php. 4:6, 7, where he admonished them to be anxious for nothing, but to be continually prayerful and to include thanksgiving in those prayers. Thanksgiving is a continual characteristic, not only of the Christian’s prayer life, but of our conscious thinking as Christians. Christians are to be ever thankful people.

In verse three, Paul makes a special request of the Colossians in his behalf. He asks them to remember him and others in their prayers to the Father. The word “us” here may have included others who were with Paul at the time of his writing. Some are mentioned by name, beginning in verse seven of this chapter.

Remember Paul was in a Roman prison as he penned this epistle. It is interesting to note the specific thing for which Paul asks the Colossians to pray. He does not ask them to pray that he will be released. He does not ask them to recognize his pitiful condition and to pray that God would alleviate his suffering. In other words, Paul does not ask them to pray for his physical needs. Instead, he asks them to pray that God would grant him an opportunity to preach to precious souls and to lead them to Christ. All Paul can think about is the spread of the gospel. Here is an attitude worthy of imitation by all Christians.

The figure of an “open door” is used elsewhere by Paul in his writings. In 1 Corinthians 16:9, Paul spoke of a “great and effective door” that had been opened to him to preach the gospel in Ephesus. He also noted in that letter that there were many adversaries in Ephesus. However, that did not discourage him from taking full advantage
of the opportunity to preach. The same unselfish attitude expressed from Ephesus in the letter to the Corinthians is seen here in the Colossian epistle. There was never a time when Paul put his personal safety or comfort ahead of the gospel.

Paul next mentions the "mystery of Christ," an expression he used often, even earlier in this letter, at Col. 1:24ff. The mystery, generally, carries the idea of the Gentiles' being given the opportunity to come into covenantal relationship with God. It pointed out that the Jews were not to be the only recipients of the gospel, but that all people were to receive the truth. Also, "mystery," as pointed out earlier, does not mean something unknowable, but rather, something not in past time revealed but now made known. That which had not been revealed earlier, but which now has been made clear, is that the gospel is for all.

Paul next alludes to the fact that he is in a Roman prison because of this mystery. When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, it was because he spoke clearly that the Gentiles were to be recipients of the gospel (Acts 21). The Jews present on that occasion did not want to accept that fact, and Paul was arrested and was taken to Caesarea to avoid being killed by the angry Jewish mob. In Caesarea, Paul appealed his case to Caesar and, then ultimately, came to Rome, where he was imprisoned. Now he reminds the Colossians that his bonds are a direct result of his preaching the mystery of Christ.

We do know from Acts 28 that Paul enjoyed a certain amount of freedom while in prison in Rome. He was bound by a chain to a Roman guard, but he could receive visitors and preach to them. Since Paul could not go to others, he asks the Colossians to pray that more opportunity might be given to him to reach those coming to him.

Paul next specifically asks the Colossian Christians to pray that he would speak the truth in the most effective manner. If the great apostle Paul needed the prayers of his fellow Christians in this regard, every gospel preacher today also needs such prayers from Christians on his behalf!

The gospel should be made manifest, or known, clearly. It should be presented in a way that may be easily understood. As Paul expressed to the Ephesians, the truth should be spoken in love (Eph. 4:15), but without compromise. While Paul's request for himself here may have particular application to preachers, his next admonition in verse five makes it clear that all Christians have a responsibility to conduct themselves properly toward all men.

"Walk in wisdom." How does one obtain the wisdom of which Paul speaks? The writer of Proverbs declared: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7). To walk in wisdom is to walk according to the Word of God. If one wants to be certain he is walking in wisdom, he must make certain he is following the teaching of the Word of God.

Here Paul particularly exhorts the Colossians to exercise wisdom toward those who are "outside," meaning those who are not Christians, those who are outside the church. Paul also uses this expression in 1 Thessalonians 4:12. In giving the qualifications for elders in 1 Timothy 3:7, Paul wrote that the elder must have a good testimony from those who are "outside."

Here, in Col. 3:5, Paul specifically states the Christian is to "redeem the time." This expression literally means "buying up the opportunity," and it suggests the urgency of the Christian's mission to the lost souls around him. A similar admonition is given in
Ephesians 5:15, 16. A Christian is to seek every opportunity to influence those around him to become, as himself, a child of God.

Every time a Christian leaves his home he goes out into a marketplace where he may buy opportunities to teach others. The Christian must not be unaware of these opportunities. He must live and speak in such a way as to draw others to the kingdom of God, the church. In keeping with this responsibility to be a light in the world, Paul next addresses the speech of the Christian.

How is grace used here in verse six? It appears to be used in similar fashion to Luke 4:22, which reads: "So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?" "Gracious words" are words that promote favor and kindness. While some have suggested that the phrase "seasoned with salt" refers to the advantage of wit or humor in one's speech, that seems unlikely in the context here. It would seem that the idea of "seasoned with salt" would be more closely related in meaning to the Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount, where he described Christians as the salt of the earth (Mt. 5:13). In the Christian's speech, there should be something that has preserving power, something that promotes spiritual growth in the individual, something worthwhile.

The next phrase, "that you may know how you ought to answer each one," reminds us of Peter's charge in 1 Peter 3:15. He wrote: "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."

The entire admonition of verses four and five should sober the thinking of the Christian. It reminds him of the power of influence and the responsibility to use that influence in the most effective manner for the Lord and His church. Every Christian has this responsibility toward those who are "outside." It is not solely the work of the preacher, the elders, or the deacons in the Lord's church to exert such influence.

Col. 4:7-15: Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts, with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here. Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him), 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. 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. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nympha and the church that is in his house.
In the final section of the epistle, Paul mentions those who were with him in Rome and sends greetings to others who would receive this epistle. In verse seven, Paul names Tychicus as one of the two brothers who would be bringing the epistle to the church at Colosse and who would be delivering the Ephesian letter (Eph. 6:21) at the same time. The description of Tychicus, who is also mentioned in Acts 20:4, 2 Tim. 4:12, and Titus 3:12, is very similar to the one Paul gave the Philippian brethren concerning Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25.

Paul refers to Tychicus as a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord. While most people in the world today look for the praise of men in other ways, Christians could receive no greater commendation than the one given Tychicus here. There is no relationship in life as precious as that of brother, minister, and servant in the Lord. This world would be a better place in which to live if all men were striving for spiritual, rather than secular, goals.

In verses eight and nine, Paul makes clear the purpose for sending Tychicus and Onesimus to the church at Colosse. In addition to delivering the epistle to them, Paul was sending these men to learn of the condition of the Colossian brethren and to let them know how things were with Paul in his Roman prison cell.

Onesimus is mentioned in verse nine as one of the messengers from Paul who, as we learn from the letter to Philemon, was being sent back to his former master. Onesimus had run away from Philemon, but had later come into contact with Paul and had been converted to Christ through Paul’s teaching. Now Paul refers to Onesimus as “one of you,” meaning the runaway slave was now a brother in Christ to Philemon and the others at Colosse. In the letter to Philemon, Paul kindly urges Philemon to receive Onesimus back in a spirit befitting a Christian. In that letter, Paul expresses confidence in Philemon to do so. The conversion of Onesimus is another demonstration of the transforming power of the gospel of Christ. The Word of God can change lives completely, when honest people hear and obey its teaching.

Verse ten mentions Aristarchus as Paul’s fellow prisoner. While it is possible that Paul used the term “fellow prisoner” in a figurative sense, meaning a prisoner of the Lord, it is more probable that Aristarchus was actually in prison with Paul at the time. In Acts 20:4 and in Acts 27:2, Aristarchus is mentioned as being from Thessalonica. Acts 19:29 mentions this faithful traveling companion of Paul as one who was seized during the disturbance at Ephesus on Paul’s third missionary journey.

The reference in Acts 27:2 shows that Aristarchus was with Paul during the voyage to Rome. Now, in this reference in Colossians, we learn that this faithful brother had become Paul’s fellow prisoner in the Imperial City. Aristarchus is also mentioned in verse 24 of the letter to Philemon.

Mark is next mentioned in this verse as the cousin of Barnabas. John Mark was with Paul and Barnabas in the early part of the first missionary journey, but for some unknown reason turned back from them at Perga in Pamphylia. This prompted a later dispute between Paul and Barnabas concerning Mark’s accompanying them on a second journey. When Paul, who did not want Mark to accompany them, could not agree with Barnabas, Paul and Barnabas took separate journeys. Paul chose Silas and Barnabas took Mark with him. Later, Paul made it clear that he had renewed his confidence in Mark (2 Tim. 4:11). Now, here in the Colossian epistle, Paul also makes clear his confidence in John Mark, instructing the church to welcome him if he should come to Colosse. The nature of the
instructions concerning Mark may have included an expression of Paul’s renewed confidence in this disciple.

Verse eleven adds “Jesus who is called Justus” to the list of three of Paul’s fellow workers who were Jews. These men had left Judaism and had become workers “for the kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God and the church are the same. These men had been added to the church, the kingdom of God, by belief in Christ, repentance from sin, confession of the name of Christ, and baptism into Christ.

This Jesus called Justus is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament, and nothing more is said about him here, other than that, as one of Paul’s fellow workers, he had been a comfort to the apostle. However, this statement alone is noteworthy. It reminds us of the importance of comforting and edifying one another in the faith, rather than being a discouragement. There were so many Jews who could have been a comfort to Paul, but only these were with him. In the Philippian letter, Paul mentioned other workers who were seeking to create problems for him by preaching from motives of envy and strife. All who claim to follow Christ should strive to be a comfort and encouragement to all other workers in the kingdom.

In the next two verses, Paul conveys greetings to the Colossians from Epaphras. From Paul’s statement, “who is one of you,” we understand Epaphras to be from Colosse and to be a faithful worker in the church. Paul, having earlier mentioned and commended Epaphras in Col. 1:7, here highly compliments his prayer life.

Paul calls Epaphras a “bondservant.” A willing slave of the Savior, he showed his love for the saints by his fervent prayers on their behalf. The phrase “laboring fervently for you in prayers” indicates an intense and agonizing prayer for his fellow Christians. The English word “agonize,” no doubt, derives from the Greek word translated by the phrase “laboring fervently” in this text. It suggests the athlete who strives intensely in the games, giving himself fully to his task of winning the prize. This was the kind of intensity that characterized the prayers of Epaphras for his brothers and sisters in Christ at Colosse.

Paul next mentions the general content of this brother’s prayers. Epaphras prayed that the Christians back at home would “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” The word “perfect” indicates “finished” or “complete.” It suggests the desire of Epaphras that these Christians would reach maturity in the faith. The word “complete” here is similar to one used earlier in the epistle in Colossians 2:10, where Paul reminded the Colossian brethren that they were “complete” in Christ. The word is sometimes rendered “full,” and carries the idea of being filled up.

Paul’s admonition back in 2:10 and the reference here to the prayers of Epaphras, may relate, at least in part, to the threat against the church from the Gnostics, who claimed one needed more than Christ alone to approach God. By their teaching, the Gnostics denied the believer could be complete, or made perfect, in Christ. Of course, here in 4:12, Paul relates that Epaphras was praying for the believers’ completeness in all the will of God, a reminder that to do part of God’s will is not sufficient.

Paul continues his comments about Epaphras in verse thirteen, noting that this disciple’s concern was not only for the Colossian church, but also for the nearby churches in the Lycus Valley, Laodicea and Hierapolis. Paul further emphasizes the fervent zeal of Epaphras had for all these brethren.

Luke, whose name Paul mentions next in verse fourteen, appears only three times in the New Testament. He was the author of the gospel according to Luke and the book of
Acts, both addressed to the same person, Theopholis. The other references to this faithful companion of Paul are found in Philemon 21 and 2 Timothy 4:11.

In this verse in the Colossian epistle, we have the only reference to Luke as a physician. It is quite possible that he was Paul’s physician during his travels with the apostle. Paul’s strong love and defense of the gospel exposed him to great persecution; and, at times, he certainly could have benefited greatly from Luke’s medical knowledge.

We also learn from this text that Luke was a Gentile, since he is contrasted with those of “the circumcision” mentioned in verse eleven. Some say he was born in Antioch of Syria. He joined Paul at Troas during the second missionary journey (Acts 16:8, 10), and remained at Philippi during that same journey while Paul continued on that trip (Acts 17:1). We reach this conclusion based on the use of the pronoun “they,” prior to Acts 16:10, which changes to “we,” after that time, until the company comes to Philippi. Upon leaving Philippi, the pronoun “they” is used again in Acts 17:1, showing that Luke remained at Philippi until Paul returned there on the third missionary journey (Acts 20:6). After rejoining Paul at Philippi during the third journey, Luke remained with the apostle, it seems, until the time of the Colossian epistle, where we find him in Rome with his beloved friend Paul during the latter’s imprisonment.

What a debt we owe to this “beloved physician,” who loved the “Great Physician,” Jesus Christ, above everyone, and who gave us, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the wonderful accounts in Luke and Acts! What a contrast we see between Luke and Demas, the other man mentioned in verse fourteen! While Luke’s name is synonymous with devotion, the name “Demas” is associated with disappointment. What a great disappointment Demas was to the apostle Paul and to the Lord Jesus Christ!

At the time of the writing of Colossians, this man is listed among the faithful. While nothing more is said of him in Colossians beyond this statement in verse fourteen, in the letter to Philemon, verse 24, Demas is characterized as one of Paul’s “fellow laborers.” The Colossian letter and the letter to Philemon were penned at about the same time; therefore, we know Demas was still among the faithful workers with Paul at this time. However, in 2 Timothy 4:10, we read: “For Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia.” What a tragedy that one who had been in the company of such a man as Paul would turn his back upon the faith and choose the pleasures of sin for a season!

The brethren at Laodicea are mentioned in verse fifteen, particularly one named Nympha, whose house became a place for the church to meet. There were no church buildings in the first century, and it was common for the brethren to meet in the homes of certain brethren for worship. [See also Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19.] The church at Laodicea is specifically mentioned in the Revelation letter with the Lord’s strong disapproval. They had become lukewarm by the time of the Revelation letter and were called upon to repent or perish (Rev. 3:19, 20).

Col. 4:16-18: 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. And say to Archippus, “Take heed to
the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen.

In the days of the early church, the letters were circulated among the area congregations. Many believe the epistle from Laodicea was, in fact, the Ephesian epistle that was circulated among the area churches.

The identity of Archippus, whom Paul exhorts in verse seventeen, is uncertain. He may have just embarked on his work as the preacher with the Colossian church. He is also mentioned in Philemon as a "fellow soldier." Since Philemon and Colossians were written about the same time, we should not take Paul's words here about Archippus to be a criticism for something lacking in this disciple's work for the Lord. We should view this admonition as an encouragement to this soldier of Christ to remain strong in the face of the opposition he would encounter in his labors for the Lord.

The phrase "take heed" is the idea of keeping one's eye on something. Paul was telling Archippus to keep his focus on his work for the Lord and to continue his work. This is the import of the phrase "fulfill it," which is in the present tense.

The earlier part of this epistle was written by a scribe, or an amanuensis (Rom. 16:22); but Paul, in the final verse of the epistle, adds his own salutation with his own hand. This authenticated the letter, as Paul was in the habit of doing. [See 1 Cor. 16:21 and 2 Thess. 3:17.]

"Remember my chains" is a powerful expression. What did Paul mean by it? It is certain that Paul wanted the brethren to be encouraged by his chains in Christ. He wanted them to remember the reason for his imprisonment, which was the greatest cause on earth; and he wanted them to carry on that cause with courage and commitment. We know something specific about Paul's attitude toward his imprisonment from another of the prison epistles, the Philippian letter. In Php. 1:12, Paul wrote: "But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel." No, Paul was not asking for the pity of his brethren when he asked them to remember his chains. He was calling them to continued faithfulness in their Christian living. He also was reminding them that suffering for the cause of Christ is to be counted as a privilege by those who follow the Lord. Paul demonstrated the wonderful sacrificial spirit that should characterize every Christian in every generation.

Paul, on another occasion, expressed this spirit to some disciples who were concerned for his physical welfare. Paul asked them: "...What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13).

Ultimately, Paul did give his life for the cause he loved above all others. We would all do well to remember his chains and his ultimate sacrifice. However, let us do more than remember. Let us do what the apostle called upon the Corinthian brethren to do. Let us imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).
PAUL'S EPISTLE TO PHILEMON

Introduction

Paul is the author of this epistle to a brother in Christ named Philemon, who lived in the city of Colosse. The content of this brief, but beautiful, letter is a fervent request from Paul to Philemon on behalf of Philemon's former slave, Onesimus. Onesimus had run away from his Christian master and had come to Rome, where he came into contact with the apostle Paul, during Paul's imprisonment there.

Through Paul's teaching, Onesimus became a Christian. Now, Paul is sending Onesimus home to his former master with this letter in hand, in which Paul implores Philemon to receive Onesimus as, not only a former slave, but now as a brother in Christ.

The manner in which Paul makes his appeal to Philemon is a wonderful study in Christian communication. From this epistle, we learn much about the character of Philemon, a man whom Paul believed to be the kind of person who would do even more than Paul asked of him in this letter.

This epistle was written about the same time as the Colossian letter, and was delivered along with that epistle by Tychicus and Onesimus (See introduction to Colossians).

Outline of Philemon

I. Address and greeting (verses 1-3).
II. Paul's expression of gratitude for Philemon's love, faith, and benevolence (verses 4-7).
III. Paul's appeal to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus (verses 8-22).
IV. Greetings from those with Paul in Rome (verses 23-24).
V. Closing commendation (verse 25).

Philemon 1-2: Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

Here Paul refers to himself as a prisoner of Christ Jesus, because he was in a Roman prison because of his work as an apostle of Christ. Rather than complaining about his condition, Paul rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. In the Philippian epistle, written at about the same time as Philemon, Paul wrote that the things that had happened to him had "actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel" (Php. 1:12).

In verse one, Paul mentions the young man from Lystra, Timothy, who was with him at the time and who, no doubt, was a great comfort and encouragement to the aged apostle. Paul loved and appreciated this younger worker in the kingdom and called Timothy his son in the gospel because he had taught him the truth. Paul had the utmost confidence in Timothy, who was converted, no doubt, on Paul's first missionary journey,
and entrusted to him various missions to certain congregations.

In these first two verses, Paul greets Philemon, his friend and fellow laborer, as well as Apphia and Archippus. It is thought by some that Apphia was Philemon’s wife and that Archippus was their son. Archippus is also mentioned in Colossians 4:17, where Paul admonishes him to fulfill his ministry.

The reference to “the church in your house,” in verse two, reminds us that the early church had no buildings in which to gather, but met regularly in private homes. The indication here is that Philemon’s home was used for assemblies of the Lord’s people in Colosse.

**Philemon 3-5:** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints,

In verse three, Paul extends his characteristic greeting of grace and peace. [See the notes on Colossians 1:2.)] Paul constantly emphasized the grace of God as the source of salvation and the peace that flowed from the knowledge of that salvation through obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse four, Paul expresses thanksgiving to God for Philemon and makes him aware that he is included regularly in Paul’s prayers to the Father. Paul’s reliance upon prayer is clearly seen in all of his writings. His teaching on the subject could best be summarized by his admonition to the Christians at Thessalonica: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17).

In verse five, Paul makes known the fact that he has heard of Philemon’s love and faith. This statement was also made concerning the Colossian brethren (Col. 1:4) [See the notes on that epistle for a more complete discussion of how one’s love and faith are seen by others.]

**Philemon 6:** that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

Faith is the foundation of the Christian’s life (Heb. 11:1; 2 Pet. 1:5). Faith is effective when it is actively shown to others by deeds motivated by love for God and Christ. Here Paul acknowledges Philemon’s faith as the kind that is seen by others and as evidence of Philemon’s deep love for Jesus. This is what others must see in the Christian if he is to have an influence for good in leading others to salvation.

**Philemon 7:** For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.

Here Paul specifically mentions the joy he feels because of the relief Philemon has rendered to fellow Christians. Obviously Philemon was the kind of man who met the needs of his brothers and sisters in Christ. The refreshing of their hearts by this good
brother would include physical assistance rendered, as well as spiritual encouragement.

Paul has now laid the groundwork for his request of Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. In verse eight, he turns his attention to the specific reason for writing this letter to this faithful brother in Colosse.

**Philemon 8-11**: Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you --being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ--I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.

Paul, as an apostle of Christ, had the authority to command Philemon to receive his returning slave, Onesimus. However, as he points out in the following verse, he rather appeals to his brother Philemon on the basis of love. The love upon which Paul makes his appeal to Philemon would include Philemon's love for God and Christ, a love that should characterize all Christians. The apostle John reminds us in his first epistle that to claim to love God while hating our brethren is totally inconsistent with Christianity. Philemon had already demonstrated that love in relieving the needs of the saints, as Paul mentioned earlier in the letter.

Also included here would be the love Philemon had for Paul, the aged apostle, who, no doubt, had taught Philemon the truth. This conclusion is based upon Paul's statement in verse nineteen, where he reminds Philemon that he owed Paul his own self. This, we conclude, is a reference to Paul's conversion of Philemon at Colosse.

In verse ten, we learn that Paul converted Onesimus in Rome, while Paul was in prison. We are not supplied with the details of this event. However, it is another reminder of Paul's undying zeal to teach the truth, regardless of his circumstances. He never allowed anything to deter him from his apostolic mission of reaching lost souls with the gospel of Christ. In this verse, Paul mentions Onesimus for the first time. The name "Onesimus" means "helpful." In the next verse, Paul reminds Philemon that Onesimus, now a Christian, is ready to live in harmony with the meaning of his name. He will now be a profitable helper as a new brother in Christ.

Verse eleven furnishes the reader with a reminder of the transforming power of the gospel of Christ. Onesimus had been a runaway slave, but now he is a willing slave of the Savior, Jesus Christ. His life has been completely changed by the Word of God, just as countless others have been forever transformed by its saving power. Today, the only hope for this world is the Word. Christ's teachings are still transforming the lives of all who will submit to them. We need nothing more than the completely sufficient Word of God to convert men and, thereafter, to guide them to Heaven.

**Philemon 12-14**: I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.
In verse twelve, Paul implores Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would receive Paul himself. He then makes known his desire to keep Onesimus with him in Rome, realizing how profitable he could be to the imprisoned apostle. However, Paul quickly adds that he would not presume to do that without Philemon’s consent. He wanted Philemon to act out of compassion and not compulsion. He did not want to force his will upon this good friend and brother.

The lesson here is that all who serve God and Christ in the kingdom, the church, should do so out of love and gratitude for the love that has been first shown to them from Heaven. Jesus declared: “If you love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15). Love is the supreme and continual motivation for all the Christian does in his service to the Master. In 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, Paul reminded the Corinthian church that he was compelled, or motivated by the matchless love shown by the Christ at the cross. Because Christ died for us, we should henceforth live for Him, crucifying the old man of sin and selfishness. The New Testament abounds with the teaching that willing obedience is the only kind that pleases God and that truly satisfies the servant of God.

**Philemon 15:** For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever,

God’s providence in the lives of His followers is clearly taught and demonstrated in both the Old and New Testaments. Jesus promised that, if His disciples would seek first the kingdom of God, the heavenly Father would bless them with the necessities of life (Matt. 6:25-34). In the passage just cited, Jesus taught against worrying about such things. Peter reminded his readers to cast all their anxieties upon the one who cares for them, the Lord Himself (1 Peter 5:7).

Today, God works in the lives of His people through natural means, not by miracles. We cannot always identify the providence of God in our lives in every instance. However, if we are Christians, we trust the promise that God has given us in His Word that all things will work together for good for those who love God and keep His commandments.

In verse fifteen, Paul mentions the possibility of providence in the case of Onesimus, suggesting that God worked things out for the ultimate good of all. Certainly God did not cause Onesimus to run away from Philemon. However, once this action was taken, the providence of God might have brought Onesimus and Paul together in Rome, a circumstance that gave this runaway slave a wonderful opportunity to do the right thing.

God does not cause man to do wrong so that God may do good, nor does He interfere with man’s free will. However, He, indeed, may work through natural means to open doors for His people to reach the lost with the gospel. Paul here suggests that such may have been the case with Onesimus.

**Philemon 16-17:** no longer as a slave but more than a slave--a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.
Paul reminds Philemon that Onesimus is now a beloved brother in Christ. Paul knew that Philemon cherished the precious fellowship he enjoyed with other Christians at Colosse. Now, Paul reminds him that he has a new brother, not only in the flesh, but also in the Lord.

The phrase "in the flesh" may refer to the fact that Onesimus was Philemon's countryman, or fellow resident of the city of Colosse. Paul points out that this slave is now more than a slave and more than a fellow resident of Colosse. He is in fellowship with Philemon and with Paul as a precious brother in Christ. This becomes the basis for Paul's next statement in verse seventeen, where he asks Philemon to receive Onesimus as he would Paul himself, as a partner in the faith, as one who shares in the fellowship of all those who have obeyed the teachings of the gospel and who are walking in the light.

Paul's statements here demonstrate that fellowship is to be extended only to those who have obeyed the teachings of Jesus. Those teachings include belief in Jesus as the Christ, repentance of sin, confession of Jesus as the Christ, and baptism into Christ for the forgiveness of sins. The Lord then adds those who have fully complied with the teaching of the New Testament to His church, which is His spiritual body, over which He is Head. The Christian must then maintain fellowship with God by continuing to follow the teachings of the New Testament. All who do so are in fellowship with God and Christ, as well as with each other.

Paul informs Philemon that his former slave now enjoys that precious fellowship with God and Christ and with all others who are in Christ, including both himself and Philemon. Verse seventeen emphasizes this partnership in the faith shared by Paul, Philemon, and all other faithful children of God, a group which now included Philemon's former slave, Onesimus.

This passage also reinforces the teaching elsewhere in the New Testament that, in Christ, all Christians share equally in the spiritual blessings found in Him. Of course, there are differing roles and responsibilities for men and women in the Lord's church; however, all God's children share equally in His blessings. This fact is pointed out in another of Paul's epistles, the Galatian letter, where he writes: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). While Onesimus still had secular obligations to fulfill as Philemon's physical slave, he would return to Philemon as a brother in the spiritual sense.

Philemon 18-21. But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account. I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides. Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

Paul was willing to repay any debt that Onesimus owed his master. Some have thought Onesimus might have left with money or other items belonging to Philemon. He might have been given wages in advance for service he failed to render by running away without fulfilling his responsibilities. It is not certain that anything like this occurred. However, Paul simply wants Philemon to know that he personally would make good any kind of loss Philemon had suffered as the result of the actions of Onesimus. In verse
nineteen, Paul indicates this commitment to repay is being written by his own hand, not being dictated to someone else to write, as he normally did in his epistles.

In the latter part of the verse, Paul gives Philemon a gentle reminder that Philemon himself owed Paul a debt of gratitude for his own soul. This is evidence that Paul was responsible for teaching Philemon the gospel. All Christians feel a special debt of thanks to those who loved them enough to teach them the truth. Salvation is the greatest blessing anyone could enjoy, and those who have brought us the good news of salvation have a special place in our hearts. Philemon, no doubt, had such feeling for Paul, and this would favorably influence him in his conduct toward Onesimus.

In verse twenty, Paul directly appeals to Philemon to give him cause to rejoice by receiving Onesimus warmly as a new brother in Christ. Seeing Philemon behave properly toward Onesimus would give encouragement to Paul. This is true of any Christian who is thinking as he should. The child of God will always rejoice over the proper conduct of his fellow Christians. The statement here reminds us of another of Paul’s expressions in 1 Corinthians 13:6, where he wrote concerning love, that it “does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.” Paul always rejoiced when others obeyed the Lord’s teachings.

In verse 21, Paul expresses his confidence in Philemon to do not only what he has requested, but even more. Exactly what Paul had in mind by the expression “even more than I say” is not absolutely clear. However, he may have anticipated that Philemon, being the conscientious Christian that he was, would not only accept Onesimus, but would grant him his freedom and help him to become established as an independent citizen in Colosse.

**Philemon 22:** But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

Paul anticipates being released from his Roman prison cell, and he informs Philemon that he plans to visit him in Colosse upon his release. Paul’s expression of confidence concerning his release from prison is based upon his belief in the power of prayer. He trusts that, through the prayers of Philemon and others, God will grant him the opportunity to see Philemon and his other brethren again.

Paul believed in the power of prayer, and he taught throughout his writings that Christians ought to pray with that same confidence. Prayer is one of the most important aspects of the Christian life. When offered fervently and in full accordance with God’s Will as a regular part of the Christian’s life, prayer results in spiritual strength, and great blessings flow in the life of the servant of God. When prayer is neglected, spiritual weakness always results.

As Paul anticipates a reunion with his friend and brother Philemon, he wants such a meeting to be positive and uplifting for both of them. However, should Philemon refuse Paul’s request concerning Onesimus, such a reunion might not be possible. Thus, Paul’s mention of a possible future visit to Philemon would add some incentive for Philemon to respond favorably to Paul’s tender plea for Onesimus. Otherwise, Philemon would have to face Paul in person in the future and explain why he did not comply.

In these two verses, Paul mentions the fellow workers who were with him in Rome at the time of this epistle. All of these men were mentioned in the Colossian letter (Col. 1:7; 4:10-12, 14). [See notes on Colossians.]

Philemon 25: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Paul closes this personal letter to his good friend and brother Philemon by expressing his desire that God’s grace, or favor, would be granted to him. Inherent in this expression is Paul’s confidence that God would show his favor toward Philemon because Philemon was faithful to the Lord. Men cannot expect God’s favor upon them spiritually unless they respond to God’s Will through obedient faith (Cp. Eph. 2:8-10).

We do not know how the matter about which Paul wrote in this letter ended. The Holy Spirit did not reveal its conclusion. However, based upon Philemon’s character, as Paul revealed it through this letter, we would be greatly surprised to learn that Philemon refused Paul’s poignant plea for Onesimus. We would rather think that Philemon warmly welcomed home his former slave as a new brother in Christ. We might further expect that Philemon granted Onesimus his freedom and helped him thereafter in every possible way, as these men became fellow laborers in the Lord at Colosse.