

COLOSSIANS

FOR BEGINNERS

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1.

INTRODUCTION

Each book in the Bible has a theme and purpose. For example:

- The Book of Genesis tells the story of the creation and the beginnings of the human race.
- The Book of Jeremiah records the warnings of the destruction to come on Jerusalem.
- The Gospel of Matthew shows the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah according to the Old Testament.
- The Gospel of John does the same but for a Greek audience.
- The Book of Acts recounts the story of the establishment of the early church.
- The Epistle to the Romans is the major thesis on the basic doctrines of Christianity.
- The Epistle to the Galatians was written as a defense of the Gentiles' right to be free in Christ and part of the church.
- The Epistle to the Ephesians was written as an appeal to Gentile Christians to accept their Jewish brethren and strive for unity in the church.

I could go on but as you can see, every book had its purpose and message for the reader – The Epistle to the Colossians was no exception.

The Colossian epistle was written as a doctrinal statement concerning the deity and all sufficiency of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

BACKGROUND – AUTHOR, PAUL THE APOSTLE

Before we begin the reading and study of the text, we need to look at the background and context for the letter that Paul sent to this church. A good way of doing this is by reviewing a timeline of the life and ministry of Paul, the author of this epistle.

PAUL'S MINISTRY – 32 AD - 67 AD

32-34 AD – Paul was born in Tarsus, educated in Jerusalem, served as a Pharisee and as a special envoy of the Jewish religious leaders. He was converted while persecuting Christians near Damascus. He preached in this area and spent time in the Arabian Desert before entering Christian ministry.

35 AD – He tried to associate with the Apostles but was rejected out of fear for his past violence against Christians. He was then introduced by Barnabas and subsequently accepted by the leaders in the church at Jerusalem.

36-42 AD – He returned to his hometown to preach and teach.

42-44 AD – He was recruited by Barnabas to work in Antioch (Northern Israel) as a teacher. This church was the first “mixed” (Jewish and Gentile members) congregation. Paul, a Roman citizen as well as a Jew, was well equipped to work with a mixed group.

44 AD – He served with a group collecting funds to help the poor in Jerusalem.

45-57 AD – He was chosen by God and sent by the church in Antioch to preach to the Jews and Gentiles outside of Israel. He completed three major journeys through the Roman Mediterranean Empire in twelve years.

58-60 AD – He was detained in Caesarea for two years awaiting the outcome of hearings based on accusations of sedition by Jewish religious leaders. He has three hearings before a series of local rulers, and ultimately appeals for a hearing before Caesar in Rome in order to avoid further detainment or plots by the Jews to kill him.

60-61 AD – He has a disastrous trip by sea that ends in shipwreck, but Paul and the crew are saved. He eventually arrives in Rome and is placed under house arrest.

61-63 AD – Ultimately Paul was moved to a prison in Rome while awaiting his trial/hearing before Caesar in order to defend himself against charges of insurrection and conspiracy. While he was imprisoned he received many visitors and fellow workers whom he taught and directed. He was even successful in evangelizing many among the servants and guards in Caesar's household – Philippians 4:22.

63 AD – It seems that after these two years he did plead his case and won his release.

64-66 AD – In some of his letters Paul had mentioned that his plan was to return to Jerusalem with the special collection of funds, go back to Rome to strengthen the church there and then push on to Spain in order to open up new frontiers for the Gospel.

There is some evidence in the non-biblical writings of the time that he may have done this when freed from prison the first time.

Some say, however, that after his arrest in Jerusalem and imprisonment in Rome for two years, his plans changed.

He did not go to Spain during his brief time of freedom. References from his epistles describe a different course of action after his release. For example, there is evidence that:

- He spent time in Crete – Titus 1:5
- He went to Ephesus – I Timothy 1:3
- He travelled to Corinth – II Timothy 4:20
- He stopped at Troas – II Timothy 4:13
- He went to Miletus – II Timothy 4:20

We could make a case for the fact that he used his time of freedom to encourage established churches.

I Timothy and Titus are letters that suggest that Paul was free and actively working with these preachers and others in his ministry of strengthening established churches.

Some scholars believe that after his first imprisonment in Rome, 64-66 AD, Paul was active in strengthening these churches and it is believed that it was during this time that he wrote the first letter to Timothy and the letter to Titus.

A great turning point in Paul's life and ministry as well as the progress of the church occurred in 64 AD. This is the year that Nero burned down the city of Rome. Nero was a great builder, and he secretly began the fire in order to make way for a newer and more glorious city that he would rebuild according to his

plan. He was also a fiddle player and historians record that he played out of the sheer joy that this destruction gave him.

Of course, to divert blame from himself, he accused Christians of setting the fire because everyone knew that Christians considered Rome to be a wicked place – they had motive. The Bible does not mention Nero as the persecutor of the church even though this trouble is the background of at least two epistles: II Timothy and I Peter.

We get information about this persecution from the Roman historian, Tacitus, who knew about Nero's involvement and false accusations of Christians. He knew that Christians of that time were an easy target because they were without influence and mostly despised by the pagan citizens of Rome.

Nero accused them of setting the fire and ordered their persecution. Multitudes of Roman Christians were arrested and put to death in cruel ways:

- Some were crucified.
- Some had animal skins tied to them and were thrown in with wild dogs.
- Some were simply placed in the arena with wild animals to be killed.
- Nero would even take some and impale them on stakes, pour tar over them and use them as human torches to light the imperial gardens.

67 AD – It was during this period of persecution that Paul was rearrested, not at the insistence of angry Jews, but as a recognized leader of a religious group who had allegedly burned down the city of Rome.

It was during this second and final imprisonment that Paul wrote his last epistle to Timothy (II Timothy).

Paul knew that with this second imprisonment he had little hope of release, so he encouraged Timothy to come and visit him in Rome before winter.

We believe that Paul was finally executed in Rome (beheaded) in the period between 66 and 67 AD.

BACKGROUND – LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

Now that we have some information about Paul's activities from around 32 AD to his death in 67 AD, we can situate the letter he wrote to the Colossian brethren. This particular letter was written by Paul between 61 and 63 AD during his first imprisonment in Rome.

We know that Paul is the author because he names himself in the first verse. This letter was universally accepted by the early church as an authentic letter from Paul. We also know that Paul had originally written the Colossians a previous letter about John Mark, but this letter no longer exists (4:10).

It seems that one of Paul's associates, Epaphroditus, had come to Rome with a gift for Paul from the Philippian church, and while he was there, he informed the Apostle of a dangerous heresy brewing in his home congregation of Colossae.

Philemon verse 23 tells us that Epaphroditus was also detained for a while with Paul but later released and given a letter to take back to the Philippians thanking them for their gift.

In the meantime, after Epaphroditus' departure, Paul writes three other letters to churches and people about different matters.

1. One to the Colossians regarding the false teaching and heresy that they are dealing with.
2. One to Philemon concerning a runaway slave Onesimus whom Paul had converted in prison and was sending back home to his master.
3. One to the church in Ephesus that was experiencing problems of unity and fellowship.

These letters were sent by the hand of two other helpers, Tychicus and of course, Onesimus, the converted slave (Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7-9) It seems that Philemon was a member of the church at Colossae and Tychicus was there also. This is where the converted slave Onesimus returned to as well for both are mentioned in Colossians 4:7-9. Tychicus is also mentioned as the messenger bringing Paul's letter to the Ephesians. And so, while in prison in Rome between 61 and 63 AD, Paul wrote several epistles, one of which was addressed to the brethren at Colossae and delivered by Tychicus.

BACKGROUND – COLOSSAE (MODERN DAY CENTRAL TURKEY)

In 500 BC, Colossae had been a city of importance, especially as a trade center, but by New Testament times it had lost its strategic importance to the city of Ephesus that was 100 miles to the west and closer to the sea and shipping traffic.

By Paul's time, it had lost its prestige and was extremely decadent. The language of Paul's letter suggests that he had not been there personally (2:1), but Epaphroditus, who was from that region, had established the church there.

There was a period when Paul spent a long time in Ephesus (Acts 19) and sent out Timothy and Epaphroditus to evangelize the surrounding area. Colossae may have been established during this evangelistic outreach.

An interesting footnote about Colossae was that it was in the region of Phrygia and Luke records that on the day of Pentecost there were Phrygians present hearing Peter's sermon (Acts 2:10). Some of these may have been converted then and brought back the faith with them into the region.

BACKGROUND - CONTENT AND REASON FOR THE LETTER

The heresy that occasioned the writing of this letter was a mixture of ideas from Greek philosophy, oriental religions, and Jewish traditions. It was being presented as a "higher thought" cult and promoted as a new philosophy for Christianity. Some of its features included:

- A call to worship angels as intermediaries between God and man (2:18)
- It insisted on the observation of Jewish customs and laws to the point of asceticism.
- It assumed that its teaching was a superior form of doctrine than what was presently or had been previously taught by the apostles or their disciples.

In response to these false ideas, Paul writes a letter to the Colossians, not as an effort to debate them, but simply an opportunity of presenting the person of Christ to them once again. Paul presents Jesus with all of His divine attributes and permits his readers to form their own conclusions between the teachings concerning Jesus of the gospel and the doctrine taught by the false teachers among them.

His objective was to show that Jesus and His teachings were pre-eminent (first and superior) in every area of life and spiritual knowledge – including this "so-called" higher knowledge.

OUTLINE

This is a basic outline for the book and the order in which we will be studying it.

1. Salutation – 1:1-2
2. Christ: Preeminent in Personal Relationships – 1:3-29
3. Christ: Preeminent in Doctrine – 2:1-3:4
4. Christ: Preeminent in Ethics – 3:5-4:1
5. Conclusion and Greetings – 4:2-18

2.

COLOSSIANS 1:1-2

In this chapter we begin our study of the epistle to the Colossian church. Note the simple outline: The epistle is Christ centered and its main objective is to show that the true teaching about Jesus is the sole response to this and all heresies.

SALUTATION

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

Paul, as was the custom, introduces himself at the beginning of the letter. He takes special care to include his title, Apostle, in the introduction. The term Apostle meant messenger and there were many messengers in the church at the time. (e.g. Phoebe bringing a message to Rome – Romans 16:1-3).

However only a few could claim the title Apostle of Jesus Christ. These were the special messengers chosen by Christ Himself.

Paul even reinforces this position by saying that his Apostleship was not self-appointed but came about by the will of God. This introduction was important because what was at stake here was the credibility of the teachers. Paul is going to go on to give authoritative teaching, so he wants to establish his credentials

from the outset. He mentions Timothy as a courtesy because the people at Colossae knew him, but Paul does not include him as part of the authority base for the letter. Timothy's role is that he is a brother in the Lord and that is his connection to Paul and the Colossians.

Vs. 2 – To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

In the second verse he recognizes the brethren to whom the letter is sent. Saints and faithful brethren are not two separate groups but simply a reference to different aspects of the same groups.

1. Saints – The Greek word meant holy one or separated one. Those made holy by the blood of Christ. Those separated from sin by the blood of Christ. All Christians are saints, not exceptionally holy or martyrs, etc. The word “saint” denotes one's relationship with God.

2. Faithful Brethren referred to the relationship that all Christians share with one another. When one falls away from Christ and His church, he becomes an unfaithful brother. When we discipline and disfellowship someone for unrepented sinfulness or unfaithfulness, we do not condemn them to hell (that is God's call); we simply identify them as faithful or unfaithful brethren.

He then identifies the location and church where his letter is intended in the first place, but later on (4:16) Paul will instruct them to pass this letter along to other churches. The content was meant for them but applicable to all churches, even until Jesus returns because the heresies might take different forms, but they always have the same objective – to discredit Jesus Christ as

divine Lord and His word in the New Testament. (for example: Islam, Buddhism, Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.).

Paul then offers a blessing upon them that he uses in other letters and with other churches (Romans 1:7).

He offers them a blessing that only God provides, and one that is the most precious. Prosperity, health, long life, many children, the respect of others – all of these things are blessings indeed, but grace and peace exceed them all:

Grace: God's favor, God's gift of forgiveness, God's acceptance regardless of one's imperfection, God's promise of eternal life. These are only possible because of God's grace.

Peace: The felt result of God's grace is peace. Peace of mind, peace within one's soul, peace with others, peace with oneself – all the benefits of God's grace.

Taken together these two are the very best gifts God bestows on sinful man. Paul mentions that they are indeed gifts that do not come from himself, but from the Father in heaven.

Of course, these gifts (grace and peace) are in marked contrast with what these people have been experiencing with their new teachers and new doctrines. There has been confusion about the way to receive blessings because of the introduction of the worship of angels and other intermediary spirit beings by these teachers.

Paul says that these gifts (grace and peace) come directly from God the Father – He gives them.

They, of course, have not had peace but rather turmoil and debate with the new doctrines they have had to deal with. And, with the introduction of Jewish traditions, laws and food

restrictions, the concept of grace is probably being trampled as well.

Christians are restrained by love, not law. I do not steal because I love my brother not because the Law will condemn me. We are new creatures; we live under the dispensation of grace not law.

It is God's grace and love that not only frees us from sin but also empowers us to overcome sin in our lives. These Colossians were being dragged back to living under the Law by these false teachers.

Every new religion does this in one way or another because that is the only option other than being saved and living in God's grace. No religion can improve on the gospel of grace. God offering us perfection and salvation based on faith in Jesus Christ (expressed in repentance and baptism). Nobody can make a better deal, a more gracious offer, a more effective religious experience, so they always go the other way.

For example, Eastern religions have their rules of life where through human effort you keep trying for perfection or oneness – what is that if not a form of law keeping?

Islam imposes strict rules and if Allah wants and feels like it, you might go to Paradise – more law keeping, especially social law. Every form of “Christian” sect or cult has been based on obedience to the rules of a human prophet or leader or special “doctrine”. For example:

- Sabbath keeping – 7th Day Adventist
- No blood letting – Jehovah's Witness

But it is all a form of law-keeping to obtain salvation, and it works because people love to try to keep the law – it appeals to

their pride because they can measure their progress in relationship to another.

The Gospel of Christ on the other hand declares 3 simple truths:

1. All are sinners and condemned before God –
Romans 3:23; 6:23 (From Adam to the last person).
2. No one can save themselves by trying to keep the law (perfectionism) in any of its religious or social forms –
Galatians 2:16.
3. The only way to be saved from the condemnation that awaits us because of our sins is through faith in Jesus Christ and no other.
 - Acts 4:12 – very specific who
 - Galatians 2:16b – very specific how

Some ask at this point, “well what about repentance and baptism, where do these fit into all of this?” The answer is that repentance and baptism are the ways that Christ has given us to express our faith in Him. We are saved when we express our faith in Christ Jesus by repentance and baptism. This is what “saved by faith” includes. If you do not believe, you will express that disbelief by rejecting repentance and baptism. So back to verse 2, Paul says that grace and the peace that comes with grace are things that come from the Father.

In his epistle he will show how the Father bestows these through His Son Jesus Christ. Note also that he says our Father, meaning the Father of Paul and Timothy and the brethren at Colossae. God is the Creator of all men but the Father of His adopted children, Christians. All men can call upon God as their creator, only Christians can call Him Father or Dad as Paul refers to Him in Romans 8:15.

3.

COLOSSIANS 1:3-12

In our last chapter we covered Paul's introductory remarks where he introduces himself and establishes his authority as an Apostle and teacher in the face of the false teaching and teachers that have been active at this congregation and elsewhere. He blesses them with grace and peace from God, two important spiritual gifts that they are in danger of losing if the heretics have their way.

In the following section of the letter Paul will offer a prayer which will serve as a bridge to his first major point in this lesson: Christ is pre-eminent, or first and foremost, in their relationship with God.

CHRIST PRE-EMINENT IN RELATIONSHIP

In this first section Paul will review the establishment and progress of the Colossian church. He does this in prayer form.

1. The History of the Colossian Church – 3-8

Verses 3 to 8 is one long sentence with many sub-clauses.

Vs. 3 – We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

Paul establishes the fact that he and his associates constantly pray for this church.

As a matter of fact, prayer is one of the main functions of church leaders. In Acts 6:4 the Apostles said that they did not want to take up their time with benevolence work (this they gave to deacons) because they wanted to focus on their main tasks of prayer and the ministry of the Word.

Paul quickly establishes the position of Jesus Christ as equal to the Father. He prays to God the Father of Christ – they are of the same divine nature. He prays to one, but both are included. And his prayer is one of thanksgiving, which was not always the case when praying for a congregation (e.g. Corinth).

This congregation has been making good progress, they have not yet fallen but rather are in danger of doing so.

Vs. 4-5a – since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven,

The reasons for his prayers of thanksgiving are found in these verses:

A. Faith – These Christians have faith in Jesus Christ. They believe in the Lord; they have not yet been moved away from this. Paul is thankful for brethren of like-minded faith.

B. Love – He is enthusiastic about their faith because it is sincerely and authentically demonstrated in love. And not just any type of love but true Christian love of the brethren and love of the church.

So then while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the

household of faith.

- Galatians 6:10

C. You cannot be for God and against the Church. He is happy for them and thankful as well as prayerful because of their future. In the past they believed in Jesus, in the present they express that faith in love for others, especially Christians. In the future there is this hope (this confident assurance) that there is a reward for them in heaven.

Paul equates the reward (eternal life with God) with the hope (confident assurance) of the reward. This is a literary device known as Metonymy where one word is substituted for another. For example, the President is the head of State. He is not a head; a state does not have a head. The word head is substituted for the word leader. Paul gives thanks because they have a sure reward awaiting them in heaven; he refers to this as their “hope.”

Vs. 5b-8 – of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

In this section Paul expands his comment concerning the hope/reward that the Colossians are anticipating by saying several more things about it and its relationship to the gospel message.

This is another literary device that Paul uses where he talks about one thing and then, without pausing or beginning a new sentence, he builds a bridge to a different idea. In these verses he

builds a bridge from the idea of the reward the Colossians will receive to where they received this reward and who brought it to them.

A. Where the Information About the Reward Comes from – verse 5b

This faith that leads to this love that produces this reward/hope all begins with the message of the gospel. Paul assumes that his readers know what he is talking about when he says “gospel” or “good news.” That Jesus died to pay the moral debt for all men and now forgiveness and eternal life are offered through faith in Him.

Gospel is short form for this (compression). He refers to the gospel as the word of truth.

Remember to keep your eye on what these Colossians are struggling with here – false doctrine leading them away from the simple message of the gospel. Paul establishes himself as an Apostle, Christ as God’s Son and now the gospel as the truth as opposed to what they have been receiving from the false teachers.

B. What the Gospel is Doing – verse 6

They are not the only ones to receive this good news that initiates faith and love and hope – but everywhere else the gospel is preached, the same pattern of faith, love and hope has been repeated and increased. The same thing happens every time the grace of God is perceived in the gospel message.

Faith, love, hope is produced and increased as people cling to the message and the promise.

Paul assures them that theirs is not a unique or isolated experience, but the same pattern that occurs everywhere the gospel goes – this faith, love, hope is produced.

C. Who Delivered the Message – verses 7 to 8

Paul informs them of how he has come to know of their progress in the faith (and between the lines, of their problems). He reminds them of the preacher who first brought them the gospel, Epaphras, and gives him a commendation as a loving and faithful minister. Perhaps since Epaphroditus was from this congregation, the false teachers were trying to undermine his teaching and efforts at ministry.

Paul confirms his standing, his teaching and his faithful report of their condition and attitude (he did not bad mouth the congregation to Paul). His report was that their love was in the Spirit, not the flesh.

2. The Future of the Colossian Church – 9-12

Paul continues his prayer format but turns from a discussion and thanksgiving for their past, to a prayer request of blessings for their future. In these verses he asks God to bless them with very specific spiritual blessings.

A. Knowledge of God's Will

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

Since they are faithful and loving and hopeful, Paul asks God to add to these things a special kind of knowledge. Not a worldly

knowledge of politics or finances or philosophy, but the knowledge of God's will.

Remember, in those days there existed only a few letters written by the Apostles, very few collections of gospels and epistles, and so Paul asks God to give them the knowledge that they need that we can have through the New Testament – which they had no access to. Spiritual wisdom and understanding is to know the things of God and Christ revealed and disseminated by the Apostles.

Paul prays that God will somehow reveal and supply this wisdom and understanding to them. In the context of this letter, it would probably be the ability to understand and apply what he, Paul, was about to share with them regarding Christ.

B. The Ability to Please the Lord

Vs. 10 – so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

There is a difference between what we see as the right thing, what we want to do and what we end up doing. The spirit is often willing but the flesh is weak. Paul asks God to help them live in a way that will be pleasing to Him, and this would include:

- Obeying Him and having the strength to do His will in every area of life. Reducing the sin quota.
- Bearing the fruit of good works in His name. The ability to see and do those things that honor God and witness their faith.

- Increase in their knowledge not just of His will, but of Himself as a being.

They do not have the resources to do these things even if they wanted to, Paul asks God to intervene and provide whatever is necessary to obey Him, to grow in Him and to know Him personally.

He prays for their increased knowledge and ability...

C. Increased Power

Vs. 11a – strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience;

Paul finishes by asking God to increase their power – again not mental or physical power but their spiritual power. And not the power to do miracles, speak in tongues or prophecy. He asks for the power to attain two virtues:

- **Patience** – not just the ability to wait around but rather the ability to bear under a load of persecution, trials, and opposition without anger, resentment or self-pity.
- **Steadfastness** – the ability to hold out against provocation. One who is not ruled by temper or passions but rather by love, by faith, by hope.

They are being tested in their congregation and Paul calls upon God to increase their knowledge, their spiritual abilities and their power to resist quitting or divisiveness.

Finally, he prays that they have:

D. Joyful Attitude

Vs. 11b-12 – joyously ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

Along with all of these he prays that they can exercise their spiritual virtues with an attitude of joy and thanksgiving because despite the difficulties, they have the privilege of sharing in the “inheritance” of the saints in light. Before he called it the “hope”, now he calls it the “inheritance.”

He is still speaking of the promise of God to all who believe and obey Jesus Christ His Son:

- forgiveness of sin
- resurrection from the dead
- eternal life in heaven

He finishes the section by referring to Christians as “saints in light” because in the next section he will refer to Jesus as the King of the kingdom of light. So the reference to light sets up a visual bridge to the next verse where he will compare the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the Son (which is light).

LESSONS

In our next chapter we will be moving into the central theme of the letter: Christ who is all sufficient in every relationship. In this introductory phase we can draw important lessons for our own lives:

1. Jesus Christ is Lord of All

Others may deny it or call this claim narrow minded or intolerant, but they cannot deny that this is what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that there is only one Lord, one Savior, one intermediary and that is Jesus Christ – (Acts 4:12). He shares this role with no one, and He is replaced by no one. Yesterday, today, and tomorrow He will always be the only Lord of all.

2. We Have Something to Look Forward to

Paul calls it a hope, an inheritance, a light but it all points to a sure and beautiful future for those who have heard and obeyed the gospel. Whenever we become discouraged with this life, remember that we are exercising faith in this life not for a reward in this life but for a sure reward to come in the next life.

Remember, even if it gets really good in this life or really bad in this life - the reward is not in this life.

3. Ask for Spiritual Blessings not Just for Material Blessings

Look at the things Paul prayed for:

- Knowledge of God and His will
- Ability to be fruitful
- Spiritual power in Christian virtues
- Joyful and thankful hearts

These are the type of things that enrich our lives beyond anything money could ever buy. So when you pray, ask for heavenly things not just earthly things.

4.

COLOSSIANS 1:13-18a

While Paul the Apostle was in a Roman prison somewhere between 61-63 AD, he wrote several epistles. One of these was an epistle (letter) to the church at Colossae. This was a congregation located about 100 miles west of Ephesus and originally established by Epaphroditus and Timothy. There were certain teachers there who were teaching, what they insisted was a more “enlightened” form of Christianity and were disturbing this congregation with their heretical ideas. In reality theirs was a mixture of Greek philosophy and Jewish legalism that threatened to rob the church of its freedom and salvation in Christ. In response to these teachers Paul reiterates the all-sufficiency of Christ in every area of life whether it be personal relationships, doctrine, or ethical conduct.

In our last chapter we studied the first 12 verses of chapter one. In this section Paul:

- Establishes his authority and the position of Jesus Christ as Lord.
- Offers a prayer in which he reviews their history as a church. This has been a faithful group, a loving church.
- He encourages them to remain this way and look to the future with hope.

- He then reminds them of the hope or reward that awaits them if they remain faithful.
- He finishes his prayer with an appeal to God to give them knowledge of His will, ability to please Him, increased power to attain patience and steadfastness; and the ability to remain joyful through it all.

In this chapter we are going to pick up the last phrase in verse 12 where Paul is building a bridge to his next thought.

CHRIST PRE-EMINENT IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS – CONTINUED

After finishing his prayer Paul will move into his first main thought about Christ and that is that Jesus is pre-eminent in personal relationships. Paul demonstrates that only Jesus has a relationship with God; only through Him can we have a relationship with God; and only through Him can we be united in a meaningful spiritual and eternal way.

Now to get to this thought from his prayer, Paul finishes the prayer by giving thanks to God the Father for giving the Colossians the opportunity to go to heaven. This blessing he calls an “inheritance of the saints of light.”

From this idea and key word “light” he will build a bridge to the idea that Jesus is the king of the kingdom of light – as opposed to the kingdom of darkness that infers a condition of lostness, ignorance, etc.

Vs. 12-14 – giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

There are several important concepts included in these verses:

- A. **Rescue** – Implies that they were helpless to save themselves (delivered).
- B. **Domain** – Another word for power/authority. They were kept there purposefully, by a power greater than themselves.
- C. **Transfer** – God Himself does the work of saving us and unites us to His Son... He chooses the Son and only the Son is to do this work.
- D. **Kingdom** – This word denotes royal power, sovereignty, the apex of power and rule.

In essence God, by His own will and choice, transferred us from one who was stronger than we were, to One who was stronger than the one who kept us prisoner. To clarify our position and as a reminder to the Colossians, Paul also mentions the original gift that began the life that he prayed about in the beginning of the letter.

- E. **Forgiveness / Redemption** – They are forgiven by virtue of the fact that Jesus died to redeem their sins (He pays the moral debt). This is the power that kept them in the dark, they were sinners, helpless to stop sinning, unable to atone for the sins they did. They were subject to Satan's temptations and cursed by the Law to be condemned and punished.

Jesus lived a perfect life resisting every attack by Satan and offered His perfect life on the cross to satisfy the demands for restitution made by the Law. With Satan defeated and the Law satisfied, sinners were released into the custody of Christ, this custody, this group is the kingdom/church.

Of course, the emphasis here is that Jesus is the one who sacrificed to make this happen and so He is central to salvation to begin with.

Now keep in mind that this letter is written to counter the false teachers among the Colossians. They thought that things other than Christ's sacrifice were needed to achieve or maintain salvation. Paul responds by putting Christ and His sacrifice as the only thing that produces salvation. Redemption and forgiveness and nothing more or less. In verses 15-17 Paul will address another of their teachings that concerned the worship of angels. He responds to this by describing Christ's true position in the scheme of creation and the Godhead – a chain of command where Christ is every single link.

Vs. 15 – He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

This verse explains two key phrases.

1. Image of the invisible God

Jesus is not a reflection of God but of the same divine essence. God is not seen by the human eye, but Jesus is seen, and He is the visible image of the invisible God, not just His body but His words, life, etc.

2. Firstborn of all creation

This doesn't mean He was the first thing created or somehow emerged at the beginning of creation. Firstborn refers to His rank or position in comparison to all of creation including mankind.

- Mankind was created, not born.
- The universe was created, not born.

Jesus is first in rank and position in both of His natures:

- He is divine, the very image and essence of God.
- He is human, the very essence of perfection without sin or blemish, born of a virgin.

3. Power of creation

Vs. 16a – For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities

Paul goes on to explain that in addition to His divine essence and rank, Jesus is the power behind creation itself.

- This includes the visible universe.
- This includes the world of spirits which we do not see but exists, nevertheless.
- This certainty includes angels who were being promoted as objects of worship by the false teachers. The inference is that we don't need to worship angels – Christ is over them too!

4. Purpose of creation

Vs. 16b – all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Paul adds the point that not only were all things created through the power of Christ, they were also created for His purpose. In Ephesians chapter 1, Paul explains that from the beginning of time God's purpose was to bless those "in Christ/in the church" with all the blessings of heaven.

Forgiveness, resurrection, glorification, exaltation to the right hand of God. This is what he refers to in Colossians when He says, ...”for Him.” Everything in creation, everything in history, in one way or another, works in Christ’s ultimate plan to bless the church with these spiritual gifts.

5. Before creation

Vs. 17a – He is before all things,

Paul expands Christ’s role by declaring that Christ is before all things, denoting His divinity (only God is before creation).

6. Sustains creation

Vs. 17b – and in Him all things hold together.

He also says that in Him all things hold together. In other words, He not only is the agent through whom all things were created, it is because of Him that all things continue to exist. He creates all things and, in the end, when He returns, all things will cease to exist.

7. Head of the church

Vs. 18a – He is also head of the body, the church;

In this passage Paul gives not only the last link in Christ’s chain of sovereignty but introduces a new idea to bridge to the next section about the church, and especially the church at Colossae. He gives the church another name here, using the term “body” so as to fit the imagery of Christ as the “head.”

Paul will go on to explain why Christ is the head of the church and the significance of this for every member.

SUMMARY

In the end, the basic argument or false idea being put forth was that in some way Christ was not enough to secure or maintain one's salvation with God. There needed to be ceremony; there needed to be secret worship of angels; there needed to be law-keeping of some kind; there needed to be these "new" teachers.

Paul's response is to show that Christ's chain of authority went from start to finish – from God to the creation, to the church, to the end of time and end of God's purpose. The only thing that mattered was Christ Himself because:

- He is divine in nature.
- He is first in rank
- He is before all things.
- He created all things.
- He sustains all things.
- He uses all things for His purpose.
- He is head of the body, the church.

In the next section Paul will show how the church plays a central part in Christ's purpose and what that ultimate purpose is.

LESSONS

Even though Paul was indirectly responding to false teachers of the 1st century, there are many lessons we can draw from this passage for our lives today.

1. We Must Have a Relationship with Christ

I said that this section 1:3-2:7 was about the pre-eminence of Christ in relationships. When we see that everything is plugged into Christ in one way or another, we realize that if we don't have a relationship with Him, we...

- Don't have a relationship with God either, He is the Son of God.
- Are ignoring the person who is first in rank in everything.
- Are ignorant and neglectful of praising the right person for everything in creation.
- Are not part of His body and His ultimate plan for mankind (to bless with gifts).

To reject Christ is to fail in all of these other areas as well.

2. When We Have Christ, We Have Everything

Paul does us a great favor here by exposing the vastness of Christ's authority and power. Christianity is not a "western" religion, or a modern religion, or one of the great religions of history. Christianity is at the heart of God's plan for every soul ever born regardless of place, time, or position.

There is no other plan, no other savior, no other Lord than Jesus Christ who is over time, creation, heaven, life, sin, death, the church, and eternity... there is nothing left to be Lord over! This is why the confession, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God" is

the greatest, deepest, most insightful, life changing declaration anyone can make.

3. When We Pray, We Pray in Jesus' Name

When Jesus told His disciples to ask or pray in His name (John 14:14) He said this not to give us a habit (e.g. every prayer must end in "Jesus' name" or it is no good). He gave this to remind us that everything we prayed about was His concern because it was all within His authority! Life, death, food, weather, power, spiritual strength – whatever.

He is sovereign over everything in existence and He uses everything in existence for **His** purpose. Therefore, our prayers, in His name, go to the only being who really understands and who really can answer them.

This should not only encourage us to direct our prayers towards Him, but also give us confidence that our prayers are never in vain when they are in His name and should help us understand why we use this term in our prayers.

5.

COLOSSIANS 1:18-29

We have established the idea that in this letter Paul's theme is the pre-eminence of Christ. He is demonstrating this in order to combat false teachers who are trying to formulate a new gospel or new teachings that somehow minimize the person and work of Jesus on our behalf. For this reason, he concentrates on the fact that Jesus is first or pre-eminent in every area of creation and spiritual life.

In our last chapter we began the section that begins in chapter 1:3 and goes until 2:7 where Paul demonstrates Christ's pre-eminence in the area of relationships. For example, in a chain of authority that stretches from God to man, Paul shows that Jesus fulfills every link that permits a relationship between God and man. This chain, he says, begins with Jesus' relationship with God as His divine Son and ends with Jesus' relationship with man as head of the church into which all men are called.

Jesus has the pre-eminent relationship with God and the pre-eminent relationship with man as well as everything in between. In verse 18 of chapter 1, Paul will continue to establish the idea of Jesus' pre-eminence in relationships.

WHY JESUS IS PRE-EMINENT – 1:18-23

In the previous section Paul listed Jesus' credentials as to His position in relationship to everything as seen from God's perspective:

- Image of the invisible God
- Firstborn of all creation
- Power of creation
- Purpose of creation
- Sustainer of creation
- Head of the church

In the next section he explains why He has the right to hold these positions in our eyes, not just in God's eyes:

- In the eyes of God, Jesus is God and part of the Godhead; He needs no justification for His position.
- Since we are human and cannot see things from God's perspective, God gives us a reason to believe and accept Jesus' pre-eminent position from a human perspective – and in verses 18-23 Paul explains it.

Vs. 18 – He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

Vs. 18a - Paul gives the final link in Jesus' chain of authority – head of the church. Jesus has the pre-eminent relationship with man because He is head of the church.

Vs. 18b - Jesus is head of the church because of His resurrection. He is pre-eminent with all of the previous things mentioned because of His resurrection from the dead. His resurrection is the proof they needed to see in order to believe all the things mentioned that they could not see. His resurrection confirmed His pre-eminence in every relationship within time (creation, the church) and within eternity (the new heavens and earth).

Vs. 19-20 - Paul repeats with more detail what he has said in a very compact way in verse 18:

Vs. 19-20 – For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

That Jesus was divine, verse 19. The method by which He became head of the church, verse 20:

- Redemption – the Price
- Resurrection – the Proof
- Reconciliation – the Product

Now remember, keep an eye on the false teachers and their doctrines. Paul takes great pains to explain why Jesus is the head of the church and thus why their allegiance should only be to Him. What is left unsaid is how inadequate and unworthy these false teachers are to try and take away Christ’s pre-eminent position based on what He has done for it. None of them have died or resurrected from the dead!

Through His death and resurrection Jesus has brought God and man together and has thus closed the full circle of His authority.

Vs. 21-23 – And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,²² yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—²³ if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Vs. 21-23 - Paul again repeats the same idea (that Jesus brings God and man together by His cross) but adds an important condition for this relationship to continue – faithfulness.

Vs. 21 - Their former condition – hostile towards God and guilty of evil.

Vs. 22 - How Jesus accomplished reconciliation and what this reconciliation produces (transformation of sinners into acceptable saints before God).

Vs. 23 - The conditions:

- **Continue in the faith.** Continue believing and teaching the doctrine of Jesus and the Apostles. Correct doctrine is important because it preserves our relationship with Christ.
- **Continue in the hope.** Continue in your assurance, your confidence, your expectation of what the gospel promises (forgiveness, resurrection, eternal life).

This is a warning to them that if they abandon the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles, they will eventually lose the blessings that come with these teachings.

THIS IS WHY WE HAVE TO BE CAREFUL ABOUT DOCTRINE!

In the last part of verse 23, Paul creates another bridge that will help him segue from talking about the credentials of Christ which permit Him to be the head of the church (death on the cross and resurrection), to Paul's credentials for being a minister or teacher of the gospel and doctrines of Christ. The "bridge" word is minister. He has established why Jesus is pre-eminent, now he will establish why he, Paul, has credibility in preaching Jesus' message as a minister of the gospel to the church.

WHY PAUL IS CREDIBLE AS A MINISTER – 1:24-29

The way that these false teachers were operating may not have been limited to tampering with the gospel and the doctrines taught by the Apostles. They may have also tried to discredit Paul as a legitimate Apostle, teacher, and minister. Otherwise, there would be no reason for Paul to review with them his own personal history of service and suffering on behalf of the church. In doing this he is challenging his readers to compare his ministry (which includes suffering on their behalf) to the ministry of the false teachers (which is devoid of such commitment and sacrifice).

Vs. 24 – Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

He tells them that whatever trials he endures because of his work for the church (universal) he does it with joy as a minister appointed by God. He brings up the question of his suffering not to complain, but to make a point. The suffering in his life is accepted with joy. And he does suffer because it is his share as a

minister to suffer a portion of persecution directed towards Christ.

He is not saying that Jesus did not suffer enough to pay for sins and so Paul now has to make up for some of that suffering. When Jesus said, "It is finished" on the cross, He meant that His sacrifice was complete, the work of redemption accomplished.

However, the evil, the persecution towards Christ will not be over until the end of time and the ones who bear it are those who follow Him (Matthew 5:11-12).

Paul says that as a minister (and especially an Apostle) he has to bear a greater share of this suffering (he was in prison because he was seen as a leader in the church), and he rejoices in this fact.

Vs. 25-27 – Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

So that they will not get the idea that his ministry is "suffering," he clarifies what his ministry is so they will see that the suffering is brought about by his ministry and not the other way around. He is not a monk with self-imposed suffering.

Paul reminds them of his special role among the Apostles as the one who preached the gospel to the Gentiles. This is his ministry. This gospel, this mystery, would have never been known had it not been revealed by God. This revelation would never have come to the Gentiles had God not specifically chosen Paul and

sent him to preach to them. This revelation is that God offers eternal life (hope of glory) to all (Jew and gentile) on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ.

There is no more information left unrevealed.

Vs. 28-29 – We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. ²⁹ For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

Paul's purpose, in his ministry, is to bring every person to the point of salvation and final reward in Christ. This is what he strives for, and he knows that his work and effort are in accord with the power and will of God within him and whatever success he has he attributes to the Lord. Again, there is an unspoken challenge to the Colossians to examine the work and motives of the false teachers within their midst.

And so, in this section Paul reviews his "qualifications" or "credentials" as a teacher so they can compare these with the ones put forth by the false teachers.

A. He shares the sufferings of Christ. In the same way that Jesus suffered in order to establish the church, Paul suffers because of his ministry on behalf of the church.

B. He is an appointed minister of the church. Paul was chosen by God to carry out the special ministry of preaching to the Gentiles.

C. He ministers God's Word. The Apostle gives to the Gentiles the entire content of the revelation about Jesus Christ that God has provided him with.

The false teachers who do what they do for profit or power, who have appointed themselves to the positions they hold, and who teach things contrary to or in addition to the revelation of Christ, are no match for Paul when he compares his credentials for ministry to theirs.

SUMMARY

This ends the section in our outline dealing with the pre-eminence of Christ in relationships. Paul explains that because of Jesus' position in the Godhead, behind creation, and over the church – His is the pre-eminent relationship in every area of existence.

In other words, everything that is, is connected to Him first (God/creation/church). Then he shows that by virtue of his (Paul's) calling and ministry by Christ, he is a pre-eminent teacher of the church (in comparison to the false teachers).

In our next chapter we will go on to the following section where Paul will explain that Jesus' teachings are pre-eminent in doctrine.

LESSONS

Here are some lessons we can draw from this section:

1. The Methods of False Teachers are Always the Same

Time and culture change but false teachers use the same tactics throughout history.

- Displace Jesus as Messiah and Lord.
- Pervert the doctrine.

Add or change the gospel and the teachings of the Apostles (new rules, new revelation). Jude 3 – We have all the revelation we are going to receive.

2. The Gospel Produces Everything God Intends for Us

God wants people to receive Jesus Christ and be saved through Him. Once we are united to Christ through faith (expressed in repentance and baptism), we are eligible for all of the blessings. There are no other conditions, no other mysteries to learn, no other messiahs to come – once we are in a relationship with Christ, we are safe forever. Col. 1:28.

3. Suffering is a Normal Part of Christianity

Whether it is suffering the withdrawals of the flesh when we deny it the sin that it craves, or the persecution by the world of unbelievers because we stand up for what we believe is true and right, or the burden of fatigue and inconvenience we feel as we give up self to serve others.

The closer we are to Christ, the better we follow His example, the deeper our commitment to ministry in the church – the greater our discomfort and suffering in this world will be.

So do not be surprised and do not be discouraged when it happens, do like Paul and James – consider it a joy to suffer some of the same kinds of burdens that Jesus suffered to save your soul – that is when He is closest to you.

6.

COLOSSIANS 2:1-14

In our last chapter, Paul completed his explanation of the idea that Christ was first/pre-eminent in all relationships. In other words, in a chain that links God and man, He is every link:

- He is linked to God as one of the divine beings in the Godhead.
- He is linked to the creation as the force that not only brought it into existence and maintains its existence, but also the purpose for its existence.
- He is linked to mankind as mankind's only hope for salvation from sin and death.
- He is linked to the saved as the head of the body into which the saved are placed by God – the church.

So, whatever the relationship, whatever point of linkage, Paul shows that Jesus has the credentials to be the first or pre-eminent individual at every point of contact – whether it be in the heavens, in the material world, among human beings or the church. Now onto this idea he adds the thought that as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he too has the credentials to be a teacher or minister of the church. He mentions his sufferings, the

fact that he was appointed by Jesus and that he teaches only the words of Jesus – as the credentials he has to qualify him for this task.

I mentioned that Paul was building his case for the pre-eminence of Christ in order to refute the position and doctrine of false teachers that had crept into the church at that time. In the last section of chapter 1, Paul goes from talking about Jesus to references about himself as a legitimate teacher of Christ's doctrines. We will see that this is a transition Paul uses to begin a section about Jesus' teachings.

CHRIST: PRE-EMINENT IN DOCTRINE – 2:1-3:4

The last chapter focused on Christ and His pre-eminent role in personal relationships. This next chapter will zero in on the teachings of Jesus and their pre-eminent place in comparison to other religious doctrines. Remember those false teachers. First Paul shows how Christ Himself is pre-eminent in comparison to them, now he will demonstrate how His teachings are superior to their teachings as well.

Vs. 1-3 – For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,² that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

He begins by summarizing the thought he will explain in detail in the entire chapter and 4 verses of the next.

Vs. 1 - Paul is writing to people who know of him, but whom he has not personally met. Remember, this church was originally established by Epaphroditus and Timothy. Paul is in prison in Rome for having preached the gospel, the very gospel he is trying to protect among them with this letter. The struggle Paul talks about is his ministry, his imprisonment, his prayers and now this letter of instruction to people he has not met – all of this is a great effort that he makes for them as well as other churches for whom he feels a personal responsibility.

Vs. 2 - In this verse Paul describes what his struggle is for, what he strives for in his work. He describes his objectives for them as a series of attainments that have a final outcome. He wants the results of his work:

- to be a source of encouragement to them.
- that it might promote a loving unity among them.
- that they experience real hope (assurance of understanding) that comes from knowing the true revelation (mystery) of God which is the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Here Paul compresses all the information about the gospel into one word, “Christ.” In other words, if you believe in “Christ” you have the key to understanding all of the Old Testament as well as all the teachings of the Apostles.

Vs. 3 - He repeats this idea in verse 3 where he explains that all wisdom and knowledge (about God’s plan, the salvation of man, etc.) are contained in Jesus’ life, teachings, cross and resurrection.

- It is not earthly wisdom about science or math, etc.
- It is heavenly, spiritual wisdom that pertains to man’s condition and salvation.

So, as I said, Paul begins by stating that as far as wisdom, knowledge, teaching is concerned, Jesus is the embodiment of “revelation” – something that man, regardless of his intelligence, cannot compete with.

Vs. 4-5 – I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

Paul states that he has established Jesus’ teachings as revelation so that they will not be “persuaded” to abandon these teachings for some other form of doctrine.

Persuasive argument is the manner in which these false teachers were drawing the brethren away. They did not have new revelation, but they were smooth talkers and good debaters. They would use these tactics to fool, confuse and delude the brethren, and thus make them doubt the gospel. Even though he warns them, Paul is quick to also commend them for their personal discipline (self-control) and steady faith in Jesus.

They were being penetrated by false teachers but so far they were holding on to the truth and even though Paul is far away – he rejoices with them in this.

Vs. 6-7 – Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.

The best way to prove doctrine is to live it. They have been taught about Christ and His teachings, now they need to practice

that teaching in their everyday lives if it is really to take effect. They have been well taught (rooted) and encouraged, now they need to put into practice those teachings that dealt especially with faithfulness and thanksgiving.

Now that they are being challenged, now that things are becoming difficult, they are being tested to see if their faith is true – Paul encourages them to persevere.

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

This is another summary statement where Paul will briefly outline a new thought and then take several verses to explain in detail what he has just said. Again, he uses a compression word – “Christ.”

Christ is the standard.

In this case not simply the person but the teachings, the commands, the example of Christ... this is the standard by which all things need to be judged. The objective of the false teachers is slavery. They want to enslave the Colossians to their doctrine and their religious authority.

Christ sets one free from ignorance and fear.

Their tactics are the teaching of ideas and concepts from a variety of sources other than Christ. Philosophy (or concepts) that are really an empty show or deception based on lofty notions about man-made rules concerning the way the world works. There was speculation at that time that the angels somehow controlled the basic elements (fire, rain, thunder, etc.)

and that these should be worshipped or that they provided spiritual insight.

These Judaizers (false teachers) were not necessarily educated men but were making a show of their learning by putting forth these “new ideas” based on man-made philosophies involving angels and the manipulation of nature. And from this new worldview they were inventing rules for living which robbed the Colossians of their freedoms in Christ.

Paul says that the Colossians should not be held responsible to any teaching that does not have as its source the teachings of Jesus.

Vs. 9-15 - Paul will give 4 reasons why this should be so:

1. Jesus is divine

Vs. 9 – For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,

The teaching of Jesus is the teaching of God because Jesus is God in human form. To follow His teaching is to follow God’s teaching and it should not be replaced with the false doctrines of these other teachers no matter how “spiritual” they seemed.

2. They are complete in Christ

Vs. 10a – and in Him you have been made complete

By connection to Christ, who is divine, they have access to all that divinity offers (revelation, wisdom, salvation, blessings, etc.). They have no need of additional teaching, additional saving... they have everything they need spiritually in relation to Christ.

3. Jesus is the ruler of all

Vs. 10b – and He is the head over all rule and authority;

By saying head over all rule and authority, Paul says in effect that Jesus is Lord of lords, King of kings, sovereign over everything. If Jesus is their head or Lord, then there is no need for another head, another one to take this position – as the Judaizers were trying to do... with angels, secret knowledge, etc.

4. Jesus is the Savior – vs. 11-15

Finally, Paul explains the most important reason why they should only follow the teachings of Christ – He is their Savior. The Judaizers (false teachers) were boasting that their circumcision and their adherence to laws on feasts and food made them superior and holier than their Gentile counterparts (who simply trusted in Christ) and thus worthy to be obeyed and followed.

Paul shows that the salvation they have in Christ has a greater value than the mere boasting in circumcision made by the Judaizers. Circumcision was of God. It was the sign of the promise God made to Abraham – which Jesus fulfilled with His appearance.

These men were using it as a badge to boast of their religious superiority.

Vs. 11-12 – and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Fleshly circumcision removed an actual piece of flesh as a sign of a spiritual promise of God. Paul says that through Christ what is cut away is the “body of flesh” meaning the “old person of sin,” or the old nature that loved and served sin. This was removed by Christ through His efforts on our behalf. He then describes the physical or historical moment when that “spiritual circumcision” takes place, baptism. And this baptism is not just a promise or a symbol, it is the actual moment when the old man is removed, and the new person is raised.

Paul says that what happens to us in baptism is verified and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For example, we are raised and renewed in baptism by the same Godly power that raised Jesus from the dead. Romans 8.

Vs. 13-14 – When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

In these 2 verses Paul emphasizes the value and importance of this “spiritual circumcision” that they received at baptism. It transformed them from death to life. He equates “uncircumcision” with being spiritually dead. He explains that they were spiritually dead because they were guilty of transgressing God’s law, God’s decrees (which said, in effect, if you sin you die). Paul says that they were made alive through the power of forgiveness, and what this forgiveness does is cancel or pay the debt of sin which constantly accused and condemned them before God. Jesus took all of these sins and atoned for them once and for all so that they no longer stood between God and man. His graphic imagery is that the sins (which he describes as a

certificate of indebtedness) are nailed to the cross along with His own body.

Paul explains that the spiritual circumcision that takes place at baptism was made possible by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. We go into the water as sinners condemned by the Law that accuses us of our sins and two things happen in that watery grave:

- The bill or certificate of debt or mortgage we owe God for our sins is paid for by the cross of Christ. It is at the point of baptism that forgiveness for our sins takes effect for us.
- The old nature of sin, the old man of sin is cut away and we are given a new spiritual nature. It is at the point of baptism that we receive the Holy Spirit who enables us to live as spiritual people.

Peter explains this same phenomena but in a much shorter way in Acts 2:38. In the meantime remember that the importance and necessity of baptism is not something invented by the church of Christ. Jesus, Peter, and Paul each emphasized that baptism was the moment that salvation, forgiveness, and regeneration took place. When we focus in on this principle, we only emphasize what the New Testament itself emphasizes.

7.

COLOSSIANS 2:15-23

This letter is being sent in order to respond and refute false teachers and doctrine that have crept into the church at Colossae. These false teachers were trying to displace Christ and His doctrines with a mixture of ideas from different sources. There was the pagan idea that various spirits (angels in this case) were responsible for the manipulation and care of the creation and should somehow be honored or worshipped. There was the insistence that in order to be acceptable to God, one had to observe Jewish traditions and the Law – especially the requirement to be circumcised. The false teachers, or Judaizers as they were called, were boasting that their Jewish heritage (of which circumcision was some kind of badge of honor) and their insight into these supposedly new religious mysteries, made them superior to the Gentiles. They used this attitude and teaching about angels and circumcision requirements to draw the Gentiles away from their faith and dependence on Christ and only Christ for salvation.

In this letter Paul responds in several ways:

- He shows that Jesus and only Jesus is the link between God and man. Jesus created the world for His purpose and maintains it, not the angels.

- He also demonstrated that as far as doctrine is concerned, every mystery (or revelation) that God has made to man, He has made it through Jesus. He says that if you believe in Jesus Christ, you have the key that will unlock every mystery of heavenly wisdom and knowledge there is.
- And, as far as circumcision was concerned, Paul explains that the circumcision that the Gentiles receive in baptism by Christ is far superior to the fleshly circumcision that the Judaizers boast about and want to impose. He teaches them that Jesus has cut away their old man of sin and given them the Holy Spirit in baptism. This spiritual circumcision results in forgiveness and eternal life, two things that mere physical circumcision could not do. Paul explains that this forgiveness, this cutting away of the old sinful nature in baptism, was made possible by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Forgiveness can be offered because sins have been paid for on the cross by His precious blood.

As we continue in this section, Paul will explain several other things that Christ accomplished with His cross; and he will admonish them not to be pulled away from this teaching.

VICTORIES OF THE CROSS

Verse 15 is the summary or concluding statement from the passage we were previously studying.

Vs. 8-15 – See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. ⁹For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, ¹⁰and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; ¹¹and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made

without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; ¹² having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴ having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵ When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.

Verses 8 to 14 were explained in the last chapter and in the review section in the beginning of the chapter. Verse 15 is an additional statement that piles on all of the victories that the cross of Jesus accomplishes. Not just forgiveness and the renewal of the sinners' life, but victory over the unseen forces that were against God and man in trying to destroy the church or block man's entry into the church. Paul uses a gentile image here:

- To make a display of your vanquished enemy was very much a Roman tradition and one the Gentiles would understand.
- When a returning Roman general would be victorious in war, he would return to a hero's welcome and parade in Rome.
- At this time, he would trail behind him the captives and prizes that he had plundered – even the noblemen of the conquered land.
- Paul uses this imagery to describe Jesus' victory at the cross and the defeat of the spirits and satanic angels who

lost in their effort to possess and destroy mankind because Jesus' blood and His Word now protect believers.

Of course, his reference is directed towards the false teachers who were pushing the notion of spirits and angels as mediators between God and man. No faithful angel or spirit would be in such a position, so these were evil spirits, and their teaching was not much more than magic and doctrines of demons and the occult.

In verse 15 Paul adds one more link in the chain between God and all other things. Jesus is the link with God as a divine person; He is the link with creation as its creator; He is the link with mankind as mankind's savior; He is the link with the church as its head; and finally, Paul says, He is even the link with the underworld because He is its conqueror.

The Traps of False Teachings

Now that Paul has firmly established Jesus as the pre-eminent individual in their spiritual lives, and His teachings the pre-eminent doctrine to guide them – he warns them of the various traps set by the false teachers and their doctrines:

The Trap of False Authority

Vs. 16-17 – Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day-- things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.

In this section we catch a glimpse of how the Judaizers were trying to manipulate and dominate these Gentile Christians. They

set themselves up as the authority by introducing rules concerning issues over which they had no real authority:

- Laws on food and drink which the Jews had in the Old Testament (e.g. no pork, priests no alcohol) and which the Pharisees had raised to a point of obsessiveness (e.g. tithing condiments).
- Rules on observing certain feasts which were part of the Jewish culture in the Old Testament (e.g. Passover, Pentecost) or the many obligations concerning the Sabbath which again were part of the Old Testament laws and traditions.

The false teachers were putting rules and regulations concerning these things and claiming that by following their teachings, the Gentile Christians would become stronger and wiser as Christians. Paul responds to this by saying that all of the things mentioned (feasts, Sabbath, food laws...) and every other element in the Jewish religion were a shadow, a kind of preview of Christ and His work.

For example, the sacrifice of animals in worship was a shadow or preview of the sacrifice of Jesus.

The special diets that made the Jews unique among the nations pointed to the unique separation from the world Christian disciples would experience. Everything in the Jewish religion pointed to or foreshadowed the coming of Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection as well as the establishment and eventual glorification of His church. These false teachers were trying to convince the Gentile Christians that the shadow was more important than the actual substance of the shadow – Jesus Christ.

His admonition is: do not let them act as judge for these things, they are free to do as they please concerning food, festivals, and

special holy days. If they have Christ, meaning if by faith they are united to Christ, they have achieved the ultimate religious goal – all of these other things are secondary and fall in the realm of personal choice.

THE TRAP OF FALSE SPIRITUALITY

Vs. 18-19 – Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

The “prize” of course is freedom from condemnation due to sin, and the reward of having an eternal relationship with God through Christ – because our sins are forgiven. Paul says that the Gentile Christians should not allow anyone to deny them this prize claiming that they are not spiritual enough to deserve it and basing this denial on their concept of false spirituality.

In the Judaizers’ case, this claim to superior spirituality was based on their practices and claims which Paul enumerates briefly:

Self-abasement

- Asceticism.
- Vows of abstinence from marriage or certain foods or codes of conduct.

Worship of angels

- Discussed previously their concept of the role of angels.

- Paul says that their only proofs for this are personal claims of visions.
- These claims create a false sense of spiritual pride in the ones who say they have them.

Paul brings his readers back to the only source for religious authority and spiritual growth – God Himself! By extension, Paul infers here that since Jesus is divine and part of the Godhead, the only source of authority and teaching that causes the body (church/Christians) to grow spiritually is Christ, not the false spirituality of the Judaizers.

Verses 20-23 are a summary statement:

If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)--in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Paul asks his readers a question:

If you have died to this world (in the waters of baptism) and have risen as new creations (eternal spiritual beings), why do you think that material things which are temporal (food, feasts, etc.) and human teachings (from the Judaizers) will have any effect on you for good or bad?

You cannot manipulate, improve, or destroy spiritual things with physical things. For example, if you have eternal life through

Christ, how can eating or not eating certain foods add to this or take away from this?

He does admit that from a human perspective these practices (asceticism, religious festivals, traditions) seem “spiritual” or look “religious” to the human fleshly mind. He concludes, however, that none of these things give one the spiritual power to overcome sin or be forgiven for sin. Only the blood of Jesus removes the stain of sin; only the Holy Spirit within the Christian and the Word of God can enable the Christian to overcome sin in this life; only resurrection and glorification can free man from sin forever, not food or drink laws, religious rituals, feasts, or false religious teachings.

SUMMARY / LESSONS

So, in this section Paul really focuses on the teachings and tactics of the false teachers revealing their basic worthlessness to achieve any spiritual goals. He also establishes the gospel, the teachings of Christ as pre-eminent, sufficient, and effective in accomplishing our dearest spiritual desires.

- to be forgiven for sin
- to be enlightened spiritually
- to live forever with God

A couple of modern-day lessons from this section can help Christians maintain their faith:

1. Be Careful

In every generation there are religious hucksters who try to build a following using the same gimmicks from 2,000 years ago -- The claim that they have a special calling, vision or message from God.

God has given us His final message until the return of Jesus. Believe in Jesus and obey all of His commands. God has given all the miracles, visions, and direction to carry out that message to the Apostles who have recorded it and preserved it in the New Testament. The only thing we wait for is the return of Christ; everything else we need to know concerning God and His will for us is in the Bible.

2. Be Confident

Do not let:

- gurus who starve themselves or never marry or live in caves make you feel unworthy.
- religious zealots with a one doctrine religion make you doubt.
- new religious movements with lots of publicity sweep you up.
- criticism or scorn of the Bible weaken your faith.

If you have been united to Jesus Christ in repentance and baptism and continue to follow Him daily – you are forever a child of God, and your salvation is guaranteed. Nothing you can do or say will make you any more saved. God is pleased with those who believe and obey His Son. This is the ultimate spiritual condition and the only way to spiritual growth and eternal life. Above all else:

BE CONFIDENT IN CHRIST.

8.

COLOSSIANS 3:1-11

So far in this letter Paul has been defending the church against the influence and doctrines of false teachers. We said that these teachers were promoting doctrines that denied the all-sufficiency of Christ and His sacrifice to accomplish salvation. They were suggesting that the Colossians needed further teachings and adherence to Jewish Law in order to be saved. They also boasted of superior spirituality because of their claim to certain visions and secret knowledge.

Paul demonstrates that Christ is pre-eminent in every domain regardless of the dimension. Jesus has authority because He is part of the Godhead and exercises His pre-eminence in creation, mankind, the church as well as in the underworld.

He also shows that response to His teachings accomplish all that is needed. Spiritual circumcision in baptism leads to regeneration as well as unity with Christ and God.

Once he has completed his response to the false teachers by exhorting the Colossians not to fall for their schemes, Paul goes on to develop the true doctrine of Christ in regard to Christian living. He has dealt with what the false teachers said concerning how to become a child of God, now he will teach them Christ's way to live an ethical and pleasing life before God.

So, we begin the fourth section of this epistle which demonstrates Christ who is pre-eminent in ethics (in other words right and wrong living according to Jesus).

CHRIST: PRE-EMINENT IN ETHICS – 3:1-4:6

In chapter 3, Paul will begin by summarizing everything he has already said and presenting it as the basis for the rest of the section. If Jesus' doctrine is pre-eminent, then the lifestyle that flows from it will also be superior to the lifestyle that comes from the Judaizers' teaching.

A. The Standard of Christian Living

When we talk about "standard of living" we usually mean how wealthy we are, how many things we possess, what advantages of lifestyle we enjoy in comparison to the very rich or very poor. Paul talks about a "standard" for Christian living which compares our life not with earthly wealth or values, but with a heavenly, spiritual standard set by Christ.

Vs. 1a – Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ

He begins by reaching back to the previous chapter to pick up the idea of baptism where he previously explained that Christ makes new creatures of them. At baptism their old nature of sin is removed, sin is forgiven, the Holy Spirit is given, a new person emerges. He says, if this is what has happened to you – in baptism you were raised up from the death of sin and condemnation (just as Christ was raised from the grave), then...

Vs. 1b – keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

You have a new standard of living to which you now strive. The standard is the one established by Christ who is in heaven. That Jesus is at the right hand of God in heaven is an exalted way of saying that Jesus is divine and has the authority of God. What He has established (through His teaching), this is the heavenly or godly standard.

Vs. 2 – Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

They are to focus on the things that Christ (who is above) has taught and established, and not the things taught and promoted by the Judaizers. Things that have to do with earthly rules about food and rituals. Teachings that promote the rule of the earth by demon-angels, etc. If you have been raised with Christ then you are freed from earthly rules about religion, fears concerning demons – you are now living according to the true spiritual standard set by the One who is actually in heaven.

Vs. 3-4 – For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Again, he refers to the death that Christians experience in baptism but adds that at this point we also become united to Christ. He uses the word hidden because as far as the world is concerned, what we will become in Christ will not be revealed until Jesus Himself returns at the end of the world. He will be revealed as the glorious and only begotten Son of God, judge of the world; Christians will be revealed as resurrected and glorified sons and daughters of God who will live and reign with Christ forever.

The point here is that if this is true (that Christians are united to God in Christ and will be revealed as the glorious eternal Church

in the end), by what standard should they now live? The unstated answer is that they certainly should not be living according to the false (and quite earthly) standard the Judaizers were trying to set for them.

ELEMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN STANDARD - 3:4 TO 4:6

In the first 4 verses Paul summarized what he will break into detail in the next several verses. The details of this spiritual/heavenly/Christ-centered standard fall into several categories.

1. Personal Holiness - vs. 5-11

Paul begins where the new life of the Christian begins to show itself first - in the personal conduct of the individual. Remember the point here - he is saying that as Christians they are not to be enslaved to the false earthly standard of religion set by the Judaizers. This standard had to do with what they ate, cutting their flesh, worship to minor spiritual beings and submission to the teachers themselves, etc.

He is saying that as Christians they need to focus on the heavenly standard of true religion established by Christ who is in heaven and who will bring them to heaven as well.

Vs. 5a - Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead

Since he has encouraged them to seek or focus on the heavenly standard of holiness, Paul also adds how to arrive at this point. They are to deaden their flesh to sin. They have died and been raised as new creatures in baptism. This new life resists the attempts by the body to reassert its old life of sin. The admonition is quite clear - render dead your appetite for sin. Do

not offer your body up for unholy activity, and he names 5 things they are to be “dead” to.

Vs. 5b – ...dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

Four of these are sexual in nature and one is greed.

1. Sexual immorality (fornication) Illicit sexual activity with others, includes homosexuality, adultery, etc.
2. Impurity (uncleanness) Filthy talk, pictures, stories of sexual nature.
3. Passion (lust) a yearning for what is forbidden (someone’s wife, etc.).
4. Evil desire (a constant desire for evil or impure things/sexual obsession).
5. Greed – always wanting more of the things above.

All of these (usually come together) produce the sin of idolatry, the worship of sensuality and sexual gratification rather than the worship of God. Paul says that personal holiness begins with the control (deadening) of the flesh to temptations in the most basic area of life – human sexuality.

Vs. 6-7 – For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.

He reminds them that this type of activity will be punished by God. They must not be fooled by high minded ideas that indulge in sexual immorality. For example, homosexuality finding acceptability under the banner of Political Correctness.

These type of activities and attitudes are wrong, and God will punish on account of them.

He also reminds them that they were once guilty of these things, considered them as a normal part of life – but since their resurrection in Christ they now live according to a new standard where they are to refuse their bodies' desire for these things.

This line also serves as a bridge to the next verse where Paul will list another group of sins that they are to avoid.

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

The first group of sins brings harm and offence to one's own body, these next sins bring harm to others.

1. **Anger** – the boiling of emotions. Allowing ourselves to be stirred by negative feelings towards others.
2. **Wrath** – this is a stronger form of the previous – where the emotions threaten to boil over. The end of control. Exasperation.
3. **Malice** – or meanness, where our unchecked emotions begin to form into an evil action.
4. **Slander** – the usual first mean act is to speak against someone, curse them.
5. **Abusive speech** – foul, abusive language in regards to others. A constant attitude.

Along with verse 5 this makes a list of 10 things to resist in the pursuit of holy living. It is not a comprehensive list of every sin there is but the fact that Paul refers to sins of sensuality and those of speech shows that he is including all the earthly evils we

desire in our hearts and evils we commit as a result of what comes from our hearts. The resurrected man/woman has a new heart which neither desires these things nor produces these things – and it is evident.

Finally, personal holiness requires a new approach to personal relationships with others. An approach based on truth.

Vs. 9 – Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,

Paul returns to the historical moment when the old man, old sinful, old devious nature was removed and replaced by the new, purified, holy nature put in its place – baptism. Because this has happened, they must leave off the sin of lying.

Vs. 10 – and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him

This is especially necessary because this transformation was made in order to bring them back to their true and original form. Before sin, Adam was the true image of God, sinless, pure, knowing God. He lost this status because he sinned and was plunged into darkness, separation, and death.

All humans shared in this fallen nature after him. Now that Christ has renewed man to his true nature (sinless, having a relationship with God), man must be truthful in his relationships with others.

Verse 11 summarizes the last few verses:

Vs. 11 – a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and

uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman,
but Christ is all, and in all.

This renewal is not simply a change of ethics or a new set of moral rules, it is a complete change that occurs to anyone who experiences the saving power of Jesus. No matter who you are (Paul mentions sets of disparate people):

- Greek/Jew → culture
- Circumcised/uncircumcised → religion
- Barbarian/Scythian → civilized vs. uncivilized
- Slave/Free → social position

No matter what group you formerly identified with, you were a sinner, did not know the truth, lost in sin – but because of Jesus you have become a new creature, a Christian. Now as a Christian none of these labels mean anything; you have been liberated by the truth, you know the truth (that God renews everyone through Christ); and now you must live according to this truth.

Part of leaving off these old labels is to pursue personal holiness, and part of personal holiness is to speak the truth since they were renewed by truth. In the end everyone comes together in Christ because everyone is focused on Him, and the heavenly things connected to Him.

SUMMARY

So, in this 3rd chapter Paul explains the standard or ethic for Christian living established by Christ in heaven. He encourages his readers to focus on this standard rather than the false and earthly standards that the Judaizers were trying to impose on them. This heavenly standard reflected their new status as

spiritual beings, renewed, and purified by the blood of Christ in baptism. This heavenly standard included several elements.

In this chapter we looked at the first of these which was the pursuit of holy living which required the denial of various evil desires and the effort to speak the truth to everyone. In the next chapter we will move on to the next element in the heavenly standard – a loving attitude.

9.

COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

Let's focus on where we are in this letter. Paul, in response to false teachers who are trying to undermine Christ's position and teaching, demonstrates that Jesus' life, ministry and teachings:

- place Him at the right hand of God as a divine being
- over all creation as the creator
- savior of all humanity
- head of the church
- victor over demons in the underworld

From this primary or “pre-eminent” position flow the teachings which supersede any other teachings (especially those of the false teachers). And these teachings form the basis upon which we decide what is good, what is right, what is from God and what is not from God.

This is where we left off in our previous chapter. Paul explained what kind of lifestyle flows from the teachings of Christ and how it is superior to the lifestyle that is being imposed upon them through the teachings of the Judaizers. In his explanation Paul says that those who have responded to Jesus' command of baptism have cut away the old man of sin or the old “standards”

by which they formerly lived. Not just the low human standards of immorality, worldliness and lack of love, but also the earthly standards of “religion” built around laws on food and religious ritual as well as custom symbolized in circumcision. Now, he says, they live according to Christ’s standard which He conveys through His teachings. In the previous chapter Paul describes the various elements of this new standard by which we live.

The first element of Christ’s standard is personal holiness. The next section contains several other elements that come together to establish the Christian standard.

ELEMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN STANDARD - CONTINUED

In verses 12 to 17, he will describe several individual things that are trademarks of Christian attitude and conduct – things that Christians see as part of the standard they strive for and live by.

Vs. 12a – So, as those who have been chosen of God,
holy and beloved,

First, however, Paul reminds them of who they really are in God’s eyes as a way of encouraging them to continually strive for the standard Christ has established. The Judaizers have made them feel inferior, incomplete, lacking in what was necessary to be equal to themselves and thus worthy before God. He refers to them with three terms that were originally applied to the Jewish nation in the Old Testament but now are applied to the Christians at Colossae, a direct response to the false superiority claimed by the Judaizers.

A. Chosen of God

The Jews were the people of God, the chosen because they were descendants of Abraham who had been chosen by God to

establish a nation. Genesis 12:2: Their “chosen” status was based on their relation to him.

Christians were the chosen of God because they were united to Christ by faith and Christ had been chosen by God to save mankind and establish the church. I Peter 2:4: their “chosen” status was based on their relationship to Christ.

B. Holy

The term "Holy" means to be separate. God had separated the Jews from the rest of the nations for a special purpose. They were to be the nation/people through whom the Messiah would come. Their religious practices, their history (i.e. Exodus), their lifestyle (all given to them by God) made them stand apart from the other nations. Christians, in the same way, were also to be “separate.”

They were separated from the world by faith, separated from their sins by the blood of Christ, separated from death by the Holy Spirit. Christians were separated from the world in order to glorify God and prepare the world for the return of Christ. (Jews prepared for the first coming / Christians prepare the world for the second.)

C. Beloved

The Jews were beloved by God in that He sent them prophets, gave them His Word, protected them, and promised them salvation. Christians were also beloved of God because they received fulfillment of all the promises God had made to the Jews.

Once he has reminded them of their true standing with God on account of Christ, once he has reassured them that they are not second-class citizens in comparison to the Judaizers, Paul

continues to set forth the different elements of the standard of Christian living.

1. A Loving Attitude – vs. 12b-14

Next to personal holiness, another distinguishing mark that sets the Christian apart is the loving attitude that he strives for. No other religion has as its key doctrine the forgiveness and love of enemies. No other religion portrays God as a God of love who demands love above all else.

Love and the evidence of love within the individual and among the group is another basic element in the standard for Christian living established by Jesus through His teachings. For example: John 3:16 – God loves, John 13:35 – we love.

In these few verses Paul will describe the nuts and bolts of the loving attitude. In other words, what does Christian love look like? He gives the nuts and bolts first and then summarizes in the end.

Vs. 12b-14 - In the second part of the verse, he mentions seven attributes of a loving heart.

Vs. 12b-13 – put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

Notice that he says to “put on a heart...”, this is suggesting that these things do not come naturally, we have to make an act of will – we have to make an effort.

- Compassion – a tender feeling towards those who are suffering, who are in need.

- Kindness – the same tender feeling but extended towards all, whether they are suffering or not.
- Humility – Pagans sought the upper hand, power, and domination. Love requires Christians to recognize their sinful state and realize that they are sinners among sinners. Christians know who they are.
- Meekness – Not self-willed, desiring one’s own way.
- Patience – The willingness to put up with suffering or trials without losing faith, love, joy, confidence.
- Longsuffering – Bearing with one another and the ability not to be provoked by another’s weakness or insult.
- Forgiveness – Giving up the right to receive justice or restitution for a wrong done.

Paul gives a little more detail here by describing a typical problem between two people – one person is upset with another and has a cause to complain. He says we should have the attitude with one another as Christ had with us. Don’t continue to complain, don’t look for a judge or arbitrator – simply forgive and move on.

Note he said a complaint, not a crime or sin against.

Vs. 14 – Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

In this verse Paul summarizes these things by saying that love is the crowning glory of all. In other words, love is beyond these individual things because it is the fulfillment of them. I.E. Love is kind, love is patient... I Corinthians 13.

Even though these individual things bring Christians together, love serves as the glue that truly cements the relationships that Christians have.

2. A Thankful Heart – vs. 15-17

Personal holiness is the standard of conduct in the world, a loving attitude is the standard of conduct in the church, and a thankful heart is the standard one strives for before God. We can't impress God with our holiness because we are sinners. Our conduct is an attempt to put distance between ourselves and the world.

Loving attitudes maintain the unity in the church; we can never “out-love” God or make up for His love with our own. But a thankful heart, now there is something that is uniquely ours, that we have control over and that we can legitimately offer to God in good conscience. Paul mentions three ways we can express and experience gratitude as Christians before God.

Thankfulness for a peaceful mind

Vs. 15 – Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

The word “rule” refers to a judge or a referee, an arbitrator. The Christians were being judged by the Judaizers who wanted them to submit to their standard (law, circumcision, etc.) in order to be “good enough.” Paul tells them to allow the “peace” that Christ brings to their hearts be the thing that decides if God loves and accepts you or not. He adds that everyone was called to experience this peace, and the sharing of this peace is the unique feature of those who are in the body (church), not circumcision or food laws or slavish submission to certain teachers.

Be thankful that you have the peace of Christ in your heart and this peace is the assurance, the judge that you belong to God.

Worship with Thanksgiving

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

A heart that is thankful ultimately expresses itself, and so Paul describes the natural progression from feeling to expression. This peaceful assurance in Christ should lead to expressions of thanks – how should this be? Certainly not as the pagans celebrate. And not as the Judaizers express the feelings of their hearts with empty ritual and self-abasement. A thankful heart...

- Drinks in the words/teachings of Christ and allows them to permeate the entire person.
- It shares the peace, the message, the wisdom with others in teaching and encouragement.
- It praises using spiritual words and ideas provided by God just for such occasions.

If God is the one that sent Jesus to create the peace Christians feel, then it is only natural that the praise and thanksgiving for this return to Him and Him alone.

N.B. Note that in his only reference to public worship Paul uses the word sing (meaning sing without instrument), denoting the kind of praise that is acceptable.

3. A Life Motivated by Thanksgiving

Vs. 17 – Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

A heart that feels thankful will eventually begin to express thanks and this expression of thanksgiving will find its way into everyday life. The Christian lifestyle is filled with actions great and small; the difference is that the motivation for life is Christ and His service. This motivation completes the cycle of thanksgiving:

- We experience the peace of Christ in our hearts.
- We are moved to give thanks to God for this.
- We are motivated by gratitude to live and serve in His name.
- This reinforces and deepens the peace we feel and keeps the cycle turning.

SUMMARY

We are not finished with the elements of the Christian standard Paul outlines in these verses. So far, however, he has said that Christians live by Christ's standard, not the false one promoted by the Judaizers. This Christian standard has several elements. The ones Paul has described so far are:

1. Personal holiness
2. A loving attitude
3. A thankful heart

10.

COLOSSIANS 3:18-21

We are nearing the end of our study on the book of Colossians. We have learned that this letter was written to reject a system of false teaching and teachers who were attempting to displace Jesus and His teachings as the primary standard for Christian life and doctrine.

After Paul describes Christ's priority or "pre-eminent" position in the scheme of things, he goes on to explain that Jesus' teachings have an equal priority. He also describes for them the type of life that is supposed to emanate from these teachings: Christ is pre-eminent in ethics therefore the right way to live is by following His ethical teachings.

In the previous chapter I described the standard for Christian life that is established by Jesus' teachings and the details or elements of that standard/ethic that pertains to Christians.

1. One was holiness – sexual purity.
2. A loving nature – truthful and compassionate.
3. A thankful heart – a life motivated by a grateful spirit and expressed in worship and praise.

In this chapter, Paul will add the two final elements he includes in the Christian ethic/standard established by Christ.

ELEMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN STANDARD – CONTINUED

4. An Ordered Family – 3:18-21

Most of our lives are lived within the context of a family so it would only be natural for Jesus to include instructions for family life so that we would have these teachings as the base for marriage. The Judaizers forbade marriage and saw it as a concession to the flesh. The pagans had a very loose commitment to the marriage bond, and they modeled it after the ignorant and cruel system they themselves came from. Men treated wives and children as property. Women and children survived as best they could through cleverness and silent submission.

Paul establishes the basis for an orderly family according to the words of Christ.

Vs. 18 – Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Wives should be in submission to their husbands (obedience towards). Again, the word here is the same as the one used by Paul in Ephesians 5:21,

“... be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

In Ephesians he referred to Christians in the church who were to be subject to each other; in Colossians it is the wife to be in subjection to her husband. The word is a military term which means to “place oneself under.” The idea that a soldier understands his rank and recognizes and submits to the one who has a higher rank.

In the marriage relationship the ranks were handed out by God in Genesis and have not changed since Genesis 3:16 says

... your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.

The requirement that these be only one man and one woman for life in a marriage was established here in Genesis, confirmed by Jesus in Matthew 19:4-6 and taught by Paul in I Corinthians 7:1-ff.

Everyone agrees this is the “ideal” marriage arrangement. Well, in the same way the requirement that a wife be subject to her husband was established in Genesis and confirmed and taught by Paul in the New Testament not only in this passage but in Ephesians 5:22 as well.

Jesus does not ever say this but Paul, in teaching this, says that it is “fitting” or “proper” in the Lord – that a wife submit to her husband. This is an easy one to understand but not such an easy one to accomplish for a variety of reasons:

- The husband is not a Christian.
- The husband is a weak or immature Christian.
- The wife has a forceful personality in opposition to her husband.
- The problems of dysfunctional families.

Whatever the situation, women need to understand several things about this teaching.

A. It is not a Cultural Thing

This is not an outdated “Jewish” thing that we should ignore because it does not fit into our society anymore. It is a command

of God and relevant in each generation. In marriage, what God wants, what is proper and the right thing for Christians, is that wives be in submission to their husbands. You can teach this idea to your children because it will be around as long as marriage will be.

B. It is not an Absolute Thing

Although the Bible says this is what would be proper for those calling themselves Christians, it does not mean that it is always possible (e.g. a widow cannot do this).

A divorced woman cannot do this – I Corinthians 7:15. A woman whose husband is evil and cruel and violent cannot do this. However, for those who are trying to have a marriage that is fitting in the Lord, the woman should be in subjection to her husband. Do this if this is possible, but if you do not do it or use a different system because it suits your personality better – than your relationship to your husband is not “fitting in the Lord.”

C. It is Something you Choose

If you are beaten or threatened into submission, this is not submission, it is slavery. Submission is a choice that the wife makes for the greater good of the family not an act of debasement. Submission is a faith issue, not a competency issue.

A Christian woman gives freely, because of her faith, the leadership role in the marriage to her husband and reinforces that decision each day by respecting him.

Vs. 19 – Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them.

In a world where marriages were arranged by parents and women treated as property, it was natural for Paul to admonish

men to love and not treat their wives harshly. When your view of your wife is that of property, it is difficult to love her as self, treat her as self.

Note that Paul's instructions for men do not have much to do with being good leaders, fair managers. He goes to the heart of what is difficult for men – love and tenderness. We have come a long way as a society but the commands for men remain the same within marriage:

A. To love their wives

In Ephesians 5:22, he gives more details about this love: That it is to be similar to the love that Christ has for the church (sacrificial) and it is to be similar to the love they have for themselves (generous).

Again, this command for a husband's love remains until there will be no need for marriage (heaven). A woman who is loved in this way finds it a joy to respect and submit to her husband.

B. To be tender towards them

The term “bitter” means sharp, pointed, harsh. When you perceive something as less than you are, it is easy to disrespect it, to become harsh and cruel. Paul's admonishment requires men to keep in mind who the wife is:

- A gift from God – Proverbs 18:22
- A partner for life – Genesis 2:24
- A mother for their children – Genesis 4:1

Such a precious person must be treated with care and tenderness. I would say the same thing to men as I did to the women on this subject – a man must choose to be this way with his wife, it does not come naturally. It does not come naturally

for a woman to submit to her husband (she must choose and cultivate a submissive nature through prayer and practice). In the same way it does not come naturally for a man to love his wife sacrificially and tenderly (it is natural to act this way because of desire, but not be this way) – men are just more naturally selfish than women.

In the end, the man must choose to deny himself and make his wife the beneficiary of his love and tenderness rather than himself.

Vs. 20-21 – Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

Again, Paul reaches back to the elemental principles found in the Old Testament.

In Exodus 20:12:

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

Paul summarizes this in Colossians by keeping the main elements and applying them in a New Testament context. The responsibility of children is:

Obedience to parents in all things

This includes the commands of God and the judgments and application of these in daily living made by parents. When parents say, “Because I say so,” this has basis in Scripture.

The promise of the Old Testament was fulfilled in Christ and so now the children of God look forward to a heavenly “promised land,” where Christ reigns. There is a blessing in learning to “obey” parents in all things – it prepares us to obey Christ and please Him.

Parents are the ones who develop the “obedience” muscle first in their children. If they do a bad job of this, someone else (school, police, etc.) will have to teach it the hard way.

Now Paul adds one caution to dads, and that is to not overdo the authority thing. Some Bibles use the term “provoke to anger” or “stir-up” emotionally: how?

- Setting the goals too high
- Being inconsistent
- Lack of praise and appreciation
- Favoritism
- Creating jealousy by devoting too much time to work or hobbies

Children become discouraged when they cannot please, properly obey, secure a blessing from their fathers. Discouragement can easily lead to either depression and withdrawal or rebellion and acting out.

SUMMARY

So, the fourth element of the Christian standard is an orderly family. An orderly family is a tremendous witness of Christian grace and the presence of God in your life. Paul says that an orderly family requires three main components (cannot have it without these):

1. A submissive wife

Begins with the woman because she is the key to a balanced Christian home. A woman who respects and supports her husband's leadership (despite his flaws and hers as well) is the first component in an orderly family.

2. A loving husband

A man who understands, accepts and practices loving leadership of his wife and children is the second part of the equation. You cannot have an ordered family if the one in leadership refuses to lead or leads improperly. Many ask, "If husband will not lead, what is a Christian woman to do?"

- Do not lead him. This is not your job; the job is vacant.
- Lead your children to Christ (e.g. Timothy).

3. Obedient children

Ordered families suffer their greatest strains when children begin to test the limits of parental authority. Paul says it is possible to do this without discouraging the children. We have learned that consistency, fairness, and tenderness go a long way in repairing and maintaining the bonds with them at this time.

In our next chapter we will go on to explain the last element in the Christian standard.

11.

COLOSSIANS 3:22-4:18

We have learned that Paul wrote this letter in response to the efforts of false teachers (Judaizers) to minimize the place of Christ and His teachings and substitute their own. The result of this was that the Colossians were being lured away from their peace and security in Christ and tempted to base their salvation on the following of food laws, circumcision, and various teachings on the position and power of angels.

Paul's answer is to demonstrate that Jesus Christ and His teachings are the basis upon which they are saved, continue to be saved and upon which they should base their lives. Paul goes on to explain what their lives should be like if they base them on the teachings of Christ rather than on the empty teachings of the Judaizers. This has been the subject of our last few lessons – the standard or ethic that pertains to Christian living. This standard has several features:

1. Holy living (especially sexual purity)
2. A loving nature (speaking the truth)
3. A thankful heart
4. An ordered family (each with specific roles to play)

Let's continue describing this standard of living that flows from Jesus' teaching by adding the final feature that Paul describes.

FEATURES OF THE CHRISTIAN STANDARD – 3:22- 4:1

5. Ordered Society – 3:22-4:1

Paul mentioned that Christians are to have an ordered family and continues this thought to include the natural extension of an ordered family and that is an orderly society. Now he does not go into great detail about this. He simply comments on the role and attitude of the two main positions of society in that day: slaves and masters.

In the Roman Empire of the day, you had only two classes: slaves and free. There were divisions within these, but this was the dividing line. Paul does not condone slavery; he merely provides the teaching necessary for Christians to live properly, orderly before God in each class.

SLAVES

Vs. 22-25 – Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.

He tells slaves two things that will help guide their Christian lives:

1. Obey sincerely – Not just lip service to the master but true obedience from the heart, knowing that the Lord sees your heart. Work with enthusiasm – no grumbling, no slacking. Do your work cheerfully and with enthusiasm as if you are working for God (Jesus), not man (master). Paul reminds slaves that God will judge and reward their work. Their attitude and work should not be based on their master's character or reward – it should be done to please God who will issue the final reward – which is eternal life (that is the inheritance). A wonderful promise to one who was destined to a lifetime of slavery here on earth.

2. You will be judged – They should not hide their disobedience and laziness behind the excuse of slavery. God is impartial and will judge everyone based on their obedience to Him, not based on their station in life (slave or free).

MASTERS (FREE)

Vs. 4:1 – Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.

Again, Paul does not give all the instructions for the master's life, only that which will set the tone for a proper relationship with their slaves – in God's eyes. As masters they have a responsibility to be just (see to their needs) and fair (not take advantage) of those in their charge. It would be easy to treat them as less than human because the slaves were seen as property, but God reminds them of their stewardship in caring for their slaves.

He also warns them that they too are slaves of the Master and should pattern their attitude after the attitude that Jesus, their Master, has for them. The implication is that they too will be judged.

Now Paul does not denounce slavery as evil and try to begin a revolution. He merely guides these two classes of people in how to live orderly lives before God in the positions they occupied. We know that Paul encouraged those who could obtain their freedom to do so (I Corinthians 7:21) but did not encourage rebellion. This would have created chaos in the church and in society, not order. Slavery was eventually defeated as Christianity overtook the various social systems of the Roman Empire.

So, Paul adds one more feature to the Christian lifestyle, ordered society, as seen in the relationship between free and slave, or today as seen in the relationship between employer and employee, manager and worker, etc.

Christians strive to maintain order in their working relationships whatever position they hold, knowing that they serve the Lord and will ultimately be judged by Him and not man.

CONCLUSION AND GREETINGS – 4:2-18

If they accept Christ and His teachings as the standard, then their lives will reflect the fact that they live by this standard. Their lives, as Paul has shown, will be holy, loving, thankful, and will demonstrate ordered living in the home and society.

In the next verse (4:2) Paul will move seamlessly into the final part of his letter which will include several words of encouragement and the commendation of various workers.

Vs. 2-4 – Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak.

He encourages them to continue giving thanks for their many blessings but also to pray for him. He is in prison, various individuals seek to destroy his work, there is still much to do, and he faces a trial.

He asks them to be devoted to prayer on his behalf and the others who work with him so he will be able to preach to others the good news who have not heard it yet. God is the one who provides opportunity for Paul. He wants his ministry to continue. Also, that he has the wisdom to defend himself at the imperial court in Rome, as he awaited this in prison.

Much of his future ministry rested on the outcome of his appearance at court. We know he was released for a while (2 years) as I said in the introductory chapter, he spent the time after his release revisiting and strengthening the churches he had established in Crete, Ephesus, Corinth, etc. (Titus 1:5). But at the writing of this letter, he was unsure of the future and the outcome of the trial and so he asks them to pray for him.

Vs. 5-6 – Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

In the context of him having to deal with pagans at court and in prison, he turns the prayer request for himself around by encouraging them to be careful how they communicate with non-Christians.

He was in prison, fighting for his life, and yet despite these obstacles he had been able to spread the gospel throughout the prison in Rome (Philippians 1:13). He tells them that by their good conduct (he has explained in previous chapters) and careful speech (not foolish or coarse) but full of grace – they too must

take full advantage of every opportunity to respond to outsiders concerning their faith.

Him being in prison might have driven them “underground” but he tells them that with good conduct, careful and graceful speech, they can reach others for Christ as they witness for their faith.

Vs. 7-9 – As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

Now begin the greetings and commendations:

TYCHICUS

He was one of Paul’s personal representatives and the one who carried the letters to Colossae and to Ephesus. He was also dispatched to relieve Titus in Crete (Titus 3:12) and Timothy at Ephesus (II Timothy 4:12). In this passage Paul refers to him as beloved and faithful, and able to inform them accurately of his situation. He was a trusted and useful minister in the early church.

ONESIMUS

He was the runaway slave from Colossae who Paul converted in prison. He was returning home, accompanying Tychicus, and bringing a letter from Paul to his former master, Philemon.

Vs. 10-11 – Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas’s cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); ¹¹ and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me.

Paul mentions three Jewish Christians who were working with him and ministering to him while under house arrest in Rome.

ARISTARCHUS

He was an early companion of Paul, and we see him first as one with the Apostle in Ephesus during the attack by the mob (Acts 19:29). He accompanied Paul to Jerusalem with the collection for the saints (Acts 20:4) and later we see him again with Paul as he sailed under guard for Rome (Acts 27:2). It seems that he rejoined Paul as a voluntary prisoner in order to minister to his needs (Colossians 4:10).

JOHN MARK

Of course, John Mark is a familiar character. His mother’s (Mary) house was used by the Apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). He was brought to Antioch by his cousin Barnabas and left on the first missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas as their helper (Acts 13:5). He refused (for some reason) to go into the mainland and returned to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13). This later caused a dispute between Barnabas and Paul when Barnabas wanted to bring him on another missionary journey (Acts 15:38). Barnabas then took Mark under his wing and went to work in a separate place (Cyprus) while Paul along with Silas went on to work in Asia Minor and Greece. We see by this mention of him in the Colossian letter that Mark was reunited with Paul in the work and highly regarded by him.

After Paul's death we see further mention of him by Peter (I Peter 5:13) as Peter's helper. Many scholars feel that the gospel of Mark is Peter's recounting of his own experience and written out by Mark.

JUSTUS

Not much is known about him other than this mention of him in this letter.

Paul has spent much of this epistle refuting the false Jewish teachers among them but quickly mentions three fellow Christian Jews who are faithful and beloved, to show that there are many brethren among the Jews who are faithful and trustworthy.

EPAPHRAS

Vs. 12-13 – Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondsman of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

A friend and co-worker of Paul. Many scholars believe he was a different person than Epaphroditus mentioned in Philippians 2:25 and 4:18. Epaphras worked as an evangelist and helped in the establishment of the churches in Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea.

Paul says he is from Colossae and was a man who prayed fervently for them. Paul attests to the fact that Epaphras was truly concerned (agonized) over their faith. He wanted them to

be fully assured that God wanted them to be saved and secure in Christ – this is God’s will.

LUKE

Vs. 14 – Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.

Again, Paul only mentions Luke in passing, not because he is unimportant but rather that he is finishing his letter and his readers know about Luke. A companion and fellow traveler with Paul and the author of the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. This is the only place where he is referred to as a physician.

DEMAS

There are three references to Demas. Two say that he is a fellow worker and sends greetings, and the final one in II Timothy 4:10 which reveals that he finally abandoned Paul and the work to return to worldly living. He was Paul’s secretary and scribe for a time before his fall.

Final greetings and instructions then come in rapid succession.

Vs. 15-18 – Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. ¹⁶ When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. ¹⁷ Say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.” ¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

Vs. 15 – Greetings to the church in Laodicea and a smaller group meeting in the home of an individual.

Vs. 16 – Paul mentions another letter (to the Laodicians) which he has written and sent, but this letter has not been found. He instructs them to exchange letters with the Colossians.

Vs. 17 – The only other reference to Archippus is in the letter to Philemon – he was probably Philemon’s son. Epaphras had left the church in Colossae (where Archippus and Philemon were) in order to go to Rome to minister to Paul. It seems that Epaphras had left his ministry there in the hands of Archippus. Paul exhorts him (like he does Timothy in I Tim. 4:16) to not neglect that ministry but to work at it and be diligent. In the end the ministry had really been given to him by the Lord, not just by Epaphras or Paul.

Vs. 18 – Finally, Paul signs with his own hand the letter dictated to Demas as a proof of authenticity, and as a way of sending his own personal greeting. He urges them to remember his imprisonment and what it stands for and why he is there: the glory of God and the gospel of Christ. He finishes with a blessing that God’s grace (or favor) be upon or with them.

And so with this blessing, Paul ends the letter which puts forth Christ and His teachings as the primary or pre-eminent basis upon which:

- Knowledge of the true God is revealed
- Faith for salvation is based
- Direction for Christian living is established

12.

Conclusion

This is our final chapter in the series on the book of Colossians. I said when we began this study that the focal point of this epistle was Jesus Christ. His supremacy/pre-eminence is the “point” of this letter to the Colossians. Let us, therefore, review this important theme.

THE SUPREMACY / PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST - 1:15-20

BACKGROUND REVIEW

In writing to the Colossian brethren, Paul describes the supremacy of Christ to a church who had begun to drift away from the faith. False teachers had crept in and began teaching a gospel that mixed together Greek philosophical ideas, pagan cultic practices (worship of angels), Jewish religious traditions along with the teachings of Christianity. These men blended all of these components into a “new” gospel which, they claimed, would give people a more dynamic spiritual experience.

Instead of faith practiced in loving obedience as Jesus had taught, they promoted a strict form of asceticism (denial of certain foods, vows of celibacy, etc.) telling their followers that this would provide the spiritual power needed to gain the salvation they wanted. This type of teaching and practice was clearly in

opposition to the gospel and so in response to these heresies, Paul puts forth two main ideas in his epistle to the Colossian church:

It is Jesus Who is Supreme and Preeminent

It is not these teachers, not their new methods nor any person who is superior, only Christ.

Vs. 15-18 – He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

In stating this fact, Paul describes 7 areas of Jesus' supremacy:

1. He is the Supreme Spirit – vs. 15a

As the image of God, He is God – no other spirit invented by man is His equal.

2. He Holds the Supreme Position – vs. 15b

No created thing is before Him in time or position.

3. He is the Supreme Authority – vs. 16a

Every level of creation from the unseen particles to the greatest king or leader is subject to His authority. Not only is His authority greater, but every other authority is in service to His.

4. He is the Supreme Reason for Existence - vs. 16b

He is the answer to every great question and the end of every search.

5. He is the Supreme Power - vs. 17

It is by His energy that the physical world continues to exist. Not gravity, not black holes, not exploding galaxies – HE is the power source for all existing things.

6. He is the Supreme Head of Organized Religion on Earth - vs. 18a

Only Jesus, by virtue of His supremacy, has a right to be worshipped as God. He and only He is the true religious and spiritual head – all others are pretenders and false prophets.

7. He is the Supreme Leader of the Eternal Kingdom of Heaven - vs. 18b

In the spiritual world He is the leader of the angels and spirit beings that were created before us as well as the supreme leader of those who have joined them from the earthly realm. In the kingdom of heaven, Jesus is the Lord of all forever.

After establishing Jesus' supreme position in all of these areas, Paul explains one other important fact about Jesus that they need to be reminded of.

JESUS, THE SUPREME LORD, SACRIFICED HIMSELF FOR THEM

Vs. 19-20 – For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Paul's point here is: who needs human philosophy, cultural rituals, or human effort when the Supreme Lord has personally undertaken the task of saving those who were condemned to death by sin? No amount of human wisdom and effort could accomplish what the Supreme Lord had accomplished for them, and for us!

EXHORTATION

Paul finishes this section by reminding them of three things. If they accept what he has taught them, then they need to:

1. Remember the Way They Were Saved

Vs. 21-22 – And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.

He explains that their sins against God are what made them guilty and subject to condemnation and punishment in hell. But, he goes on to say, it was the blood of Jesus, the Supreme One, that washed away their guilt, that made them pure before God. The cross, the blood, the sacrifice of Jesus – this is what makes them pure beyond the reach of Satan and acceptable to God; not self-sacrifice, self-denial or the learning of mysteries.

2. Remember to Remain Faithful

Vs. 23a – If indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast,

Note that he says, “if” – this is a condition. God’s grace is free, we cannot buy it, earn it, sell it, or obtain it based on our conditions. We cannot produce it or force Him to give it to us based on our effort, wisdom, or actions. God sets the condition for grace; He establishes the one criterion for its procurement – and that one condition is faith. You can only obtain this wonderful soul cleansing grace through faith, and that faith is expressed according to His will and purpose.

GOD'S GRACE IS FREE BUT IT IS NOT GIVEN TO SCOFFERS, DISBELIEVERS AND THE DISOBEDIENT.

If it was, then sinners and disbelievers like Herod and Hitler and Stalin would be with Christ this very moment even though they hated Him and His church during their lifetime. No, grace is extended to those who have faith and in Colossians 2:11-12 Paul further explains that faith in Christ is properly expressed in baptism.

Vs. 11-12 – and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

In Colossians Paul is simply repeating what Peter explained to the Jews in Jerusalem on Pentecost Sunday:

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you

will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 2:37-38

The Pilgrim gate had pools of water nearby that could accommodate up to 500 people at a time. Pilgrims visiting Jerusalem would use the pools to cleanse themselves before entering the Holy City. This is where 3000 would have easily obeyed the gospel as 12 men baptized this many in just a few hours. And so Paul reminds them to remain faithful, assured that the grace of God to remove all of their sins was applied completely when they called on the name of Jesus in repentance and baptism.

3. Remember the Truth - vs. 23b

The danger here was that with their false teachings, these men were moving them away from Christ because Christ is one with His gospel. To deny one is to deny the other.

So, Paul tells them to remember:

1. Christ as the only Supreme One
2. His cross as the only way to forgiveness and perfection
3. His gospel as the only true message of hope

If they did this, the Supreme Lord Jesus would remain their personal Savior and Lord forever.

As we close out the end of this study, I encourage all of us here with the same encouragement of Paul:

1. Hold on to Christ

He is the Supreme Lord of all persons, dominions, worlds, events; HE is the Lord. Whether there are wars, climate changes, economic upheavals, or personal tragedies, He is the Supreme

Lord. Jesus will save you, sustain you and surround you with His love forever. Hold on to Him!

2. Hold on to the Cross of Christ

There will be all kinds of new prophets, new teachings, new promises... No matter what, hold on to the cross of Jesus. When you feel you are unworthy or afraid all is lost. Hold on to the cross of Jesus as the one act in all of history that will serve to save you and keep you saved forever.

3. Hold on to the Gospel of Christ

Technology changes and society changes, but people are the same today as the day Adam sinned. God preached the gospel to Adam because it was the answer to his problem of sin and it remains the answer to sinful man today. Let us not change the gospel or be ashamed of it – let us instead take every advantage that technology has given us to proclaim the glorious gospel to every sinner on earth!

4. Hold on to Each Other in Christ

The world is filled with unbelievers and scoffers, evil men and women who are Satan's willing servants. Because of this Christians need each other!

Let's not hurt each other, let's forgive and be kind to those for whom Christ died, and within whom the Holy Spirit resides. Let's make the loving of each other our main priority in the church. This will be pleasing to the Lord Jesus and promote the best witness of our faith in Him.

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The goal of this mission work is to spread the gospel to the greatest number of people using the latest technology available. For the first time in history, it is becoming possible to preach the gospel to the entire world at once. BibleTalk.tv is an effort to preach the gospel to all nations every day until Jesus returns.

The Choctaw Church of Christ in Oklahoma City is the sponsoring congregation for this work and provides the oversight for the BibleTalk ministry team. If you would like information on how you can support this ministry, please go to the link provided below.

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