Colossians - Commentaries by Stanley Bruce Anstey

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians: The Mystery-Christ in You, the Hope of Glory, Colossians 2:4-19: Hindrances to Carrying Out the Truth of the Mystery

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(Chapter 2:4-19)

Having spoken of the importance of understanding the Mystery, as well as the need for walking together in love with our brethren, whereby the truth of the Mystery is put into practice, Paul now warns of the dangers of being distracted from this objective. In this second chapter, he exposes the different wiles that the devil uses to draw the saints away from the simplicity that is in Christ. He also shows that Christ is the answer to all that the enemy would introduce to ensnare the saints.

Four Spiritual Dangers

Paul focuses on four main spiritual dangers that will move a person away from the truth of the Mystery—if he is not careful. These are:

- Enticing words of eloquence (vss. 4-7).
- Philosophical rationalism (vss. 8-15).
- Jewish ritualism (vss. 16-17).
- Oriental mysticism (vss. 18-19).

Even though these errors vary and are different in nature, they refer to the same class of teachers who were corrupting the saints with their spurious doctrines. H. Smith said, “It will be noticed that none of these evils are the gross things of the world, but rather things that would appeal to the intellect and religious side of man’s nature, and therefore are things that are a special snare to the Christian” (The Epistle to the Colossians, p. 30). This array of spiritual snares serves to remind us that we mustn’t underestimate the power and deception of the devil. Again, using the typology in Israel’s conquest of Canaan, if chapter 1:15-22 gives a view of the Captain of the Lord’s host, and chapter 2:2-3 answers to the inheritance of Canaan, chapter 2:4-19, which we are now about to look at, would give us a view of the enemies in the land. The Canaanites answer to the various kinds of spiritual wickedness that the believer meets with “in the heavenlies” (the realm of spiritual activity – Eph. 6:12).

Looking over these four things we see that the whole intent of the enemy of our souls could be summed up in the phrase—“And not after Christ” (vs. 8). Truly, the devil’s ABC’s are: “Anything But Christ.” It is significant that Paul begins each of these four warnings with: “Lest any man....” or, “Let no man....” (vss. 4, 8, 16, 18). This shows that the devil not only uses his angels and the elements of the world, but also men to do his evil work. It is also significant that while he uses these agents, he cannot use anything that is “according to Christ;” those things do not fit his evil program (vs. 8).

Each of these four things that the enemy would introduce through cunning men, is followed by an appropriate antidote, which if heeded, would preserve the saints from those seductions. As mentioned already, the answer for all of these intrusions is knowing what we have in Christ and walking in it. It is our great safeguard.

(First) Enticing Words of Eloquence

(Vss. 4-7)

The first thing that marked these false teachers was a great show of human eloquence. Paul says, “And this I say, lest any man should beguile [delude] you with enticing words.” Eloquence is the art of using language to stir the emotions. The Greeks were particularly impressed with it (Acts 12:21-22). Eloquence in itself is not necessarily bad (Acts 18:24). The danger is in using it with an agenda to further one’s erroneous views and heretical purposes of drawing people after oneself. Paul warned the Romans of this very danger, stating that by “good words and fair speeches” men with ulterior motives will “deceive the hearts of the simple [unsuspecting]” (Rom. 16:18). Unestablished souls are often swayed by high-sounding phraseology that appears spiritual, thinking that eloquence is spirituality. A case in point is the present day cults in the Christian profession. Their evil doctrines are usually wrapped in a beautiful exterior of fair words. Those who teach this kind of “systematized error” (Eph. 4:14) will often have an attractive demeanor, and this can be deceiving as well. “Hymenaeus (“wedding song”) and “Philteus” (“beloved”) are examples of this (2 Tim. 2:17). The meaning of their names suggests that these men had sweet and lovely characters—but in reality, they were overthrowing the faith of the saints with their erroneous doctrines! H. E. Hayhoe appropriately said, “Beware of nice men; love faithful men.”

Vs. 5—Paul rejoiced to know that the Colossians were continuing in the truth. He said that this was evident by “beholding” their “order” and the “firmness” of their “faith in Christ.” This fact proves that the Colossians had not swallowed the spurious doctrines that were being put forth. Nevertheless, they were in danger of it, and that was a concern to Paul.

The Remedy

Vss. 6-7—As mentioned, with each snare that the enemy would put in the path to trip up the believer, Paul gives an appropriate antidote that would meet that particular seduction. His remedy for the persuasive speech of those who would draw them away after strange doctrines was: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him, and stablished [assured] in the faith, as ye

have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving." That is, they were to stay with the things that they knew and had been "taught" and to "walk" in them. "As" they had begun, so they were to continue. Instead of looking around for new truth, they were to be "rooted and built up" in the truth they had received, and to be "assured" of it. "Rooted" is the past tense, but "built up" is present tense. Thus, Paul would have them to be built up in what they had been given. They were not to let anyone draw them away from it, regardless of how persuasive their speech was. (Compare Galatians 1:8-9.) They needed to understand that they had been given all the treasures of truth in the Mystery; there was no higher truth to give. It is enough to fill and satisfy our hearts and minds, and to cause in us much "thanksgiving."

(Second) Philosophical Rationalism

(Vss. 8-15)

The second dangerous thing that marked these false teachers was philosophical rationalism. That is, the use of human reasoning in divine things. Philosophy means, "the love of knowledge." It is not wrong to want knowledge; Paul prayed for the saints to that end in chapter 1:9. The danger is to seek it apart from the revelations that God has given through the apostles and prophets of the New Testament. This is exactly what these false teachers were doing. They attempted to add philosophy to the gospel, but it was just the working of the human mind in the things of God. As a result, they erred from the truth with much bad doctrine. Since that was the case, Paul warned the Colossians: "Beware lest any man spoil you [lead you away] through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition [teaching] of men, after the rudiments [elements] of the world, and not after Christ." As Paul points out here, the sad effect of this teaching was that it ultimately leads believers away from Christ.

Paul exposes this philosophic line of teaching as being "vain deceit" because it ministered to the pride in man. Since it emanates from the mind of men, all such human reasoning never takes into account the end of man in the flesh under God's judgment at the cross, as does the gospel that Paul preached (Rom. 6:6; 8:3). This human line of teaching makes something of man in the flesh. It sees some good in man and seeks to cultivate it, and thus, ministers deceitfully to the vanity of man. This is why it is called vain deceit.

That Christians would seek knowledge in the matters of life from the unconverted Greek philosophers shows clearly that they don't understand that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Simply put: those worldly philosophers cannot give the Christian the truth because they don't have it! The very best that they can offer is but mere human reason. They may have great pretentions to having higher spiritual knowledge, but in reality Paul says that it is just the "rudiments [elements] of the world." "The Greeks seek after wisdom" (1 Cor. 1:22), but it is "the wisdom of this world" (1 Cor. 2:6). Moreover, much of their worldly wisdom is filled with uncertainty. Each new generation of philosophers usually contradicts the previous generation so that the seeker of knowledge is left with no real hope on which to rest his soul. If we go in for philosophy and the wisdom of men, we will soon be filled with that sort of thing and Christ will be left outside.

Vss. 9-10—Contrariwise, in Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Paul's point in stating this is to show that in Christ on high there is everything that we could ever need or want. If we want "wisdom," we have it in Him (1 Cor. 1:30) and in the Mystery (Col. 2:3). There is, therefore, no need to turn to worldly philosophers for illumination. Thus, Paul says that believers are "complete in Him." As to our position before God and our portion in Christ, there is simply nothing that can be added to them. (Chapter 1:19 refers to the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in Christ as a Man on earth during His life and ministry, whereas here in chapter 2:9, it refers to Him as a glorified Man on high.)

Further to this, if anyone were to think that angelic beings were really something special and were objects to be admired (as these teachers were advocating), they needed to understand that Christ is the Creator of all those beings (Psa. 104:4), and as such, He is "the Head of all principality and power [authority]." This fact proves that He is incomparably superior to them. In reality, the position of those angelic creatures before God is actually inferior to that of Christians! As sons of God in the new creation order, we are in a position that is far higher than angels. Being seated together "in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," we are "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion" (Eph. 1:21; 2:6). They are actually our servants, ordered by God to help us in various situations in life (Heb. 1:14). We are not said to be complete in these beings; our completeness is in Christ. Moreover, as members of Christ's body we have a special union with Him as the Head, through the indwelling Holy Spirit—but these creatures don't have that union. (Note: verse 10 refers to elect angels in their different capacities, whereas verse 15 refers to different ranks of fallen angels.)

The Remedy

Vss. 11-15—The remedy for all such human reason and speculation in the things of God is to understand the significance of the death and resurrection of Christ. Paul brings this in here, saying, "In whom also ye have been circumcised with circumcision not done by hand, in the putting off of the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; buried with Him in baptism, in which ye have been also raised with Him through faith of the working of God who raised Him from among the dead." Since these philosophical ideas are erroneous and derogatory to Christ's Person and work, it is clear that they emanate from man in the flesh—that is, that whole order of life after the fallen sin-nature in man. This being the case, Paul states that in Christ's death (which he refers to as "the circumcision of Christ"), God has condemned man in the flesh (which he calls "the body of the flesh"), and as such, He has set it aside as worthless. Hence, everything to do with man in the flesh—from his filthiest sins to his philosophical reasonings of so-called higher knowledge—has been judged by God in the death of Christ. Thus, His death has marked the judicial end of man in the flesh before God (Rom. 6:6; 8:3). The KJV has added the words "of the sins" in verse 11, but without sufficient manuscript authority, and therefore, shouldn't be in the text. The subject in the verse is not the deeds of the flesh, but the flesh as an evil system in fallen man that controls his movements. The point here is that the Lord's death has not only taken care of the fruit of the fallen sin-nature (the believer's sins), but it has also condemned the very root which bore those sins and has put it all away before God.

Moreover, Christians, through their identification with Christ's death, have been "circumcised with the circumcision made without hands," and thus, before God they have been severed judicially from every connection they once had with the flesh. The believer is also viewed as being "buried" with Christ, as demonstrated in the ordinance of "baptism." Moreover, the believer is also seen as "risen with Him." Thus we are identified with a whole new order of life in Christ.

As noted above, Paul uses the words "circumcision" and "body" in a symbolical sense in this passage. Regarding his use of the word "body" in this passage, it describes the whole system of life after the flesh. Similarly, we might say, "The body of scientific knowledge," or "the body of

medical knowledge," etc. J. A. Trench explained it as: "'The body of sin'—that is, its whole system and force, as we say, the body of a river....It is the whole system and totality of it" (Truth for Believers, vol. 2, pp. 77, 83). J. N. Darby said, "He [Paul] takes the totality and system of sin in man as a body which is nullified by death" (Synopsis of the Books of the Bible on Romans 6). E. Dennett said something similar: "It may be well to say that 'the body of sin' is the totality of sin in its dominating energy" (The Christian Friend, vol. 23, p. 182). Thus, Paul is not speaking of the human body here.

The practical conclusion to Christ's death and resurrection, as applied to believers, is that Christians (characteristically) are done with the flesh. Their "baptism" signifies this (vs. 12). They, therefore, reject everything to do with the flesh and now live unto God as entirely disconnected from that old order of life. Applying this to the situation which the Colossians were facing meant that they were to reject the whole scheme of rationalistic teaching that was being put forth by the false teachers because it was of the flesh—and everything having to do with the flesh must go out of the believer's life.

Vss. 13-15—Paul passes on to what has been accomplished in us and for us through Christ's death and resurrection. He says, "And you, being dead in offences and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has quickened together with Him, having forgiven us all the offences; having effaced [blotted out] the handwriting in ordinances which stood out against us, which was contrary to us, He has taken it also out of the way, nailing it to the cross; having spoiled principalities and authorities, He made a show of them publicly, leading them in triumph by it." As mentioned, the believer has been "quickened together" with Christ in a new sphere of life wherein he lives unto God. (See also Ephesians 2:5.) Verse 13a refers to believing Gentiles. This is indicated by the words "you" and "your," for the Colossians were a company of converted Gentiles; whereas, verse 14 refers to believing Jews. This is indicated by the word "us." Paul was speaking to his fellow countrymen, and thus he includes himself. (This is not uncommon in Paul's writings (Compare Ephesians 1:12-13; 2:1-3, 17, etc.).

Paul focuses on three particular things that have resulted from the death and resurrection of Christ:

believers

"us"

legal ordinances

"us"

"handwriting"

"All the words which the Lord hath said will we do"

"stood out against"

However, in Christ's finished work on the cross, He has not only borne the curse of the broken Law (Isa. 53:8b; Gal. 3:13; Psa. 88), but His death annulled the legal obligations of the Law which Israel had put themselves under. This does not mean that the Law has been removed; it still has its application to Israel nationally and to unbelieving sinners (1 Tim. 1:8-10). The Law is not dead and gone; it's the believer who is dead and gone—through his identification with Christ's death (Rom. 6:2-8). The believer on the Lord Jesus Christ is "dead to the Law" (Rom. 7:4-6), and the Law has no application to a dead man (Rom. 7:1). Hence, the whole legal system has been annulled for each Jew who believes in Christ. Christ's death "took it (the obligation, not the Law) out of the way." Paul, being a Jewish believer, uses the word "us" here to indicate what he and his fellow believing countrymen have been delivered from. He adds, "Nailing it to the cross." This refers to the charge that stood out against the Jews for failing to keep the Law. It was cancelled and the statement of that fact was made a public declaration. It is an allusion to the Roman custom of nailing a statement of a criminal's crime to the cross on which he died to indicate to all the nature of that person's offence. (See John 19:19-22.)

spiritual foes

"armour of God"

(Third) Jewish Ritualism

(Vss. 16-17)

The third danger that threatened the spiritual progress of the Colossians is that of Jewish ritualism. Paul says, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday [feast], or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days; which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." These verses indicate that these false teachers were probably from a Jewish background, but had become heterodox in their doctrines. Since Jewish Christians have been removed from the legal obligations wherewith they were once bound through being "dead with Christ" (Rom. 6:8; 7:4), they were not to let anyone put them back under those legal ordinances. The death of Christ has ended all connections with that legal system for them. Paul uses the word "judge" here in connection with those who would find fault with saints who understood their liberty in Christ. Thus, the Colossians were not to let the criticisms of those who were not clear of Judaism to dissuade them (Gal. 5:1).

In mentioning "meat," or "drink," a "holyday [feast]," a "new moon," and "sabbath days," Paul was indicating that this deliverance was not merely from the Law of Ten Commandments, but also from the ceremonial laws and statutes and rituals that make up Judaism as a system. Those things were "a shadow of things to come" in Christ. In Old Testament times, the light of God was shining upon Him, and all those forms and ceremonies in the Levitical order of approach to God were but shadows cast by Him. But now, since Christ has come, those types and shadows have given way to the actual substance. Paul indicates this by adding, "But the body is of Christ." In stating this, he is not referring to the physical body of Christ, nor is he referring to the mystical body of Christ, of which believers are members. Rather, he is using the word "body" to indicate that Christ is the substance that cast those shadows. F. B. Hole said, "But the body—that is, the substance—is of Christ" (Paul's Epistles, vol. 2, p. 103).

Incidentally, the word "body" is used in six different ways in this epistle:

- For the mystical body of Christ (chap. 1:18, 24; 2:19; 3:15).
- For the Lord's physical body (chap. 1:22).
- For the Lord's glorified body (chap. 2:10).
- For the whole system of the flesh as an entity that God has judged (chap. 2:11).
- For the substance of Christ in Old Testament times casting a shadow of the good things that were to come (chap. 2:17).
- For the bodies of the saints (chap. 2:23).

Since those types and shadows have given way to the actual substance in Christ, the Judaic system with its forms and rituals has served its purpose in pointing forward to Christ. To teach that Christians are to approach God through outward forms and rituals as in Judaism is to deny the truth that has come to light in Christ's death and resurrection. This is something that Christians have misunderstood for centuries. Instead of seeing the things in Judaism as being fulfilled in Christ, and not necessary in Christian worship, most Christian groups have established their worship along Judaic lines and have mixed the principles and practices of Judaism with that in Christianity. The result is a hybrid of both, which is something that God never intended for Christian worship.

The churches in Christendom have missed the plain teaching of Scripture that shows that the tabernacle is a figure of the true sanctuary into which Christians now have access by the Spirit (Heb. 9:8-9, 23-24). Instead, they have used the Old Testament tabernacle and temple as a pattern for their churches. They have borrowed many things in a literal sense from the Judaic order for their places of worship and religious services. This can be seen in the use of literal temples and cathedrals for places of worship, having a special caste of men who officiate on behalf of the congregation (i.e. the clergy), the use of musical instruments to aid worship, the use of a choir, the special robes on the "Ministers" and choir members, the practice of tithing, the observance of holy days and religious festivals, etc. It is true that many of these Judaic things have been altered somewhat to fit into a Christian context, but they still have the trappings of Judaism. Since this mixture of Jewish and Christian principles and practices has permeated the Christian testimony and has been around for so long, it has become accepted by the masses as God's ideal. It is defended and upheld tenaciously by earnest (but mistaken) Christians. However, mixing these two distinct orders has destroyed the distinctness of each, and what has resulted from the mixture is neither Jewish nor Christian.

The Remedy

Paul's remedy in verses 16-17 was that the Colossians were not to let anyone convince them that they needed to add the Judaic order of approach to God to their Christian worship. Regardless of what form Judaism may be packaged in—whether it is full-blown Judaism in the synagogues or the quasi-Judaic mixture found in the churches of Christendom—it has no place in Christianity. Clinging to that outward order of approach to God has a tendency to "dull" the Christian's spiritual sensitivities and hinders his growth and progress. The net result is that the believer remains a "babe." This was the case with those to whom the epistle to the Hebrews was written (Heb. 5:11-14).

(Fourth) Oriental Mysticism

(Vss. 18-19)

The fourth thing that marked these false teachers was mysticism. We define mysticism in this context as teaching that supposedly has hidden and secret meanings, which when understood, leads a person (supposedly) to higher knowledge and spirituality. This line of things was aimed at intriguing the saints with fanciful and novel ideas which had the appearance of being something really spiritual. But in effect, it caused the saints to look away from Christ for their spiritual needs and hindered their spiritual progress. Paul, therefore, warned the Colossians: "Let no man beguile [fraudulently deprive] you of your reward in a voluntary [doing his own will in] humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God." What Paul was particularly addressing in these verses was the pretention of having higher spiritual knowledge above what the apostles had delivered to the saints. Since all of the truth had already been revealed in the disclosure of the Mystery (vs. 3), the claims of these teachers were bogus.

To help the Colossians to see these teachers for what they really were, Paul exposed the manner in which they worked to gain peoples' ears. They used a cloak of "humility" which gave the impression that they were true servants of God. Humility is a Christian virtue that should mark all believers. The enemy knows this and has his workers make a fair show of it—but with these men it was really just a sham. Sad to say, mock humility works like a charm among Christians generally. When the ideas of false teachers are presented with high-sounding spiritual phraseology, and coupled with what seems to be a life of holiness and humility, unestablished believers are often taken in by it.

The false humility of these mystics involved the veneration of "angels." But by engaging in this practice, they exposed themselves. Since these unfallen creatures do not sin, and do only the will of God, God's mind in this matter is known in their refusing worship (Rev. 22:8-9). Thus, these mystics were doing something that God clearly does not approve of. They were intruding (prying) into unseen things which they knew nothing about, and their ideas were mere imagination and speculation. Furthermore, their voluntary humility and worshipping of angels is a complete denial of the new creation order that has resulted from the death and resurrection of Christ. As mentioned earlier, there is now a new race of men under His Headship that is in a position that is superior to angels. Hence, in Christianity, men are no longer the inferior beings. It is, therefore, completely out of order for Christians to be doing obeisance to those inferior creatures. If angels are inferior to Christians, why would Christians worship them?

Without question the characteristic mark of mystical teaching is the vague and cloudy expressions with which the ideas are presented. Those who are impressed with such teaching will usually dismiss its vagueness as being deep truth. But Paul said that their novel ideas really came from their "fleshly mind" being "puffed up." Thus, behind their show of humility was spiritual pride! As stated in the Introduction (p. 8), a person will be drawn to this line of things because he can distinguish himself as having knowledge in divine things that others do not have. He can intrigue his friends with his high-sounding thoughts, and this ministers to his pride.

Vs. 19—Sad to say, the result of this façade of pseudo-spirituality is that the saints become distracted with novelties and cease "holding fast the Head." That is, they cease to look to Christ their Head for direction, guidance, and spiritual nourishment, and become occupied with things

that, in effect, draw them away from Him. All true direction and spiritual sustenance comes from Christ, and we are to look to Him for it, but we receive it through the “joints and bands” of the body, which are the members whom He uses to minister the truth to us (Eph. 4:16). Spiritual food does not come from the members of the body, but from the Lord through the members of the body. In supplying our spiritual needs in this way, the members are of necessity interdependent upon one another. The result of this ministry is that the saints are “knit together” practically in love and they are edified together “with the increase of God.” The object of all ministry is that there would be an increase in the saints that is according to God. We do not want an increase in doctrine and knowledge merely, important as that is, but an increase that is of God. This is true spiritual development.

The Remedy

Paul’s simple and straightforward word to the Colossians was not to allow anyone to persuade them in this mystical direction, because it would “deprive” them of their “reward” for faithfully holding fast the truth. If the Colossians were deceived by this mystical line of teaching, and went in for it, their spiritual development would be hindered. Paul’s conclusion, therefore, was that since it was not of God and it would only hinder them, they were to “let no man” persuade them to take up with that line of things. They had all they needed in holding fast the Head.

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians: The Mystery-Christ in You, the Hope of Glory, Colossians 3:1-11: The Believer's Identification With the Death and Resurrection of Christ

Chapter 2:20–3:11

We now come to the practical part of the epistle wherein are the exhortations based on the truth that, as believers, we are dead and risen with Christ. The practical application of this great truth not only delivers believers from the four dangers mentioned in chapter 2, but it also leads to the setting forth of Christ characteristically in the saints, which answers to the Colossian aspect of the Mystery—“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (chap. 1:27).

Using again the typology in Israel’s journey to Canaan, the truth that is before us in this passage answers to Israel’s crossing of the Jordan river (Josh. 3-4). The Jordan River is a type of Christ’s death. Israel’s entrance into the riverbed answers to the believer’s death with Christ and Israel’s exit from the riverbed into the land of Canaan answers to the believer being risen with Christ. At that time, the children of Israel drew 12 stones out of the riverbed and placed them on Canaan’s shore for a memorial. This typifies the believer being risen, and seated in Christ, in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6).

The Practical Effect of Being Dead With Christ

Chap. 2:20-23—Paul speaks first of the practical ramifications of the believer being dead with Christ. He says, “If (since) ye have died with Christ from the elements of the world, why as if alive in the world do ye subject yourselves to ordinances?” Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch (things which are all for destruction in the using of them): according to the injunctions and teachings of men (which have indeed an appearance of wisdom in voluntary worship, and humility, and harsh treatment of the body, not in a certain honour), to the satisfaction of the flesh.” Paul’s point here is that since the saints have “died with Christ” to “the elements of the world,” why would they subject themselves to various ordinances of worldly religion that have been either invented by men or borrowed from Judaism? The believer is not only dead to the grosser things of the flesh, but also to worldly religion. Christians, generally, have not understood this and have mistakenly incorporated many carnal ordinances and rituals into their church services. W. Kelly said, “The great error of Christendom has always been a going back to ordinances” (Lectures on Colossians, p. 136). (Biblical Christianity has only two ordinances: baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Baptism is performed once in a person’s lifetime and the breaking of bread at the Lord’s Supper is to be done weekly – Acts 20:7.)

The fact that these false teachers had encouraged the saints to engage in carnal ordinances of earthly religion proved that they were promoting something that was not a part of real Biblical Christianity. To help the Colossians to see this more clearly, Paul exposed the folly of seeking spiritual attainment through carnal ordinances and ascetic practices (punishing the body in an attempt to keep it from obeying the lusts of the flesh). He gives an example of the rules and regulations that accompany many of these ordinances—“Touch not, taste not, handle not.” These are human injunctions, which he calls “the commandments and doctrines of men,” by which misguided religious people vainly seek to control the flesh and to attain a higher spiritual life. Religion made up of trusting in ordinances and outward rituals may appeal to a man “living in the world,” but it is totally inconsistent with the believer who accepts the truth that he has died with Christ. Identification with Christ’s death has severed him from all that. In a parenthesis, Paul explains that those things were not spiritual at all, but carnal, and would “perish with the using” of them (vs. 22a).

As mentioned already, asceticism denies the body certain things (food, sleep, natural comforts, etc.) in order to purify the human spirit and to control lust, but in reality it only gratifies the flesh with the feeling of having acted in what it thinks is praiseworthy. The proud fallen nature gains a measure of satisfaction in trying to keep the body down; a person can be proud of what he has suffered. In another parenthesis, Paul explains this, stating that these things have “a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body” (vs. 23). After closing the parenthesis, he says that all such practice is only “to the satisfying of the flesh.” In spite of this air of pseudo-spirituality, thousands of monks have proved that these things do not control the indulgences of the flesh. They have starved their bodies, beaten their bodies, and made many earnest promises to God, etc., but no amount of will-power and physical suffering has changed the carnal mind of the flesh. The Lord taught this to Nicodemus. He said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6). That is, the flesh doesn’t change in man regardless of how many appliances are used to alter its propensities. After all such attempts to reform the flesh have been made it remains the same old flesh that it has always been.

In chapter 2:20-23, Paul does not describe a man who is striving to become dead. This is something that is not taught in Scripture, but sadly striven for by many well-meaning believers. They will say, “We have to die to ourselves so that Christ can live in us.” The truth is that the Christian is “dead with Christ” (vs. 20). He is also “dead to sin” (Rom. 6:2) and “dead to the Law” (Rom. 7:4). This is all a result of his identification with Christ’s death. Therefore, what is needed is not an effort to attain one’s death with Christ through ascetic practices, but to

have the Spirit's power to act on the fact that we have died with Him. This is taken up in detail in Romans 6-8.

The Practical Effect of Being Risen With Christ

Chapter 3:1-4—The counterpart to the believer's identification with Christ's death is the believer's identification with Christ's resurrection. Paul takes this up next. In chapter 2, he has shown that the practical effect of our death with Christ disconnects us from man's world, man's wisdom, and man's religion. He now shows that the practical effect of our identification with Christ's resurrection is to associate us with God's world above and with all that is there. Hence, chapter 2:20-23 presents the negative side of this great truth and chapter 3:1-4 gives the positive side. The great difference between the two is that on the positive side we have an Object before us—Christ.

Paul says, "If (since) ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." Since it's true that we are identified with Christ in His resurrection, we are to seek after those things which are in Christ on high. It may be asked, "What exactly are 'those things which are above?'" They are our heavenly blessings and privileges that have been secured for us through Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. In Christ risen, we have been introduced into a whole new sphere of things which has come into existence through His being glorified and seated at the right hand of God. These things did not exist while Christ was on earth.

F. B. Hole explained what setting our "mind on things that are above" means. He said, "We set our minds upon things above, not by reposing in arm-chairs and indulging in dreamy and mystical imaginings as to things that may be in heaven, but rather by setting our minds supremely upon Christ and seeking in all things the furtherance of Heaven's interests. The British ambassador in Paris sets his mind on British things by seeking British interests in French circumstances, and not by continually sitting down to try and recall to his memory what British scenery is like" (Paul's Epistles, vol. 2, pp. 105-106). Thus, the Christian whose mind is set on heavenly things is busy on earth pursuing the heavenly interests of Christ. These things would be: spreading the gospel, learning and teaching the truth, shepherding God's people, etc. The person who is engaged in such has set his mind on things above, because those interests are centered in Christ above and have their ultimate end in Christ above.

It's true that we have to provide for our temporal needs through secular employment, but we don't have to set our affection on those earthly responsibilities. The danger for us is in getting absorbed with earthly things: Hence Paul's admonition to set our minds on things above, and "not on things on the earth." He adds, "For ye are dead." In saying this, Paul was not teaching that the Christian is dead to nature—that is, to the natural things of this creation. The believer is dead to sin and to the world, but when it comes to natural things, God "giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Hence, it is fleshly and worldly things on earth that the believer is dead to, not natural things.

Paul then tells the Colossians that they shouldn't expect the world to understand their pursuit of heavenly things, because the Christian's life is "hid with Christ in God" (vs. 3). From whom is this life hidden? It is hidden from the men of the world. The men of this world do not understand Christians, as far as our inner springs and motives are concerned. They cannot figure out why we live the way we do, and for the things we live for—it makes no sense to them. The unbelieving man of the world lives and moves and has all his thoughts on the temporal things of this earth; he thinks that everyone should do as he does. When he sees a Christian "marching to the beat of a different drum," it is all an enigma to him.

Having a hidden life with Christ in the sense in which Paul speaks here does not mean that we hide ourselves from the world literally. To sequester ourselves in our dwelling places and live a secluded, monk-like life would be counterproductive to our Christian testimony. On the contrary, God's people are to be "the light of the world" and as "a city upon a hill" that "cannot be hid," and thus they should be a bright and shining testimony before the world (Matt. 5:14). The main thrust of this Colossian epistle is to have the saints move together on earth in such a way that there would be a display before the world of the truth of the Mystery, which is: "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (chap. 1:27).

Paul concludes by saying, "When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (vs. 4). He brings this in to show that there is a day approaching when Christ and the Church will be manifested before the whole world (2 Thess. 1:10), and at that time it will be revealed before all what faith has led believers to do in this day. The revelation of that day will explain what we have been living for in this day (John 17:23). Correspondingly, Paul had only two days before him in his life and service: "this day" (Acts 20:26) and "that day" (2 Tim. 1:12, 18; 4:8). He lived his life in this present day of grace in view of that coming day of manifestation—and so should we.

A Character Change

Vss. 5-17—Being introduced into the life above with Christ necessitates that our old life which we once lived in our pre-conversion days, must go. The reason is simple: the two cannot go on together in a Christian's life. Hence, what follows in this 3rd chapter is the exercise of divesting the character of the old life and putting on the character of the new, so that the divine objective of having a reproduction of Christ displayed in the saints would be achieved (chap. 1:27).

The Old Man

Hence, in this next series of verses, Paul makes a practical application concerning this character change based on the "old man" (vs. 9) and the "new man" (vs. 10). This is a subject that is not well understood. These two terms do not refer to the flesh and the new nature, as is commonly thought, but rather are abstract expressions that denote the corrupt state of the fallen race of Adam and the new moral order in the new creation race under Christ. The old man does not refer to Adam personally, but to what is characteristic of the fallen race of which he is the head. It is the embodiment of every ugly and sinful feature that marks that race. To see the old man properly we must look at the race as a whole, for it is unlikely that any one person would be marked by all of the features that characterize that corrupt state. For instance, one person may be characterized by being angry and deceitful, but he may not be immoral. Another person may not be known for losing his temper, nor for being deceitful, but he is terribly immoral. However, taking the race as a whole, we see a personification of all the ugly features that compose the old man.

This corrupt state has been condemned by God at the cross (Rom. 6:6; 8:3) and is something that is put off by the believer when he gets saved. He may not be conscious of doing so at the time, but by taking the Christian stand, the believer by his profession dissociates himself from that corrupt state, for it is not part of what constitutes a Christian. Hence, as Christians, we are no longer associated with that old corrupt state. This putting off is stated in the aorist tense in the Greek, which refers to having done it once for all time. The KJV mistakenly renders

Ephesians 4:22 as an exhortation, making the putting off of the old man something that we are to do in our lives on a daily basis. But the passage should read: “Having put off according to the former conversation, the old man ... .” This shows that the putting off of the old man is a thing that has been done in a believer’s life and the exhortations to him that follow in the passage are based on that fact.

As mentioned, the "old man" is often confused with the old nature (the flesh). This is a widespread misunderstanding among Christians. They will say things such as: “The old man in us desires things that are sinful.” Or, “Our old man wants to do this or that evil thing ... ” These statements are confusing the old man with the flesh. Scripture does not use the term in that way. J. N. Darby remarked, “The old man is being habitually used for the flesh incorrectly” (Food for the Flock, vol. 2, p. 286). One difference is that the old man is never said to be in us, while the flesh most certainly is. F. G. Patterson said, “Nor do I find that Scripture will allow us to say that we have the old man in us—while it teaches most fully that we have the flesh in us” (A Chosen Vessel, p. 51). Hence, it is not accurate to speak of the old man as being a thing living in us with appetites, desires, and emotions, as does the flesh. H. C. B. G. said, “I know what a Christian means who loses his temper, and says it is ‘the old man, yet the expression is wrong: If he said it was ‘the flesh,’ he would have been more correct” (Food for the Flock, vol. 2, p. 287). Moreover, if the old man were the flesh, then Ephesians 4:22-23 (in the KJV) would be telling us that we need to put off the flesh! This is something that no Christian can do while living in this world. It won’t happen until we die, or when the Lord comes.

Hence, there are no exhortations in Scripture to put off the old man. There are, however, exhortations to put off the things that characterize the old man. Accordingly, Paul says, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection [vile passions], evil concupiscence [evil lust], and covetousness, which is idolatry” (vs. 5). These grosser manifestations of the flesh were common in the heathen world, but they have no place in Christian life. The fact that there is an exhortation to believers of this sort shows that when a person is converted his old sin-nature is not eradicated.

Christians are not called to “mortify” their bodies, but rather to mortify “the deeds” of the flesh which are manifested in their bodies (Rom. 8:13). In using the word “mortify,” we see the need of dealing with these sins unsparingly. F. B. Hole said, “Put to death is a strong and forcible expression. Our tendency is to parley with these things, and sometimes even play with them and make provision for them. Our safety, however, lies in action of a ruthless kind. Sword in hand, so to speak, we are to meet them without any idea of giving quarter. We should rather, meet them after the fashion of Samuel who hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord” (Paul’s Epistles, vol. 2, p. 106). Using again the typical teaching in Israel’s journey to Canaan, what is depicted here in Colossians 3 answers to Gilgal—the place where Israel cut off their flesh by circumcision (Josh. 5). This typifies the believer’s exercise of cutting off the manifestations of the flesh through self-judgment.

Note also, Paul was not speaking of mortifying the “members” of our bodies literally—the dismembering of our hands, feet, etc. He was using the word in a figurative way to describe the exercise of judging the flesh and keeping it in the place of death so that those corrupt things would not manifest themselves in our members. Mortifying our members is not done by making resolutions, fasting, depriving the body of natural comforts, etc. We are never told to crucify ourselves or to fight the flesh to keep it in line—these things lead to defeat. We are to put these things to death in their very conception (James 1:15).

Among these horrific moral disorders, Paul mentions “covetousness, which is idolatry.” Covetousness is allowing the desire for something to have an undue place in our hearts that displaces God, and anything that displaces God in our affections is an idol.

Vss. 6-7—Men think that they can commit these sins and escape the judgment of God, but Paul says that “the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience” who take pleasure in these sins. This judgment is governmental (as they live in this world) and eternal (when they pass out of this world.)

Vss. 8-9—But there are other things, besides those mentioned in verse 5, that are of the old man which also must be put off. Paul says, “But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth, Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.” Again, “put off” is stated in the aorist tense in the Greek. We once lived wrapped up in these things as a garment clad about us. When men looked at us, that is what they saw—a “garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 23). Upon being saved, this is not to be seen any more. Hence, the old garment must be divested, and that is the essence of Paul’s exhortation here. Let us say again, the exercise is not to put off the old man—that has been done—but to put off the sinful character of the old man.

The New Man

Vss. 10-15—Having stated the negative side of things, Paul goes on to give the positive side in connection with the new man. He says, “Having put on the new [man], renewed into full knowledge according to the image of Him that has created him; wherein there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman; but Christ is everything, and in all.” As with the putting off of the old man, the putting on of the new man is a thing that was done when a person took the Christian stand. The practical exhortations that follow in verses 12-15 are based on this fact.

The “new man,” like the old man, is an abstract term. It denotes the moral perfection in the new creation race under Christ. While the old man is characterized by being “corrupt” and “deceitful,” the new man is characterized by “righteousness” and “holiness” (Eph. 4:22-24). The new man first came into view “in Jesus” (Eph. 4:21). That is, men first saw this moral perfection when the Lord Jesus walked here in this world. (“Jesus” is His Manhood name.) Just as the old man is not Adam personally, the new man is not Christ personally. G. Davison said, "The new man is not Christ personally, but it is Christ characteristically" (Precious Things, vol. 3, p. 260). As mentioned earlier, the new man is often confused with the new life and nature in the believer. People will mistakenly say, "The new man in us needs to feed on Christ." Or, "Our new man needs an Object—Christ." It would be more accurate to say that the new life in us needs to feed on Christ.

Vs. 11—Paul mentions four things that mark the old creation order that are not a part of the new creation order:

- “Greek nor Jew”—no national distinctions.
- “Circumcision nor uncircumcision”—no religious distinctions.
- “Barbarian, Scythian”—no intellectual distinctions.
- “Bond nor free”—no social distinctions.

Thus, the distinctions of race, religion, culture, and class are all transcended in the believer's new position in Christ, the Head of the new creation. By adding, "Christ is everything, and in all," Paul was indicating that everything in the new order of life in Christ takes its character from Him, for He is the Head of the new race (Rev. 3:14). He is "all and in all."

Christ Seen in the Believer

Vss. 12-15—Passing on to the practical application of this, Paul says, "Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any should have a complaint against any, even as Christ has forgiven you, so also do ye. And to all these add love, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of Christ preside in your hearts, to which also ye have been called in one body, and be thankful." This shows that since we have put on the new man, our life should manifest it practically. Hence, another garment, so to speak, is to be "put on" which manifests the character of the new man. This character change is illustrated typically in Elijah and Elisha. Elijah is a type of Christ who ascended into heaven and Elisha is a type of the believer. The sons of the prophets said of Elisha, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha" (2 Kings 2:15). He had rent his own garment and had put on the garment of Elijah, and in doing so, he had no further use for the old robe, so it was cast aside.

"Holy and beloved" are what the saints are before God. Paul then proceeds to list ten moral characteristics of the new man which is how the saints should be seen before the world. These things are the moral features of Christ. When they are seen in the saints as they move together collectively, the truth of "Christ in you, the hope of glory" will be exhibited before the world (chap. 1:27):

- "Compassion" (Matt. 14:14; Mark 1:41).
- "Kindness" (Eph. 4:32).
- "Lowliness" (Matt. 11:29).
- "Meekness" (Matt. 11:29).
- "Longsuffering" (Heb. 12:3).
- "Forbearance" (Matt. 26:63; John 19:9).
- "Forgiveness" (Luke 23:34).
- "Love" (John 13:1).
- "Peace" (John 14:27).
- "Thankfulness" (Matt. 11:25).

In the midst of all these wonderful traits of Christ, Paul says, "And above all these things put on [add] love, which is the bond of perfectness" (vs. 14). This is the girdle, so to speak, that holds the new garment in place.

We can see why this passage has often been called "the Christian's Changing Room." It has to do with character change. As mentioned, it is the antitype of Israel circumcising themselves at Gilgal. In doing so, the Lord "rolled away the reproach of Egypt" from them (Josh. 5:9). Similarly, when a person first comes to Christ, he bears the marks of his life in the world, of which Egypt is a type. But in going through the exercise in this chapter of putting off that old garment and donning the new, he is no longer marked by the things of his old life. The shame and reproach of it is gone because there has been a character change.

Since the new man is patterned after "the image of Him who created him," being part of the new creation race we are fully able to represent God in this world.

The Spiritual Power to Act on the Truth

Vss. 16-17—Paul has exhorted us to put on the moral characteristics of the new man, but the question is: "How?" He goes on to address this next. Some will say that we are to cultivate Christian graces by making an effort to act like Christ in all situations in life. However, Paul does not indicate that these things are put on by any conscious effort of the believer. Rather, he says, "Let the word of the Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching, and admonishing one another, in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God. And everything, whatever ye may do in word and or in deed, do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father by Him." He speaks of two things here: the need for filling ourselves with the things of Christ through the various means that he states, and being engaged with things in life which can be done for the glory of Christ. When we are occupied with these things, the moral features of Christ will be formed in us by the Spirit quite naturally (2 Cor. 3:18). Similarly, a tree produces fruit as a natural result of the root system drinking in water and nutrients from the soil. It's true that we are to "exercise" ourselves "unto godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7), but this is done by acting on the very principle that Paul touches on here—being filled with the things of Christ. The actual bearing of "fruit" is produced in us by the Spirit as we are occupied with Him and His interests (Gal. 5:22-25).

"The word of the Christ" is truth that pertains specifically to Christ and the Church. This is indicated in the expression "the Christ" which denotes the mystical union of the Head with the members of the body (1 Cor. 12:12-13). "Wisdom, teaching, and admonishing" are specific instructions pertaining to the carrying out of this truth in practice.

"Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs" are three kinds of Christian compositions that express spiritual thoughts and feelings in regard to the Lord, the truth, and the path on which we tread. "Psalms" are not, as some think, the Old Testament Psalms. These are compositions based on Christian experiences which the saints have passed through in walking with the Lord. If they were Old Testament psalms, the Spirit of God would have added the article "the" as in Luke 24:44 and Acts 13:33. The Old Testament Psalms are Jewish compositions expressing Jewish sentiments and experiences; they do not have a Christian setting and do not properly convey Christian knowledge and sentiment. For example, the name of the Father, which is characteristic of Christianity, is not known in them. Hence, eternal life is not in view in the Psalms (John 17:3). Moreover, the knowledge of Christ's finished work is not known by the writers of the Psalms, nor is the believer's acceptance in

Christ before God through the indwelling Spirit. The Old Testament Psalms do not portray the feelings of one who has a purged conscience and knows peace with God. Consequently, they are composed with an element of fear of the judgment of God, even though they have faith. Furthermore, the hope in the Psalms is not heaven, but to live on earth in the kingdom of Israel's Messiah (Psa. 25:13; 37:9, 11, 29, 34, etc.). The worship is also of a Jewish order in an earthly temple; the place of a Christian's worship within the veil is entirely unknown. Moreover, the cry in many of the prayers in the Psalms is for vengeance on their enemies, which is not the attitude of a Christian who blesses those who curse him and prays for those who despitefully use him. Christians can read them and gain an understanding of the circumstances of the Jewish remnant in the coming Tribulation, and also to gather knowledge of God's moral principles from them which are applicable to saints of all ages, and thus gain comfort and hope in their circumstances in life.

"Hymns" are compositions that express worship and address God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ directly. These may take the form of prayers. "Spiritual songs" are compositions that contain spiritual truths in accord with the Christian revelation by which we are instructed and exhorted in the Christian pathway. They may be in the form of "teaching" us some aspect of New Testament truth, or "admonishing" us as to some practical point of Christian living.

When we are immersed in these spiritual things having to do with Christ, the Spirit's power will be evident in our life, and Christ will be seen in us.

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians: The Mystery-Christ in You, the Hope of Glory, Colossians 3:18: Earthly Relationships wherein Christ Is to Be Manifested

(Chapter 3:18–4:6)

In this next section, Paul shows that a manifestation of the character of Christ is to be seen in every aspect of our lives—in the family circle, in our business life, and in reaching out to the lost in the world. In each relationship and in each sphere, the subordinate one is addressed first. The wife is exhorted before the husband, the children before the parents, and the servants before the masters.

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians: The Mystery-Christ in You, the Hope of Glory, Colossians 3:18-21: Christ Expressed in the Family Circle

Chap. 3:18-21—Paul addresses the family circle first. The relationships of husbands and wives, and parents and children have not come into existence through the introduction of Christianity—these relationships go back to man's beginning. But what Christianity has brought to family life is the Lordship of Christ as being the new motivating factor for all right behaviour in these relationships. This is indicated in this next passage by the frequent use of the term—"the Lord." It lifts the whole matter to a higher plane than what was known in Old Testament times.

It is appropriate that Paul would address the family unit first, for it is a prime target of the enemy. The disintegration of family life is one of the things that marks "the last days" in the Christian testimony (2 Tim. 3:1-2). But it need not be so. If we follow the basic principles that Paul touches on in these verses concerning love, submission, and the Lordship of Christ, we will be able to meet and defeat every design of the enemy against the family. He shows that there are certain obligations and responsibilities in domestic life, and when those things are applied, the Christian home will run according to God's order and will have His blessing and protection from the inroads of the enemy.

Wives

(vs. 18)

The Christian wife is to "submit" to her husband, not because her husband insists on it, but because it is "fitting in the Lord." It expresses the place in which the Church has been set in relation to Christ (Eph. 5:22-24). A motive for her submission may well be her love for her husband—and this, of course, is good. But as a Christian woman under the Lordship of Christ, she has a higher motive for her submission—she submits because it is what the Lord would have her to do. Since every Christian wife under normal conditions wants to please the Lord, she should be happy to do it, for it is the will of God.

Note: Paul does not say that the wife is to obey her husband, as the children and servants are told to do. This is because she doesn't have the same relationship with the head of the household as they do. If obedience is demanded of the wife, it would make the relationship in a Christian marriage a legal thing. Submission is different than obedience. It is something that comes from the heart, whereas in obedience a person's heart could be far from the act of obeying. Moreover, if trouble enters the marriage relationship, submission can heal a lot of the difficulties that arise. J. N. Darby said, "Submission is the healing principle of humanity."

Occupying a place of submission in the marriage relationship implies that she is not to take on the role of leadership or to usurp her husband's authority in the home.

Husbands

(vs. 19)

The Christian husband is to "love" his wife. He is to not only initiate love in the relationship, but he is also the one who is to maintain it. When a Christian woman knows that she is loved by her husband, it will go a long way in helping her to submit to him. If a husband is "bitter against" his wife, as Paul warns against here, it will only make the marriage more difficult.

Children

(vs. 20)

The children are to understand that when they “obey” their parents, they are doing something that is “well-pleasing unto the Lord.” Obeying “in all things” means even in things they may not like to do. Again, if the children know and are assured that they are loved by their parents, it will help greatly in their willingness to obey. It is well to note that the word “parents” is in plural. This checks the tendency of children obeying one parent and not the other—perhaps their father, but not so much their mother. Parents being plural also suggests that they are one in their desires for the children and that they are pulling in the same direction.

Fathers

(vs. 21)

The fathers are not to make unreasonable demands on their children whereby they “vex” them and they become “disheartened.” This is said to the fathers but not mothers, because fathers have a greater tendency to do this very thing.

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians: The Mystery-Christ in You, the Hope of Glory, Colossians 3:22-25: Christ Expressed in the Work Place

Chap. 3:22-25—The next sphere of responsibility that Paul addresses is the work place, wherein servants and masters have their respective roles.

Servants [Bondmen]

(Vss. 22-25)

These believers were slaves. Slavery is something that God never intended for man; it was introduced by perverse men for base means. It is interesting and instructive to see that in each of Paul’s epistles which address this subject, he does not encourage the believing slaves to make an effort to extricate themselves from their situation. Rather, he tells them how to behave in their situation so that the testimony of God's grace in the gospel would be furthered. This is because Christianity is not a force to correct social injustices in the world; that is not the object of the gospel. When the Lord came at His first coming, He did not attempt to reform the world by rectifying its social and political wrongs. He will do all that in a coming day when He intervenes in judgment at His Appearing. Then every crooked thing in this world will be set right (Isa. 40:3-5). Accordingly, Christians have not been called to set the world right, but to wait for that coming day. We are to leave the world as it stands, and to announce the gospel that calls men out of it for heaven. There is, therefore, no injunction in the epistles for Christians to set right the wrongs of slavery, or any other social injustice in the world. This is because we are “in” the world but not “of” the world (John 17:14). The Lord said that if His kingdom were "of this world," then His servants would fight in these causes (John 18:36). But since such is not the case, we are to "let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth" (Isa. 45:9).

Paul knew how important it was for Christians to maintain a good testimony before the world. His great concern for Christian bondmen was that they would behave in an upright way so that “the name of God and His doctrine” would not be “blasphemed” (1 Tim. 6:1). These believing slaves were not to run away (as Onesimus did before he was saved – Philemon 15), but to remain in their station of life and glorify God before their masters by treating them with genuine respect, and not “with eyeservice as men pleasers.” If they served with “singleness of heart, fearing God,” it would render a powerful testimony of the reality of their faith in Christ. Thus, they were to work for their masters “heartily, as to the Lord” for in reality they were serving “the Lord Christ.” This shows that regardless of where a believer stands in his social status in society, he still has an opportunity to witness for Christ. We cannot all be missionaries, but we can all share the gospel with those whom we interact in our daily lives, and thus serve the Lord in that way.

To encourage these bondmen in this, Paul reminds them that the Lord was taking note of all that they did, and that He would “reward” them in a coming day with their possession of “the inheritance.” What a reversal was coming for these believing slaves! They had very few possessions in this world—they couldn’t own property, etc.—but they were destined to be joint-heirs with Christ over the inheritance of every created thing in the universe!

Masters

(Chapter 4:1)

Lastly, Paul addresses Christian masters. Again, we do not read of him telling them to cease from their involvement in slavery. Instead, he instructs them on how to behave as masters in a way that would honour God. They were to remunerate their servants with what was “just and equal” for their services rendered. Masters were to be conscious that they had a “Master in heaven” to whom they are responsible.

Living in the western world where slavery has long been abolished, we might be inclined to think that this passage has no application to us today. However, when we are gainfully employed at some firm in the workplace, we are, in principle, in the same position as these Christian servants. During the hours of our employment in our occupations, we render our services to various firms for wages. Therefore, the injunctions given here to servants have a practical application to us when we are employed in the work place. Likewise, employers who own a company and have employees, in principle, are in the position of masters, and they are to run their companies in a way that would honour the Lord.

Church history reveals that this injunction was generally heeded by Christian slaves—to the point that it was well-known in the world of slavery that a Christian slave commanded a higher price on the auction block. It is a tribute to the Christian faith. It should be the same today; any employer who can get a Christian employee ought to be thankful, because the Christian should look after his employer's business with due diligence and treat it as if it were his own (Eph. 6:5-8; 1 Peter 2:18).

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians: The Mystery-Christ in You, the Hope of Glory, Colossians 4:2-6: Christ Expressed in the Spread of the Truth in the World

(Chapter 4:2-6)

Chap. 4:2-6—In the previous section the exhortations were to specific groups of individuals, but now they broaden out to believers in general. The exhortations here have to do with the saints' support of the spread of the truth through prayer and godly conduct. They are encouraged to pray for things in general, and particularly for the Lord's servants in their work of communicating the truth, and also that the saints would maintain a proper testimony toward the lost.

Paul says, "Continue [persevere] in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (vs. 2). Oftentimes we pray for something but give up. This is not good. The Lord taught that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). It has been said that we need to pray as much as we need to breathe! The soul flourishes in the atmosphere of prayer, but languishes without it. Persevering in prayer does not mean that we are to badger God regarding something we want, and to persist in asking for it until He gives it to us. This manifests an unbroken spirit that insists on having its own way. If that is our attitude, to teach us a lesson, God just might grant us our request but send leanness into our souls with it (Psa. 106:15). James tells us that over all our prayers we must add, "If the Lord will" (James 4:15; Matt. 26:39). This manifests a spirit of submission to the divine will and an acknowledgment that we ultimately want His will in the matter. To "watch in the same" is to watch for the Lord's answer to our prayer requests. This manifests faith. To do it "with thanksgiving" manifests confidence in the Lord. It is to say, "Whatever the Lord gives as an answer (be it 'yes' or 'no'), I know that it will be the best for me, so I'll rejoice and give thanks even before He makes His mind known."

As mentioned, more specifically, Paul desired the prayers of the saints for the work of spreading the truth. He says, "That God would open unto us a door of utterance to speak the Mystery of Christ" (vs. 3).

Vss. 5-6—As to their conduct, he said, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time [opportunities]. Let your word be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." If we walk wisely in our daily lives, we will have "opportunities" to share the gospel with the lost ("them that are without"). Walking "toward" them implies a genuine seeking of their welfare. This opens doors when people see that we are genuinely interested in them. "Redeeming the time" refers to setting free (the meaning of redeem) time in our busy schedules to be used in service for the Lord. Paul speaks of it in Ephesians as well, but in connection with a different sphere (Eph. 5:15-21). Putting the two references together, we see that there are really only two spheres of service wherein we are to use our time:

- Redeeming time to be a help to those within the Christian community ("yourselves" – Eph. 5:19, 21).
- Redeeming time to be a help to those outside the Christian community ("them that are without" – Col. 4:5).

These verses, in Colossians 4, have to do with reaching out to the lost in the gospel. It is significant that "praying" is mentioned before reaching out to "them that are without." This shows that all outreach work is to be done in felt dependence on the Lord.

"Let your word be always with grace, seasoned with salt" has to do with how we approach others. We should always conduct ourselves in a gracious, courteous, and kindly manner in all our interactions with the men of the world. This will work to win them for Christ. But our speech should also be "seasoned with salt." This speaks of faithfulness. Thus, we are to remember to have a word for the conscience of the unbeliever, so that they might realize that they have to do with God, and that they need to be prepared to meet Him. Unbelievers' consciences need to be touched, but we will cut off their ear if we "rag" on them all the time. Paul said that our speech is to be seasoned here and there with a faithful word to their consciences. We can be over-zealous in trying to save unbelievers and get known for pressing on men's consciences too much. This turns people off and drives them away. Zealots like this seem to think that this verse reads: "Let your speech be always salt, seasoned with grace!" However, it is quite the other way around. Scripture indicates that it is possible to have "a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:2). Zeal is good, but it needs to be guided by knowledge and wisdom. Paul said to the Galatians, "It is right to be zealous at all times in what is right" (Gal. 4:18). He adds here: "That ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." This implies that if we walk in wisdom toward them that are without, we will stir their interest and they will "ask" of us of "a reason of the hope" that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). When they have this spirit, we can point them to Christ.

Summary of the Practical Part of the Epistle That Results in the Display of Christ in the Saints

The foregoing brings the main part of the epistle to a close. If it is followed by the saints with moral exercise, the character of Christ will be seen in the us. There are three links in the development of this truth:

- WHAT is to be manifested—the character of Christ (chap. 3:12-15).
- HOW it is to be manifested—by being filled with Christ and His interests in all that we say and do (chap. 3:16-17).
- WHERE it is to be manifested—in every sphere of the believer's life (chaps. 3:18–4:6).

The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians: The Mystery-Christ in You, the Hope of Glory, Colossians 4:7-18: Closing Salutations

(Chapter 4:7-18)

The closing salutations that Paul appends to the body of the epistle present a lovely picture of the grace, kindness, and mutual interest that will exist in the Christian circle when the saints are moving together according to the truth of the Mystery. They illustrate the happy conditions of fellowship among the saints in the body of Christ as they move together. A number of individuals are mentioned for various reasons:

Vss. 7-8—"Tychicus" (Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12) is mentioned first. He was the one who carried the epistle to the Colossians. Epaphras might have been chosen to do it, being that he was a Colossian, but since he was incarcerated with Paul (Phile. 23), it

was not possible. Tychicus was also to bear the personal news about Paul's "state" of affairs in Rome. In mentioning this, we see that Paul knew that the Colossian saints would be interested in his personal welfare, even though they hadn't seen his face before (chap. 2:1). This is normal Christianity.

Not much is said of Tychicus in Scripture except of what we read in this passage. Paul speaks of three things of him here. He was "a beloved brother." He was "a faithful minister," and he was "a fellowservant in the Lord." To have love and faithfulness combined in one person is a rare combination. It is an ideal balance. Oftentimes when men seek to be faithful, they are unconsciously stern and ungracious. They tend to manifest little concern for the peace of mind in the saints. On the other hand, those who are marked by love can be gracious at the expense of faithfulness. Neither of these extremes characterized Tychicus; his love didn't hinder his faithfulness. Paul adds, "That he might know your state and that he might encourage your hearts." This is not meddling in others' affairs, but showing a genuine care and concern for the brethren. This shows how Christian love delights in communicating.

Vs. 9—"Onesimus" was a slave who robbed his master and ran away. Somehow he crossed paths with Paul and the grace of God worked in his heart and he got saved. (See Paul's epistle to Philemon for the whole story.) He was now "a faithful and beloved brother" and was to go with Tychicus to Colosse with the letter to Philemon. Faithfulness and love by which he was marked are the same two things that were said of Tychicus. However, nothing is said to indicate that he ministered the Word, as was the case with Tychicus. This is probably because he was still very young in the faith.

Vs. 10—The next three men were converts from Judaism—"the circumcision" (vs. 11). They requested that Paul would send their greetings to the Colossians. The first of these was "Aristarchus." He was "a Macedonian of Thessalonica" who came to Rome with Paul in the memorable trip that suffered shipwreck on Melita (Acts 27:2). Judging by his name, he was probably a Gentile proselyte to Judaism, but having believed the gospel, he had converted to Christianity. Like Tychicus, Aristarchus had accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey (Acts 19:29; 20:4) and was used of the Lord in preaching and teaching (Phile. 24). Somewhere along the line, he had been arrested and was incarcerated with Paul. Thus, Paul calls him "my fellow-prisoner."

"Marcus" (John Mark – Acts 12:12), who was "Barnabas' cousin" (nephew), sent his greetings also. Twelve years earlier, he had "abandoned" Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13:13; 15:38), but having regained the confidence of the Apostle, was once again serving with him. Note: Mark is not said to be a faithful minister as were Tychicus, Onesimus, and Epaphras. We suppose that this is because he had failed in his service with them and had deserted the apostles at Perga. Since the saints at Colosse probably knew of Mark's failure, Paul wanted them to know that he had regained the confidence of the brethren and was once again "profitable" in the ministry (2 Tim. 4:11). Thus, Paul commended him to the Colossians for their reception, if he were to come to them. In spite of being a failing servant, Mark was led later to write the second Gospel which portrays the Lord as the perfect Servant. The "commandments" that Paul speaks of are the apostolic decrees that were given to the Gentile believers (Acts 15:20, 29; 16:4; 21:25).

Vs. 11—"Jesus, which is called Justus" sent his greetings as well. The saints called him "Justus" rather than Jesus, because they evidently believed that the name of "Jesus"—which is the "name" that is "above every name" (Phil. 2:9)—should be reserved for the Lord alone. This verse has led brethren to encourage those who have been given the name Jesus by birth to change their name to something else when they get saved.

The above-named brethren were a real "comfort" to Paul. The Greek word translated "comfort" here is found in no other place in Scripture. It means to console, and is translated "consolation" in the J. N. Darby Translation. This shows that Paul felt the loss of his liberty and really missed the fellowship that he had once enjoyed among the brethren.

Vss. 12-13—Paul then sends greetings from three Gentile believers who were with him in Rome. The first of these is "Epaphras," who was a Colossian ("one of you"). Paul draws special attention to this man's fervency in prayer. He was a capable minister of the Word (chap. 1:7), and it is generally believed that it was through his labours that the Colossian assembly was formed. But it seems that his greatest ministry was that of prayer. Being in captivity with Paul, he was separated from his local brethren, but laboured in prayer on their behalf. As mentioned in our remarks on chapter 1:9, perhaps the greatest service that we can do for the saints is to pray for them.

We see from the way that Paul speaks of prayer here that there is definitely a spiritual conflict involved. He says that Epaphras was "always combating earnestly for you in prayers." The marginal reading in the KJV says "striving." (See also chapter 1:29–2:1 and Luke 22:44 in the J. N. Darby Translation.) There are wicked spirits "in the heavenlies"—the realm of spiritual activity—(Eph. 6:12) that work to hinder the prayers of the saints (Dan. 10:12-13). This is why we need to persevere in prayer (vs. 2).

Epaphras cared for the Colossians with "great zeal." Thus, he had a pastor's heart. The great objective in his prayers was that the saints at Colosse would stand "perfect and complete in all the will of God." This refers to the saints being established in the truth of the Mystery. Paul prayed to that end as well (chap. 1:9). Sad to say, in spite of the prayers and labours of Paul and Epaphras, and others, the Colossian saints never reached this objective. Within four or five years these very saints in the province of Asia turned away from Paul and his doctrine (2 Tim. 1:15). They didn't exactly turn away from the Lord. They remained Christians, for to give up their confession of being believers on the Lord Jesus Christ would be apostasy; this no real Christian will do. But they no longer wished to be identified with Paul's teachings because of the reproach and persecution connected with it (2 Tim. 1:8, 16-18).

Epaphras' zeal and care was not just for his local brethren in Colosse, but also for "them that are in Laodicea (9 miles from Colosse), and them in Heirapolis (12 miles from Colosse)." He knew that the bad doctrine would "spread like gangrene" (2 Tim. 2:17), and these neighouring assemblies would be in danger of the mystical teaching too.

Vs. 14—"Luke, the beloved physician," sent his greetings also. Apparently, he remained with Paul to the very end of Paul's life (2 Tim. 4:11).

"Demas" greeted them as well. But not a word is said of him. Paul does not say that he was beloved or faithful, as he states of the others. It makes us wonder whether he was drifting in his soul, and Paul had nothing commendable to say of him. He speaks of him in the same way in his epistle to Philemon that accompanied this epistle (Phile. 24). All we know is that the next time we read of him, Paul says, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). Paul doesn't say that Demas went to "the present evil world," an expression used in his epistle to the Galatians (Gal. 1:4). This means that Demas didn't go off and become a profligate, but rather, that he took a worldly

approach to his interpretation of Christian principles and this led him to take a different path from that which Paul treaded.

Vss. 15-16—Paul desired that the Colossians would pass on his greetings to the assembly at Laodicea, since they were nearby—and especially to “Nymphas” who had the assembly meetings in his home. He also wanted this epistle to be read by the Laodicean assembly after it had been read to the Colossians. And vice versa, he desired that the letter “from (not “to”) Laodicea” to be read among the Colossians because the substance of the two letters was complimentary. For that reason, many Bible teachers believe that the epistle which the Laodiceans had was Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians. But why would they have the letter to the Ephesians? F. G. Patterson and others have explained that since the epistle to the Ephesians was not addressed to the assembly per se, but rather to “the saints” in that area, it was a circular letter that was to be passed around—although J. N. Darby notes that there is not much ground to support the idea. (See the footnote in his Translation on Ephesians 1:1.) Had the truth in the Colossian epistle been heeded by the Laodiceans, it would have preserved them from the spiritual slide in that assembly (Rev. 3:14-21). They degenerated to such a low state that instead of holding fast the Head of the Church, they had left Him outside their door!

Vs. 17—Before closing the epistle, Paul gives a word of encouragement to “Archippus.” He said, “Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.” It is supposed that Archippus was Philemon and Apphia’s son since he is mentioned together with them in their house (Phile. 1-2). It appears that Archippus was slack concerning the work which the Lord had given to him to do and that he needed this word of encouragement. There are many gifted and able men today in the Christian profession who need this same exhortation. Instead of using their gift, they are giving their attention to earthly and worldly things. Archippus may have grown weary and become discouraged. Whatever the case may be with us, if the Lord has given us something to do for Him, we should be glad to do it (Gal. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15:58). Has the Lord given us some work to do for Him? Then let us “take heed” to do it.

Vs. 18—Paul closes the epistle by adding, “The salutation by the hand of me, Paul.” This was a custom of his since there were men who had forged a letter stating that it was from him (2 Thess. 2:2). Signing the epistle by his own hand gave it its authenticity. This was his custom (1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; 2 Thess. 3:17).

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