



COLOSSIANS

The Sufficiency of Christ

“For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form,
and in Him you have been made complete...”

Colossians 2:9, 10



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Purpose

To confront various distortions of the Gospel by reaffirming the *deity* and *sufficiency* of Christ

Summary

Paul's letter to the Colossians was written to a church that he never visited in the city of Colossae, near Laodicea, in southwest Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Most likely, this church was started by one of Paul's protégés named Epaphras (1:7; 4:12, 13; Acts 19). Epaphras had become so concerned about the heresies that confronted the church that he journeyed to visit Paul in prison. After hearing his friend's concerns, Paul penned two letters, one to the Laodiceans (4:16, a letter that we do not have today) and the other to the Colossians. Paul's letter directly confronted tenets of these dangerous philosophies (4:8) – most likely a blend of Gnosticism, asceticism, Judaism, and others -- by affirming the deity and sufficiency of Christ. *Colossians* looks and feels very much like *Ephesians*, in that the first half of the letter focuses on Christian doctrine (*orthodoxy*) while the second half emphasizes Christian living (*orthopraxy*). In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reaffirmed the doctrines of the believer's position in Christ; in his letter to the Colossians, he reaffirmed Christ's position in the believer. Paul also suggested that the way out of these spiritual heresies was spiritual maturity.

Penman

The Apostle Paul

Recipients

The churches in Colossae and Laodicea (4:16), in the Roman province of Phrygia in Asia Minor; Paul had never been there (2:1)

Date Written

Since Paul mentioned his imprisonment, the letter should be dated around 60-62 AD, when he was in Rome (Acts 28:16-31).

Key Verses

"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. For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority."

Colossians 2:8-10

Themes

- **False Teaching:** Though Paul never identified the heresies that confronted the Colossians, we can deduce several of them by the doctrines that he addressed (Gnosticism, asceticism, etc.).
- **The Deity of Christ:** False teachers attempted to discount Jesus' identity and power in order to prove that He was insufficient to save people from their sins; but Paul shot holes in their theories with solid doctrine. Jesus was and is God in human form.
- **The Sufficiency of Christ:** The Colossians were being deceived with the lie that Christ was not enough, that they needed to do more to attain God's favor; but, since Christ is completely God, then our salvation in Him is complete. He is sufficient in Himself to save us from sin.
- **Putting Off, Putting On:** The Christian life bears evidence of Christ indwelling and changing us. There should be a difference evident to all that God is working in our lives, shedding the ways of the world and become more like Christ in word and deed.

Leading Ideas

- Our first and best response is to lay the cares of others before the Lord in prayer (1:9-12).
- We have been rescued from darkness to live in the kingdom of light (1:13, 14).
- Jesus and God are one and the same; He is the Creator, not created (1:15-17).
- We will either take ideas captive or they will take us captive (2:6-8).
- Because Christ is completely God, our salvation in Him is complete, lacking nothing (2:9-15).
- Christ has freed us from man-made restrictions (2:16-23).
- Since we are followers of Christ, we no longer follow the ways of the world (3:1-4).
- When the people of God mirror the character of God, then peace is possible (3:12-15).
- When we honor God first in our relationships, we will naturally honor others (3:18-4:1).
- Pray and prepare for sharing the Gospel with unbelievers (4:2-6).
- God has work for each of us to do in His kingdom; we must be faithful to fulfill it (4:7-18).

¹“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ²to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.”

By the Will of God

God's Plan for Your Life

Leading Idea

God regularly does in the lives of His people that which they would never predict.

Paul is immediately identified as the mind behind the letter to the Colossians, although Timothy, his associate, may be the one who wrote the words. This work belongs in the collection of Paul's prison letters (4:18). While he was awaiting his trial in Rome, Paul was allowed some liberties, including sending and receiving dispatches (Acts 28:30, 31). Paul's letters all bear a similar greeting, orderly format, theological tone, and list of ministry partners (4:7-15).

Timothy is an impressive young disciple whom Paul found in Lystra on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3). He was Paul's right-hand man for some time and was stationed in Ephesus to help establish the growing church there (1 Timothy 1:3). Timothy was one of the men who ministered to Paul during his imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28). He was a faithful servant and ministry companion, and he earned Paul's complete trust and confidence.

The letter was written “to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae” (v.2). Both of these terms describe the same people – Colossian Christians or followers of Christ. Colossae was a city near Laodicea in southwest Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Most likely, this church was started by Epaphras, another one of Paul's associates (1:7; 4:12, 13; Acts 19). Epaphras was concerned about the strange doctrines that were bombarding the church, so he journeyed to Rome to meet with Paul and express his frustrations. Though Paul had never visited Colossae, when he was informed of the perilous situation there, he sent this letter to encourage them. The dangers addressed by Paul include a broad range of heretical philosophies (4:8).

Paul's greeting ended with “grace and peace to you” (v.2), a regular opening for his letters. Grace is the unmerited favor of God, a gift, not something we earn. Peace does not refer to quiet circumstances but to quiet spirits. Our source of peace, as Christians, is God's grace. No matter what our circumstances, His grace is sufficient to meet our needs (2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Knowing that God is in control, that He is good, and that He is gracious to us in our time of need, is a tremendous assurance.

It is essential in Paul's letters that he remind his readers that he was “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (v.1). An apostle is one who has been sent out, as an ambassador of sorts, for a specific purpose. In this case, Paul's purpose was to proclaim the truths of the Gospel of Christ to Gentiles (Acts 9:15) and to establish His Church throughout Europe and Asia Minor. By including this responsibility, Paul was reminding his audience that he had authority to teach, to exhort, to refute, and to rebuke.

I love the fact that Paul described his apostleship as a result of the “will of God” (v.1). In other words, becoming an apostle of Jesus Christ was not Paul's intent for his life. He was once an enemy of the Church but God had other plans for him. He never intended to join the very group that he sought to destroy. He never intended on being the most prominent promoter of the sect that he so vehemently persecuted. He never intended to suffer the atrocities that he would while in the service of Christ, the verbal abuse, the beatings, the trials and tribulations; none of these experiences were on Paul's radar, but they were all part of the will of God for his life.

It is fine to pray and plan for life, but it is important to remember always to include in your prayers the petition, “God's will be done” (James 4:13, 14). The Lord regularly does in the lives of His people that which they never would predict. Are you ready for what may come your way “by the will of God”? Are you praying towards that end or seeking your own selfish desires? God can and will use you in ways you could never imagine, if you will completely surrender to His will.

³“We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the Gospel, ⁶which 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, ⁷just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, ⁸as he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.”

The Root and the Fruit

Evidence of Salvation

Leading Idea

When the Gospel takes root, it bears evidence with fruit.

As far as we can tell, the Apostle Paul never visited Colossae, but rather the church was started by Epaphras, one of his associates (v.7), who informed Paul of the dangerous philosophies confronting believers there. However, when Paul heard about “the saints” in Colossae, he instantly felt a connection with them because of their “faith in Christ Jesus” (v.3). It is remarkable to me the commonality that we can have with complete strangers simply because of our connection to Christ. Christians in any part of the world have a common faith and purpose; we are all on the same team, pulling the rope in the same direction, working together to accomplish the same ends.

Paul didn’t just feel a connection to the saints in Colossae; he gave thanks for them and prayed for them regularly (v.3), a good example for us to follow. We can often become so consumed with our own activities and difficulties that we lose sight of what God is doing in other locations around the world. His work is being accomplished in all places at all times, and His people need our prayers.

Notice how Paul characterized the believers in Colossae, after being informed by Epaphras, as “having love for all the saints” (v.4, 8). Faith in Christ not only produces hope for the future (v.5) but love in the present. Love for God, the word of God, and the people of God is evidence of the work of Christ in the lives of His people (1 John 4:7, 8). Paul liked to connect these three in his letters – faith, hope, and love – “the greatest of these,” he wrote, “is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Paul referred to the Gospel as the “word of truth” (v.5) and “the grace of God in truth” (v.6). He also wrote that this Gospel includes “hope laid up for us in heaven” (v.5). The Gospel, the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, is true because it is from God. It is “the grace of God” because it is a free gift, not a result of works (Ephesians 2:8, 9); and, His grace sets us free from all rules, rituals, and regulations (Galatians 5:1). We are free in Christ, free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1, 2). The hope laid up for us in heaven is the inheritance we will receive, as one of God’s sons and heirs -- eternal life, the joys of heaven, the rewards of our faithfulness, and all the benefits that will come from being with Christ and being like Christ, in right standing with God the Father.

Also, Paul wrote that the “Gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world, is constantly bearing fruit and increasing even as it has been doing in you...” (v.6). It’s important to note two points here. First, God is using His people to advance the Gospel throughout the world. Part of that advancement is that the Gospel came to us, not only so that we could be saved but so that we could be part of His work to save others. We should be grateful for being included in the hope of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but we should also be doing our part to share that hope of salvation with others. Salvation comes with a responsibility to carry His message to others in hopes that they too might be saved. *God’s work includes us, but it does not end with us.*

Second, salvation is only the beginning of the Christian life, not the end. Once the seed of salvation takes root, it should give evidence of its presence by bearing fruit. Our lives should begin to reflect the character and cause of Christ. Our desires should become His desires. Our goals should become His goals. Our words and thoughts should be His words and thoughts. Not only will there be fruit in our lives but that fruit will increase. It should be evident to others in our love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23).

If someone reported to Paul about your faith in Christ and the fruit that you exhibit, what would he be told? Is there evidence in your life that Christ is at work? Is there fruit? Is it increasing?

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, 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, ¹¹ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience, joyously ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

First Response

Interceding for Others

Leading Idea

Our first and best response is to lay our cares, and the cares of others, before the Lord in prayer.

In this passage we have Paul’s response to the report conveyed by Epaphras of the condition of the Colossian believers. Remember, they were being confronted with deceitful doctrines which were confusing them in regard to the truths of the Gospel. Paul wrote, “For this reason...” (v.9), which might be better understood as, “Because of Epaphras’ news.” His response was to pray. Typically, our first response is to try to fix the situation or solve the problem. However, Paul’s response was exemplary in that *our first and best resort would be to lay our cares, and the cares of others, before the Lord in prayer*. Because of Christ, we can “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (*Hebrews 4:16*).

Paul’s prayer for the Colossians included four requests: spiritual wisdom, a worthy walk, supernatural strength, and joyful thanksgiving. Let’s take a closer look at each of these parts. First, Paul prayed that they might be “filled with the knowledge of [God’s] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (v.9). In light of the deceitful doctrines that were confronting the Colossians, spiritual wisdom and understanding were two necessary elements; wisdom is a discernment of *the principles of their faith* and understanding is an obedience or *practice of their faith*. In essence, Paul was praying for them to grasp the truths of the Gospel so that they could grow in the truths of the Gospel. That growth leads us to the second aspect of Paul’s prayer – a worthy walk.

He continued in his petition, “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...” (v.10). The Lord gives us spiritual wisdom and understanding (*Proverbs 2:6*) not so that we can boast or pursue our own selfish ambitions but so that we can know better how to please Him. We are to live lives that are consistent with the faith that we proclaim, to walk the talk. Do our actions, our words, our attitudes, and our thoughts glorify God? Are they “worthy of the Lord”? Do they bring honor and attention to Him or to ourselves? Would they be a credit to His name or would they bring Him shame? Notice that to please the Lord we are “to bear fruit in every good work.” Though we are not saved by our works, we are saved for good works (*Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:14; 3:8*). Also, notice that which pleases God is to “increase in our knowledge” of Him. The best way to increase our knowledge of God is to study the words of God. *Right conduct* (orthopraxy) *is preceded by right doctrine* (orthodoxy). Spiritual growth has little chance without the water of God’s Word. How can we know what pleases God if we don’t know what He expects? Likewise, how can we know what He expects without reading what He has written to us? The spiritual discipline of Scripture intake informs the other disciplines – prayer, worship, giving, serving, evangelizing, etc. It also informs our words, attitudes, and actions. How can we walk in a manner worthy of God if we ignore the instruction manual of the Word of God?

Third, Paul prayed that the Colossians would be “strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience” (v.11). The Christian life cannot be lived in the flesh. It is a supplied life, supplied by the strength of the indwelling Spirit. We cannot endure spiritual attacks in our own strength, nor can we persevere through temptation or trials with mere will power. *Withstanding spiritual assaults requires spiritual weapons*. Empowered by the Spirit of God, we can endure trials without complaint, suffering patiently and praising God, no matter what.

Finally, Paul prayed that they would be “joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light” (v.12). This thought is not completed until the next two verses (v.13, 14), which we will consider next, but it is clear that Paul didn’t want them to forget what God had done for them in regards to their salvation. *Forgetfulness is evidence of ungratefulness*. Let us never forget that the Lord has “qualified” us who were once disqualified (*Ephesians 2:1-6*).

¹³“For He rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Under New Ownership

Redemption in Christ Jesus

Leading Idea

We have been rescued from darkness to live in the kingdom of light.

These two verses belong to Paul’s prayer for the Colossians (v.9-12). They are an explanation of his petition that they may be “joyously giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light” (v.12). What does it mean that the Father qualified us? What is our inheritance, and who are “the saints in Light”?

Paul used the word “qualified” here for a specific reason, because false teachers in Colossae were convincing Christians that they were disqualifying themselves for various reasons (2:16, 18, 20-23). However, Paul wanted them to understand that *those whom Christ has qualified no man could disqualify*. Here, to qualify means to “make sufficient, to empower, or to authorize.” Before coming to Christ, we are only qualified to receive God’s wrath and judgment, the just penalty for our sinful state. However, because of Christ’s work on the cross, we have been qualified to receive God’s forgiveness.

Now that we – “the saints in Light” -- have been qualified by Christ, we have been made heirs with Him, and our inheritance now awaits us in heaven (*Ephesians 1:11; Colossians 3:24*). What is our inheritance? Simply put, it is eternal life with God in heaven, but, our inheritance also includes all of the spiritual blessings that God has promised us in regards to our salvation.

“The saints in Light” refer to the followers of Christ. Throughout the Bible, particularly in the New Testament, there is a theme of light and darkness. Light refers to the Kingdom of God and darkness the Kingdom of Satan. For example, Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (*John 8:12*). Heaven has been described as a place that needs no sun or moon because it is filled with the light of God’s glory (*Revelation 21:23; 22:5*).

Being familiar with this theme helps us to understand Paul’s description of what happens to a follower of Christ in salvation. He is “rescued from the domain of darkness” (Satan’s control) and “transferred to the Kingdom of the beloved Son” of God (v.13). Those who are outside of Christ remain under the rule of Satan and his evil forces; they are trapped in darkness, in the absence of truth, hope, and joy. They are deceived by a world of lies, so they cannot comprehend the truth (*1 Corinthians 2:14*). They have no power or means in or of themselves to escape Satan’s control. They are trapped behind enemy lines, without hope for the future. They are destined to pay their own penalty for sin, which is to face God’s wrath and judgment and to be separated from His favor for eternity.

The only way to be saved from that hopeless state is to be rescued by someone more powerful than Satan, someone who can break into his kingdom, repel his authority, and defeat his forces. The only person capable of these heroic acts is God Himself, which He did for us through His Son Jesus. However, to rescue slaves from Satan’s rank required a high price, a ransom that cost a life for a life. The sinless Lord Jesus sacrificed Himself in order to pay that ransom (*Mark 10:45*), to redeem us from the control of the evil one. As a result, Christ exchanged His righteousness for our sinfulness and took the penalty of God’s wrath and judgment upon Himself, with His death on the cross.

As Israel was rescued from the bondage of slavery in Egypt and led to the Promised Land of Canaan, so also we have been transferred from the domain of darkness to the Kingdom of Light. We are under new ownership, new management, and new rules. One of those rules is that these things have already been done, and they cannot be reversed. We are forever free from the enemy’s domain and will from now on enjoy the light of the Lord. We have been bought with a price – Christ’s substitutionary death - - and we are no longer our own (*1 Corinthians 6:19, 20*). Now, we live for Him. As Paul encouraged the Colossians to do, let us “joyously give thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light” and never forget the price that was paid for our redemption!

¹⁵ “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.”

Creator, Not Created

The Identity of Jesus

Leading Idea

Jesus and God are one and the same; He is the Creator, not created.

One of the purposes of Paul’s letter to the Colossians was to confront the heretical doctrines of the false teachers there. Though he does not identify them by name, we can deduce some of their distorted beliefs by observing Paul’s pointed theology, specifically about Christ Himself. Evidently, these distortionists were promoting the lie that Jesus was just a man, or an angel at best, but certainly not God in the flesh. That’s why the Apostle wrote, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the traditions of men... For in Him all the fullness of the Deity dwells in bodily form” (2:8, 9). Paul explained this concept in our passage (1:15-17). His explanation describes Jesus’ relationship to God, to creation, to angels, and to the Church (v.18-20).

First, what is Jesus’ relationship to God? Paul wrote, “He is the image of the invisible God...” (v.15). The word “image” here (*eikon*) conveys the idea of a copy or likeness. Since God is Spirit, He is, therefore, invisible to the human eye. Thus, Jesus is God in human form; He took on flesh so that we could know more of what God is like. He said Himself, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father...” (John 14:9). The New Testament repeatedly affirms this truth, that Jesus is God in the flesh (John 1:1-18; 8:58; 10:30-33; Philippians 2:6; Hebrews 1:3; and more).

So then, since Jesus and God are one and the same, what is His relationship to creation? Paul wrote, “He is the firstborn of all creation” (v.15). Some have mistakenly taken this description to mean that Jesus is a created being; they take “firstborn of all creation” to mean that Jesus was the first object of God’s creative efforts. That is an unscholarly and damaging interpretation, contradictory to the context of the passage, the letter, the New Testament, and the rest of Scripture. The very next sentence contradicts the doctrine that Christ is a created being, for Paul wrote, “For by Him all things were created, both in heaven and on earth” (v.16). How can Jesus be both created and the Creator?

Although the phrase “firstborn of creation” can be somewhat misleading in our minds, we must view it in light of Old Testament phraseology. The firstborn in a family was the highest ranking child among his siblings, the primary heir of a father’s wealth. To use the term “firstborn” for someone or something was to signify supreme position, superiority over others. For example, David was hailed as “the firstborn among the kings of the earth” (Psalm 89:27). God called Israel the firstborn among nations, meaning the most important, His Chosen People (Exodus 4:22). Thus, what Paul was saying about Jesus is that He is not a part of creation, but rather He is superior to it, above it, ruler over it. He says as much when he wrote, “He (Jesus) is before all things...” (v.17).

Third, what is Jesus’ relationship to the angels? Many false teachers (Gnostics, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and others) have equated Jesus with the angels, but this too is false teaching. We have already established the fact that Jesus is God and, therefore, the Creator of all things. How then can He be an angel which is a created being? Paul confronted this heresy head on when we wrote, “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...” (v.16). Jesus, who is God, is above the angels, Creator of them.

Paul went further to solidify Jesus in the minds of his readers, when he added, “All things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (v.16, 17). From this description we learn that Jesus existed before creation (eternal). He was the agent of creation (through Him), the goal of creation (for Him), meaning it was all for His glory, and the Sustainer of creation (in Him all things hold together). These false teachers were attempting to discount Jesus’ identity and power in order to prove that He was insufficient by Himself to save people from their sins. Thus, according to their beliefs, more was required for salvation than faith in Christ alone; but Paul shot holes in their theories with solid doctrine. Jesus was and is God in human form.

¹⁸“He is also the head of the body, the Church, and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have to first place in everything. ¹⁹For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰and 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.”

First Place

The Preeminence of Christ

Leading Idea

Christ, who is the fullness of God, is first above all things.

Paul is still establishing the superiority of Christ in contrast to the false doctrines that were facing the Colossians (1:15-20). He already addressed His relationship to God, to creation, and to the angels, and now He included the Church (v.18). As in his letter to the Ephesians (5:22-25), he referred to the Church as a body and to Christ as its head, which is another way of saying that He is the leader. The Church, which is comprised of the followers of Christ, takes its lead from Him. We worship Him, we obey Him, and we pattern our lives after Him. The Church should function as He commands, it should pursue His objectives, and it should fulfill His ministries. We are not the head of the Church. He is.

Another phrase to describe the superiority of Christ is that “He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead” (v.18). Not only is He the Creator of life (v.16), but He is the Conqueror of death. While there are other people in the Bible who were resurrected from the dead, none of them rose in their own power; and, those who were resurrected before Him will eventually die. Christ is the first to defeat death on His own and die no more; therefore, He is “the firstborn from the dead.” Because of His resurrection, we too will get to experience freedom from death in eternal life.

The point of Paul’s list – Christ’s superiority over creation, over angels, over the Church, and over death – is “so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything” (v.18). Despite the attempt of these false teachers to point out the insufficiencies of Christ, there are none. There is no one like Him and there never will be. He is the Creator of all things, He is above all things, and He is sufficient to do all the things He has promised, including save us from our sins and grant us everlasting life.

Paul continued by summarizing Christ’s sufficiency this way, “It was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him...” (v.19). Jesus is God in human form. The fullness of Deity has always dwelt in Him; it did not suddenly begin dwelling in Him at some point. This truth strikes at the enemy’s lie that Christ was not sufficient to save men from their sins. However, Paul stated the opposite argument, that God the Father, through Christ the Son, was able to “reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross...” (v.20).

Because of the existence of sin, both creation and mankind were estranged from God. Enmity, a state of opposition, existed between them, not because of anything God had done but because of man’s rebellion to Him. Man had made himself an enemy of His Creator. However, because of the sacrifice that Jesus made at Calvary, all things were reconciled to God. To reconcile means “to make right” or “to make peace, to settle an ongoing conflict.”

What does it mean that “all things” were reconciled to God, “whether things on earth or things in heaven”? Some false teachers have used this verse to promote universalism or universal salvation, the idea that all creatures (men and angels, including Satan) are made right with God and there is, therefore, no need for hell. It is important here that we do not take this verse out of the context of the rest of Paul’s letters, the words of Jesus, the New Testament or the Bible. Of course, Paul is not advocating universalism (*Matthew 25:41-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9*); so then, what was he advocating?

Paul was simply stating that Christ settled the sin problem to God’s satisfaction. Man’s sin not only condemned all creatures but it condemned all of creation (*Genesis 3:17; Romans 8:20-22; Job 15:15*). Heaven was affected by the sin of Lucifer and earth was affected by the sin of Adam; thus, there is a need for a new heaven and a new earth, both of which will be purified for eternity. With Christ’s death on the cross, He righted the wrong, in the spiritual sense. The physical expression of that spiritual victory will be visible in the new heavens and the new earth at the end (*Revelation 21, 22*). However, those who remain in rebellion to God (men and angels) will be banished to eternal punishment.

²¹“And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, ²²yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach – ²³if 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.”

Holy and Blameless

Personal Reconciliation

Leading Idea

Because of Christ, we have been right with God, forever.

In this passage Paul transitioned from addressing the topic of *general reconciliation* (1:19, 20) to *personal reconciliation*. “For it was the Father’s good pleasure,” he wrote, “to reconcile all things to Himself” through Christ, “having made peace through the blood of His cross.” Then, he narrowed his focus. “Although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds” he continued, “yet He has now reconciled you...” (v.21).

Consider the three ways that Paul described the previous condition of a follower of Christ, before salvation. First, he is *alienated* or estranged, separated and distant from God. Now this description is somewhat misleading because God is omnipresent. How, then, can one be in any way separated from God? It is similar to a wife who is alienated from a husband whom she knows is having an affair or a parent whose son or daughter is rebellious and defiant. Two people can be in close proximity yet distant in their relationship, cold and uncaring. Sin has driven a permanent wedge between all people and their Creator God. He is holy and we are not; our sin withdraws us from His favor.

Next, an unbeliever is “*hostile in mind*,” an enemy who is unfriendly, defiant, and apathetic to God’s will or words. In the natural state, he despises God and wants nothing to do with Him. The evidence of this mindset is his attitude and actions. Paul described him as “engaged in *evil deeds*”; he is bent to think and do wrong. Remember how God described the people of earth before the flood, “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (*Genesis 6:5*). Here, too, is a picture of us before salvation.

But, praise God that He did not leave us in that state. Paul wrote, “He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach...” (v.22). Because of the blood of Jesus Christ, we who were separated from God have been brought near to Him; we who were hostile in mind now have the capacity to love Him, and we who were engaged in evil deeds now desire to do what’s right (*Ephesians 2:12, 13; 4:17-24*).

Two key words to note here are “fleshly” and “formerly.” Paul made sure to add the word “fleshly” to his description of Christ (v.22). This word gives us an indication that one of the heresies that Paul was confronting was Gnosticism. One of the tenets of Gnosticism was that Jesus was a spirit being and was not crucified in the flesh, in His body; His death was only an illusion. But, Paul made sure that the Colossians understood that Jesus was human, like them, and did, indeed, die in the flesh.

The other word that is important here is “formerly” (v.21). Paul said that because of Jesus’ crucifixion, believers have been reconciled to God; they were formerly separated from Him but they are no longer. Our reconciliation to God has already happened; it is a thing of the past, done once, and never repeated. Note our new condition in Christ – “holy, blameless, and beyond reproach.” Because of Christ, in the eyes of God, we are no longer sinful, dirty, stained, or guilty. He has exchanged our unrighteousness for the righteousness of His Son (*2 Corinthians 5:17-21*). We are without blemish and no one, not even Satan, can bring a charge against us. All charges have been dropped!

Finally, Paul added one of his complicated “if” statements – “if you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard” (v.23). This statement is *not* insinuating that believers have to maintain their salvation or that they can lose it. Rather Paul was indicating that *genuine* conversion is marked by *continuance* in the faith. One might profess to follow Christ but the real test is *perseverance* in their faith. While all Christians may struggle or backslide at times, those who are *true* followers of Christ will always return to Him. Those who fall away and never return were *false* converts. Have you fallen away? How will you respond?

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. ²⁵ 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, ²⁶ that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ 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.”

A Ministry of Mysteries

Paul’s Preaching and Persecution

Leading Idea

The Gospel of Christ is a wondrous mystery in which we get to participate.

At the end of the previous passage (v.23), Paul mentioned the fact that he was a minister of God. Here he expanded on that title, as well as the responsibilities that accompanied it (v.24-29). For example, he wrote, “Of this church, I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me...” (v.25). He clearly understood that his ministry was a calling of God on his life and that he was responsible to God for his role in the formation and care of the Church. He went on to inform the Colossians of his role, as well as the consequences for being faithful to his calling.

First, he brought attention to his persecution and imprisonment. “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake...,” he wrote (v.24). Keep in mind, Paul was not seeking sympathy, nor was he being prideful in his remarks. In my opinion, he far understated his experiences by just calling them “sufferings.” He also said that he endured them “on behalf of [Christ’s] body, which is the Church,” and that he endured them gladly. While it may seem strange to us, Paul viewed suffering for the name of Christ as an honor. Had not Christ suffered on our behalf? Indeed. So then, to suffer on His behalf was the least that Paul could do. Besides, he saw suffering as confirmation that he was being effective, that he was on the right track, that the enemy was doing his best to discourage and derail him.

Next, he added, “I do my share in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (v.24). At first glance, it might seem that Paul was discrediting the suffering of Christ, the work that He had done at the cross, but that is not the case. Why would Paul, who was writing to convince the Colossians of the sufficiency of Christ, call their attention to anything that was lacking in Christ’s person or ministry? That would not make sense. We must remember that Paul used references to Christ’s body and the Church interchangeably, perhaps because of his encounter with Him on the road to Damascus (*Acts 9*). When Jesus spoke of the persecution of the Church, He asked Paul (then Saul), “Why are you persecuting *Me*?” (v.4, 5). In other words, any attack on the followers of Christ (the Church) was an attack on Christ Himself. Also, Jesus said to His disciples that because the world persecuted Him, it would persecute them as well (*John 15:19, 20*). Therefore, it was expected that the Church would experience a great deal of suffering until Christ’s return. Paul was simply stating that he was receiving his share of that suffering.

Paul continued by explaining that one of his roles as an apostle was to “carry out the preaching of the Word of God” (v.25). Here the Word of God is the Gospel or “the *mystery* which has been hidden from the past ages and generations but [which] has now been manifested to His saints...” (v.26). In the Old Testament, God’s people were kept in the dark regarding several aspects of His plan. He often foreshadowed or prophesied His intentions, but they were still veiled to the eyes of His people. Thus, they were mysteries, events that He would reveal and fulfill at a later date. Therefore, Paul’s letters are littered with mysteries that God has unveiled to those people living in the New Testament, under the new covenant of Christ. For example, in this passage, he mentioned two mysteries – that the Spirit of God would indwell His people and that the salvation of His people (“the hope of glory”) would include individuals from all nations, even non-Jews called Gentiles (v.27).

Finally, Paul wrote that his ministry included “admonishing and teaching every man, so that [he] may present every man complete in Christ” (v.28). He added, “For this purpose I labor...” (v.29). What Paul meant by “complete” here is to make ready, to mature or perfect. He is not insinuating that we can become perfect in this life but rather his goal was to disciple the people of God so that they could better understand and live out their faith. He did this by “admonishing” them, which means to warn, to reprove, or to counsel; he also taught them. Leading one to Christ is only the beginning; *evangelism must always be followed by discipleship*, and that discipleship is not of our doing but the Spirit’s. Paul wrote that he was “striving according to God’s power, which mightily works within me” (v.29).

Blessed Assurance

A True Knowledge of God's Mystery

¹“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, ²that 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, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument. ⁵For 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.”

Leading Idea

The better we know Christ, the more confidence we will have in Christ.

As we transition into the next chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians, we have to remember that these transitions are for our sake and do not represent a break in the train of his thoughts or themes. In the previous chapter, Paul was expanding on his call to the ministry and mystery of the Gospel to the Gentiles and how he labored for the people of God everywhere to warn and teach them (1:24-29). This passage made that labor personal, as Paul wrote, “I want you to know *how great a struggle* I have on your behalf...” (2:1). Although he had never been to Colossae or nearby Laodicea, Paul was hard at work spiritually for the believers there. How so? He was battling for them through *prayer*. Remember, Paul wrote to them, “Since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you...” (1:9).

While we may not be able to be present in a situation, to solve problems or influence people directly, *we can be present in prayer*, which the Bible says can accomplish much (James 5:16). Thus, as followers of Christ, *we are never powerless* to help others, because *we can always pray*. Though we may not be present, God is, and, because of Christ, we have access to His throne and ear; and, He can and does often act on others' behalf because of the faithful prayer of His saints. This truth explains why Paul wrote, “Even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit...” (2:5). We must never neglect the discipline of prayer or underestimate its effectiveness. Laboring in prayer is a vital, yet often overlooked and under-practiced, ministry in the Church today. Are you laboring in prayer for others? Or are you guilty of overlooking and under-practicing?

What was Paul praying for the Colossians specifically? Besides the long list he provided in the previous chapter (1:9-12), and knowing that they had already been “knit together in love” (1:8; 2:2), Paul prayed “that their hearts may be encouraged” and that they would “attain to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding...” (2:2). After having been invaded by false teachers and abused by their sordid ways, the Colossians were surely discouraged, believing that either Christ was insufficient to save them or that their faith in Him was misplaced; but, neither was true. Christ, who was God in human form, was more than sufficient to save them from sin (which was the primary thrust of Paul's letter) and they could be confident to place their faith in Him. He said as much in the next two verses, “I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument...” (2:4), and I will rejoice “to see your good discipline and [the] stability of your faith in Christ” (2:5).

How exactly did Paul plan to encourage the Colossians and help them stand against these deceivers and their persuasive arguments? He enlightened their understanding of Christ's person and purpose. Paul believed that there was “great wealth” or benefit that comes from “the full assurance of understanding, which resulted in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself...” (2:2). Simply put, *the better we know Christ, the more confidence we will have in Christ*. In Christ are “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3), meaning that He is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). We read those words but do we understand their meaning? Paul described Christ as “God's mystery,” and mysteries require a good deal of investigation to comprehend and articulate. *He who has little understanding most likely will have little confidence*. His roots may be in the soil but they are at the surface, and his faith may be easily plucked; but he who labors to understand his faith drives roots deep into the soil and is more difficult to unearth.

Here again we see the importance of discipleship after salvation. Like the Colossians, we must know the God in whom we trust. We must become intimately acquainted with the Savior of our souls, so that our confidence cannot be shaken by the ploys of the enemy. This confidence will only come as we dig into the Scriptures and avail ourselves of the treasures of wisdom in God's Word. We must regularly teach ourselves the mystery of the Gospel, Christ Himself, so that no one will deceive us with persuasive arguments. May the Lord rejoice “at our good discipline and the stability of our faith.”

⁶“Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed and overflowing with gratitude. ⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the traditions of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

Captives

Guarding Against Deception

Leading Idea

We will either take ideas captive or they will take us captive.

Paul began this passage with a word of transition – “therefore.” Everything before this transition was introductory and now he was ready to get to the main body of his message. In the previous passage (2:1-5), Paul hinted at one of his purposes when he wrote, “I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument” (v.4). This reference was a precursor to Paul’s fuller treatment of the disease, which was the false teaching that was plaguing the Colossian church.

What follows Paul’s transition is a formula for combatting false doctrine (2:6-8). Since they had already “received Christ Jesus the Lord,” he challenged the Colossians to “walk in Him” (v.6). What Paul meant by “walk” here was for the followers of Christ to pattern their lives after His, to obey His instructions, to submit to His leadership, and to allow their words and actions to be conformed to His example (*Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 4:1; 5:2*). Part of that “walk” in the Christian life is being disciplined in the foundations of Christianity, the core doctrines of the Gospel. Paul wrote, “having been firmly rooted” in Christ (this has already happened at conversion), now they needed to be “built up in Him and established in their faith...” (v.7). This “building up” was already happening, perhaps through Epaphras (1:7), as they “were instructed and overflowing with gratitude” (v.7). When we fully grasp what Christ has done for us through salvation, we will be truly grateful for His goodness on our behalf.

However, these things are only the foundation, the beginning, and do not shield believers from the dangers of false teaching. Therefore, Paul continued, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception...” (v.8). It is important to note four points in this passage. First, we have an enemy, Satan, who wants to take us captive. He despises truth, particularly the Gospel, and he desires to steer as many people as possible away from it. To take captive has two meanings – to cheat or to rob someone of a valuable possession and to exchange something of value for something worthless. Either way, Satan loves for God’s people to forfeit the freedom they have in Christ for the bondage that he promotes. Whether he cheats them, robs them, or exchanges God’s ideas for his own, the end is the same – bondage or *captivity to his influence*.

Second, one of the ways that Satan takes us captive is through worldly philosophies, empty deception, or, simply put, lies. Isn’t it interesting how his lying and stealing work together? Paul said that these lies come from the “traditions of men” and the “elementary principles of the world” (v.8). Traditions of men could refer to deceivers both inside and outside the church; they include rituals, regulations, requirements, works, sacraments, etc., that appear pious and purposeful but really have no spiritual value and certainly do not obtain favor with God. Satan loves to mask his deceptions in the guise of religion. He also loves to challenge Christianity, the only true religion, with high-sounding humanistic ideas that may appear intelligent at first but, when exposed, they are nothing but foolish thinking.

Third, notice that Paul placed the responsibility of avoiding captivity on the individual believer. “See to it that no one takes you captive...” While God has charged church leaders (Elders) to protect us from false teaching (*Acts 20; Titus 1; 1 Peter 5*), we must be faithful to place ourselves under their protection within the local church. How can we protect ourselves if we are not participating in a local church, exposing ourselves to sound biblical teaching and their godly leadership? But, even within the church, we must be vigilant to protect ourselves from deception, which leads to the last point.

We must learn to take ideas captive or they will take us captive. How do we achieve that? We must be diligent students of the Bible and, particularly, of the Gospel. Paul challenged the Corinthians to take every thought *captive* to the obedience of Christ...” (*2 Corinthians 10:5*). In other words, we must filter everything we read, hear, or watch through what the Bible says of Christ. Are you taking every idea captive, or are you guilty of letting ideas take you captive? See to it that you are not robbed.

⁹“For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,¹⁰ and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;¹¹ 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;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 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.¹⁵ When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”

In Him

The Sufficiency of Christ

Leading Idea

Because Christ is completely God, our salvation in Him is complete, lacking nothing.

This passage (2:9-15), of course, is connected to the previous one (2:6-8), in which Paul launched into the purpose of his letter to the Colossians – to confront the false teaching to which they were exposed and to convince them of *the sufficiency of Christ*. After he challenged the Colossians to guard themselves against “philosophies and empty deception” (v.8), he challenged the very core of these heresies, and he did it by reminding his readers who they were, now that they were *in Christ*.

First, Paul confronted the claim of the insufficiency of Christ’s credentials, by restating a previous point (1:15-17), “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (v.9). Perhaps no other verse in the Bible says so much in so few words. Paul reaffirmed the truth that Jesus is fully God and fully man, a truth that has enormous benefits, namely that He alone is qualified to represent both parties as a mediator of the New Covenant and bridge the gap between God and man. This statement would have been direct refutation of the Gnostics of that day, who believed that matter is evil and, therefore, Jesus could not have been God. To them a holy God would have never taken on sinful flesh. Yet Jesus lived a sinless life and did not clothe Himself in sin until the cross (2 *Corinthians* 5:21).

Included in the credentials of Christ, Paul added, “He is the head over all rule and authority” (v.10). Once again this was a restatement of a previous point (1:16), but it was an important reminder. No teacher could claim to have authority from a higher source than Christ, for even the angels were under the authority of their Creator God. In fact, Paul carried Christ’s superiority even further, when he wrote, “When He [God the Father] had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him [Christ the Son]” (v.15). In short, Christ ended any threat that Satan and the demons posed by defeating them at the cross. His sacrifice for sin defanged the sting of death and disarmed any power they had over God’s people!

Second, Paul confronted the claim that since Christ was insufficient in His credentials, the salvation that He offered to men was naturally insufficient. He wrote, “In Him you have been made complete” (v.10). *Since Christ is completely God, then the salvation we have in Him is completely sufficient, lacking nothing.* To satisfy the wrath of God, because of our sin, and to gain His eternal favor, all we need is Christ, nothing more, nothing less. No one else (which includes us) can achieve what Christ has done on our behalf. Listen to Paul’s words again, “When [we] were dead in [our] transgressions... He made [us] alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt... which He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (v.13, 14). Wow! What more can be accomplished anywhere by anyone? Christ has done it all! Our certificate of debt was the penalty of sin that continued to pile up on us and which we could never pay on our own. It “consisted of decrees against us” and which were “hostile to us” (v.14). These decrees were the commandments of the law, the requirements of God to be holy and perfect, as He is, to which we fall short (*Romans* 3:23). When Christ died on the cross, He erased that insurmountable debt. We now have a new decree in our favor that reads, “Paid in full!” Praise God!

Third, Paul challenged the false teaching of the Judaizers who required circumcision as a means of salvation. He wrote, “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...” (v.11). In the Old Testament, circumcision was a removal of flesh that had great symbolism. It identified the people of God, the Jews. For Christians, that symbolism of identity is baptism (v.12). While baptism is an external act that others see, Paul wrote that it represented an internal act by which Christ “cut out” the sinfulness of men through forgiveness (without hands); therefore, since we have been spiritually circumcised in Christ, there is no need for the old physical circumcision. Because of the sufficiency of Christ and our salvation in Him, Paul will move next to their application (2:18-23).

¹⁶“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 – ¹⁷things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸Let 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, ¹⁹and 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. ²⁰If 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 ²¹‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’ ²²(which all refer to things destined to perish with use) – in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? ²³These 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.”

The Appearance of Wisdom

Let No One Defraud You of Your Prize

Leading Idea

Christ, who has fully expunged our debt to sin, has fully freed us from man-made restrictions.

After having explained the sufficiency of Christ to the Colossians (2:9-15), Paul, in this passage, directly applied that truth to the false teachings to which they were being exposed. Thus, he used the transitional word “therefore” (v.16). Christ, who is fully God, has fully expunged our debt to sin and, as a result, has fully freed us from man-made restrictions, requirements, and rituals (v.16-23). This truth is the theme of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, in which he wrote, “It was for freedom that Christ set you free, therefore... do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery” (*Galatians 5:1*).

Christ came to set us free from rules, rituals, and regulations. That is grace! We are under grace now and are no longer under law, which explains why Paul wrote, “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in...” man-made requirements (v.18), which will never earn the approval of God. To what prize is Paul referring? The prize is the life, love, and liberty we enjoy in Christ, in who He is and what He has done for us. We are no longer under mandates of man-made religions but are now under the life-giving lordship of Christ, who has liberated us to grow in Him. “Hold fast to the head” (Christ), Paul wrote, “from whom the body is supplied and held together and grows...” (v.19). Jesus said Himself, “Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (*Matthew 11:30*). We are free in Christ!

Zealous Jews (called Judaizers) and deceitful Gnostics had convinced Colossian Christians to adhere to meaningless rules regarding what they could eat, drink, and touch, what holy days to observe, where to direct their prayers, and when they were to worship (v.16-18). These types of rituals were descriptive of the old Mosaic covenant but never meant to be observed by new covenant Christians. Most, if not all of those rituals, were symbolic of aspects of Christ’s ministry, which were “mere shadows of what was to come” (v.17, see also *Hebrews 8:5; 10:1*). They were fulfilled and, therefore, done away with; “the substance belongs to Christ” (v.17). Take, for example, circumcision; while required of Old Testament Jews, it was replaced by baptism and, thus, New Testament Christians are no longer required to be circumcised in the flesh.

Unfortunately, Christians are still hindered by the man-made requirements of false religions. Paul challenged this falsehood, “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why do you submit yourself to decrees...” (v.20-22). Judaizers and Gnostics convinced Colossians to pray to angels as a form of humility, an unworthiness to approach God directly. But to pray to angels is to discredit the work of Christ, who gave His followers access to the throne of God through His blood (*Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-22*). Similarly, Roman Catholics still appeal to Mary or to the saints, instead of appealing directly to God; but to appeal to anyone other than Christ Himself is to discredit His work on the cross. There is only one mediator between God and man, the person of Christ (*1 Timothy 2:5*).

All man-made religions will include requirements, rituals, and regulations, external works to earn the favor of God. They “may have the appearance of wisdom... but are of no value against fleshly indulgence” (v.23). No amount of self-awareness, self-discipline, self-will, or self-neglect can avert the temptations and tendencies of our sinful nature. The “self” is the problem. Therefore, the “self” cannot be used to combat its own shortcomings; something or Someone outside of the “self” must help us. In other words, our fallen nature can only be overcome through the power of Christ and through His indwelling Spirit. To rely upon the discipline of the “self” is just another way of deifying the “self.”

In regard to rituals, questions are often raised here about baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Why do we observe these ordinances if Christ has set us free from requirements? Simply put, they are commanded to be observed by Christ. However, neither baptism nor the Lord’s Supper are works required for salvation but instead are works of obedience because of our salvation.

Hidden With Christ

Christ Is Our Life

¹“Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

Leading Idea

Since we are followers of Christ, we no longer follow the ways of the world.

Between Chapters 2 and 3 in *Colossians*, Paul, as he did in other letters (*i.e. Ephesians*), made a clear transition from *orthodoxy* (doctrine) to *orthopraxy* (practice). So far, he has focused on the sufficiency of Christ, who He was and what He did. Next, he addressed the ramifications of such a truth, the practical application of believing that Christ is all that’s necessary for salvation. Thus, the second half of Paul’s letter (*Colossians 3, 4*) is full of specific action steps, a to-do list for all believers (*3:1-4:6*).

After making his case in regards to the fact that Christ has set them free from all man-made rituals and requirements (*2:16-23*), Paul challenged the Colossians to escape the muck and mire of the world by focusing only on what God desires for them. “Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above... Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (*3:1, 2*). Simply put, *since we are followers of Christ, then we no longer follow the ways of the world.*

Notice how closely Paul said that we are connected to Christ. We, our old selves, have died with Him (*v.3*). We have been resurrected with Him into new selves (*v.1*). We are hidden in Him (*v.3*). We will be revealed with Him when He returns (*v.4*). *Our complete identity is Christ*. Paul wrote, “He is our life” (*v.4*). If Christ is now our life, then the ways of our old life in the world will fall away. Our new life will grow more and more into the likeness of Christ with help from His indwelling Spirit (*Romans 8:29*). What does that look like exactly? Paul explained.

First, as we are given new life in Christ, our mind is affected. It begins to dwell on new thoughts, thoughts of what Christ has done for us, thoughts of who we are in Him, thoughts of how we can be more like Him, and thoughts of being with Him some day. Our minds also begin to view the world from His perspective. We think differently than those people of the world. We see people with His eyes. We speak to people with His words; and, we treat people the way that He treated them. We seek Him for direction. We submit to His lordship and we obey His authority. After all, “He is seated at the right hand of God” the Father (*v.1*), an honor He received after perfectly fulfilling on earth what He was sent here to do (*Philippians 2:5-11*).

How exactly do we “seek the things above” or “set our minds on the things above”? Our earthly minds dwell on heavenly thoughts as they are filled with heavenly truths from God’s Word, the Bible. It is so important that we read the Scriptures regularly, that we meditate on them, memorize them, study them, and carry them with us. As we fill our minds with God’s Word, then we fill our days doing God’s will, and the ways of the world become less and less attractive to us. As a result, we live differently than those around us. Our feet may be here on earth but our minds and hearts are in heaven. We do not look like the world. We do not think like the world. We do not talk like the world, and we do not act like the world. Here, then, is the second aspect of the Christian life that Paul addressed – what the new life in Christ looks like (*Colossians 3:6-4:6*).

Before we consider the external application of this new life in Christ, let’s consider the truth that “You have died and your life is hidden with Christ” (*v.3*). What did Paul mean here? First, God no longer sees your sinful nature; it is dead, covered in the blood of Jesus, and hidden in His righteousness (*2 Corinthians 5:21*). That righteousness will not be revealed until you receive your glorified body at His return (*1 John 3:2*). Second, your righteousness, redemption, inheritance, etc. are safe with Christ and will be revealed at His return. Your destiny is tied to Him. Third, while you still look to others like the same person on the outside, you are vastly different on the inside. Your true identity is hidden with Christ. Though others may see evidence that you have changed, they truly do not know what has happened. Upon Christ’s return, everyone will know who you really are because that which is hidden in Christ will be revealed to all “in glory,” in heaven.

⁵“Therefore, consider the members of your body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶ For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 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 – 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.”

A Change of Clothes

A Life of Renewal

Leading Idea

In Christ, we put aside the old self to put on the new self, which is being conformed to His image.

After defending the sufficiency of Christ in the first half of his letter to the Colossians (*Chapters 1, 2*), Paul switched gears and challenged them to stand out as followers of Christ. True followers of Christ no longer adhere to the ways of the world (*3:1-4*); instead their thoughts, attitudes, motives, words, and actions undergo a change to be more like Him. Paul described this transformation like changing clothes. He wrote phrases like “put aside” (*v.8*) and “lay aside the old self” (*v.9*) and, instead, “put on the new self” (*v.10*).

While Paul condemned *asceticism* (self-discipline to earn God’s favor), he promoted *sanctification*, a process in which one changes over time, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, expressing externally (in the body) what Christ has done internally. To sanctify means to purify or set apart for a purpose. As Christians, our purpose is to glorify Christ wherever we go and in whatever we do so that others will also come to know Him as their Savior (*Matthew 5:14-16; 28:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 10:31*). It is impossible for believers to glorify Christ when we live like the unbelieving world. There must be a noticeable difference. Our transformation into Christlikeness may not happen overnight, but if our conversion is genuine and we have surrendered our life to Him, then our transformation is inevitable, only a matter of time (*Romans 8:29, 30; 12:2; Philippians 1:6*).

The reason why we need a transformation is because our new nature is trapped inside of our old bodies, our original sinful, selfish flesh. Therefore, these two are in constant conflict with one another; the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, desires to glorify Christ, while our flesh simply wants to pursue sinful, selfish pleasures, those things that deserve “the wrath of God” (*v.6*). However, Paul challenged the Colossian Christians to consider themselves “dead” to these things (*v.5*). Because Christ has conquered sin on the cross and His Spirit lives within us, we too, by His power, can overcome sin’s hold on our lives. Now, we will never reach perfection while trapped inside our flesh, but “He who began a good work in us will perfect it,” or complete it, until He returns (*Philippians 1:6*). Upon Christ’s return or our earthly death, we will be liberated from our corrupted bodies and will be like Him, free from sin forever.

In the meantime, Paul wrote that “we should consider ourselves dead to sin and put aside immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, greed, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech. Notice that Paul addressed actions, thoughts, motives, and words. Because of Christ, we should see a difference in our relationship with all of these areas. Like newborn babies, who are complete human beings, need time to mature and develop, so Christians mature and develop over time. Rather than becoming “conformed to the ways of the world, we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds through Christ Jesus” (*Romans 12:2*). With the influence of His Spirit in our hearts, His Word in our minds, and His people in our path, we will “be renewed to a true knowledge, according to the image of the One who created us” (*v.10*).

Finally, this incredible renewal knows no distinction. Anyone can be changed; it doesn’t matter who you are – “Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian (who were considered uncivilized), slave or freeman.” (*v.11*). The influence of the Holy Spirit has no barriers. No person is outside of His reach. No lifestyle is outside of His transformative power. “Christ is all,” Paul wrote, “and in all.” The phrase “Christ is all” is a wonderful three-word summary of Paul’s letter to the Colossians. He is sufficient! He is all we need! Furthermore, Christ is the end of all social barriers – economic status, ethnic differences, nationalities, genders, etc. In Christ, there is unity of all peoples. He is our common bond. People of every tribe, every tongue, and every nation can live together in harmony because of the work of our Savior. Individual transformation should lead to social transformation. A people transformed by Him can live in unity despite their diversity.

¹²“So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; ¹³bearing with one another and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

Chosen of God

John 15:16
Romans 8:29
Romans 9:10-24
Ephesians 1:4
2 Thessalonians 2:13
2 Timothy 1:8, 9
1 Peter 1:1, 2

The Perfect Bond of Unity

A Recipe for Reconciliation

Leading Idea

When the people of God mirror the character of God, then living together in peace is possible.

To set this passage in context, we must look back at Paul’s previous string of thoughts (3:1-11). He challenged his Colossian readers to stand out from the world by putting aside and putting off its sinful, selfish thoughts, motives, words, and actions. In this passage (v.12-15), he encouraged them to “put on” new qualities, qualities that reflect the life and ministry of Christ. *As the people of God, we should mirror the character of God.* When we do, living together in peace is possible.

However, before we dive into Paul’s recipe for reconciliation, let’s consider ten words that he used to describe the followers of Christ – “chosen of God, holy and beloved” (v.12) and “called in one body” (v.15). First, “chosen of God.” The Bible is clear that before creation, God elected that some people would choose to follow Him in salvation (see references in margin), not because of any righteousness of their own but because of His sovereign will and mercy. Second, because of God’s grace, their corrupted nature was replaced with the holiness of Christ (*Romans 3:21-26; 1 Cor. 1:2, 30; 2 Cor. 5:21*). Third, as His children and heirs, the Church (or *ekklesia*, “called out ones”) is precious to Him; His redeemed followers, for which He bought with the price of His son, are “beloved,” His most precious possession in this world. Finally, because He has purchased them, they are “one body,” with Christ as their common bond; and, thus, they are to live in unity with one another as a demonstration to all of what God can do in the lives of His people.

However, even redeemed sinners, living in close proximity with one another, will have problems from time to time. Life is messy and, thus, we must practice being gracious with others as God has been gracious with us. Therefore, Paul commanded the Colossians to “put on” or exhibit certain qualities, qualities that would encourage unity in the body of Christ. He wrote, “put on a heart of *compassion* (a sympathy for or suffering with others), *kindness* (good will, benevolence, or attention to the wants and needs of others), *humility* (freedom from pride or arrogance), *gentleness* (softness of manners, mildness of temper), and *patience* (a calm temper which endures without complaint), *bearing* with one another, *forgiving* each other, as the Lord forgave you” (v.11-13).

Though this list alone is fantastic, Paul added three more qualities that would help promote unity. He wrote, “Beyond all these put on *love*...” (v.14). Then, “let the *peace* of Christ rule in your hearts (a state of quiet or harmony, freedom from internal commotion); and be *thankful*” (impressed with kindnesses shown and ready to acknowledge them).

What an excellent recipe that Paul has concocted here for people to get along – compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, love, peace, and thankfulness – a recipe not only for unity within the Church but for unity within any group – a family, a team, an organization, a business, or a society. What we normally witness, when sinful people live or work together, are selfishness, pride, impatience, anger, resentment, spitefulness, gossip, ingratitude, and quarrels, which ultimately lead to disharmony. The qualities that Paul suggested are ideal but they are difficult to incorporate; they are not consistent with human nature. However, for Christians they are consistent with His indwelling Spirit. We cannot exhibit them in our flesh, but rather we must submit to His leadership and allow His character to be expressed through us.

Of the ingredients that Paul listed, the most important of them is *love*. He called it “the perfect bond of unity,” the best *glue* for people to do life together. One could place love as the foundation for the rest, the basis and springboard for them all. Still, love for others is not a natural tendency but a supernatural one. With God, who is love, dwelling in us, we cannot help but to love others (*1 John 4:7, 8*). Which of these qualities are you practicing? Which of them do you need to work on? Are you allowing the love of God to be expressed to those around you? It is the best glue for unity.

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

Richly or Poorly?

Loving God's Word

Leading Idea

When the word of Christ dwells in us richly, it will produce great dividends.

In the previous passage (3:12-15), Paul encouraged the Colossians to exhibit Christ-like character that would help to produce peace and unity among them -- compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, love, peace, and thankfulness. However, what he did not mention was the source of these qualities. Where do they come from?

The Apostle wrote similar instructions to the Ephesians. “Do not get drunk with wine,” he said, “for that is dissipation (excessiveness), but *be filled with the Spirit*, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for all things *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father...*” (5:18-20). To the Ephesians, Paul wrote to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but to the Colossians he challenged them to “let the word of Christ richly dwell within” them. So then, which is it? Which one is the source of our peace, unity, and Christlikeness?

It is not one or the other but both working together. Certainly, it is the indwelling Holy Spirit who enables us to live the Christian life. We cannot do it in our own strength. However, the Spirit will be more effective in the lives of those who purposefully allow “the word of Christ” to dwell “richly” or abundantly within them (v.16). Those of us who are filling our minds with Scripture, daily meditating on God's Word, submitting ourselves to its authority, and willingly obeying the Lord's will for our lives, are breaking up the soil of our hearts and allowing God to plant seeds that will bear fruit. Conversely, how effective can the Spirit be in the lives of those in whom “the word of Christ” dwells poorly, who never expose themselves to the instructions of the Lord, who never place themselves under His authority or obey His statutes? Their hearts will be hard and their lives fruitless.

So then, what are the results of letting “the word of Christ dwell in us richly”? Paul gives us four by-products. First, we will grow in *wisdom* (v.16). No other resource will equip us for everyday life better than the Bible. Solomon wrote, “God gives wisdom to men, for out of His mouth (Word) come knowledge and understanding” (*Proverbs 2:6*). James wrote, “If anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God...” (1:5). The Creator of the universe knows His creation best; His perspective, His worldview makes the most sense of the world. Why would we not ask Him to help us live the life He gave us?

Second, allowing the word of Christ to richly dwell within us enables us “to *teach* and *admonish*” others (v.16). To teach means to instruct or give direction. To admonish means “to warn, to notify, to reprove with mildness, to counsel, or to caution” (*Webster's 1828*). Simply put, we cannot impart to others what we do not know or do ourselves. When we dig in to God's Word, a natural effect is that we will be better equipped not only for our own spiritual walk but also to aid others in their spiritual journey. Paul wrote to Timothy, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable..., so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good deed” (2 *Timothy 3:16, 17*).

Third, when we let the word of Christ richly dwell within us, we will overflow with *thanksgiving* (v.16, 17). When we begin to understand what God the Father has done for us through His Son, Jesus, our hearts will be swollen with gratitude, so much so that our mouths will be filled with worship and praise – “songs and hymns and spiritual songs” (v.16). Are you thankful for what God has done in your life? Is your gratitude evident by the words of your mouth?

Finally, when we let the word of Christ richly dwell within us, we will glorify Him, “doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v.17). What does that look like? Paul surrounded this verse with examples – striving for unity among His people (v.12-15) and living in a way that honors the Lord (v.18-25). When we learn to love God's Word, we will learn to live God's way.

¹⁸ “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.” ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. ²⁰ Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this well-pleasing to the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart. ²² 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. ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. ²⁵ For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality. ^{4:1} Masters, grant to your slaves justice and fairness, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven.”

Rules for Relationships

Marriage, Family, and Work

Leading Idea

When we honor God first in our relationships, we will naturally honor others.

In the previous passage (3:16, 17), Paul revealed the source of a Christian’s life and practice – the word of Christ, which is to dwell in us richly. When that happens, one of the byproducts is that we will glorify God in all that we do. As a practical expression of that truth, Paul applied it to every day relationships within a marriage, a family, and the work place (similar to *Ephesians 5:22-6:9*).

First, regarding marriage, Paul addressed wives and wrote, “Be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (v.18). His instruction here in no way diminishes the value or equality of women. Every person is made in the image of God and is, therefore, equal and valuable. To “be subject” means to follow willingly or to place oneself under another’s authority. It is a matter of choice not coercion. In the marriage relationship, God has assigned the husband the leadership role, and when a wife humbly submits to God’s design, she is glorifying the Lord and honoring her husband.

Second, Paul addressed husbands. “Love your wives,” he wrote, “and do not be embittered against them” (v.19). Though husbands are assigned the leadership role in marriage, they are not to lead in a way as to lord their wives but to love them, humbly, gently, considerately. Husbands are not to become bitter with them, meaning they should not treat them harshly, cruelly, or in a hurtful manner. As all relationships are, marriage is a two-way street; as both partners fulfill their God-given roles, then their marriage is better for it. As the husband treats his wife with unselfish kindness, the wife will be more inclined to follow his leadership; and, if the wife unselfishly follows her husband, then he is more inclined to lead her in a loving way.

Next, Paul addressed children and parents. “Children, be obedient to your parents, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord” (v.20). Until a child leaves his home, he is to play a subordinate role in the household; this honors the order that God has established in the home. Notice, in regards to parents, that Paul addressed fathers only. This is not a slight to mothers but a reminder to fathers, that they are the God-ordained leaders of the family. Their instruction and discipline should be honoring to the Lord, firm but gentle, providing accountability without “exasperating” their children, without unduly irritating or angering them. Here again we see a two-way street. Children who honor their parents are easier to deal with, while parents who are firm but gentle are easier to obey.

Finally, Paul addressed “slaves and masters.” It is important to note that the Bible is not condoning slavery but rather speaking into the reality of the ancient world. Unfortunately, in both the Roman and Jewish cultures, there were those who were servants for one reason or another. If Paul were speaking to our culture, he would use the terms “employees” and “employers.”

To employees he instructed genuine obedience, not only when people are watching but with “sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord” (v.22). God is watching at all times. Thus, to please Him, we are to do our work with all our heart (v.23), to the best of our ability with a good attitude, as if we were doing it for the Lord. In other words, the effort or excellence in which we do our work should not be dependent on whether we like our boss or not, whether we are being watched or not, or whether we are being paid well or not. God sees all things, and He is the one who will reward our efforts, even if no one else appreciates them (v.24). Likewise, those who cheat, slack off, or rebel against authority will be dealt with by God; even if no one else sees what we do, there will be consequences for our actions (v.25).

To employers, Paul instructed “justice and fairness,” remembering that God is watching them as well. They are to deal with their employees as they would want God to deal with them, never abusive or threatening but honoring loyalty, hard work, and excellence. Christ in us is the hope of the world; if we glorified Him in all we that we did, what a difference it would make in every area of life.

²“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving, ³ 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, ⁴ that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. ⁵ Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. ⁶ Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.”

Salty Words

Making the Most of Our Opportunities

Leading Idea

Pray and prepare for sharing the Gospel with unbelievers.

Before Paul closed his letter to the Colossians (4:7-18), he added one more way to “Set your mind on the things above...” (3:2). First, he challenged them to live differently than unbelievers (3:3-10), next to live in unity with other believers (3:11-17), and, then, to honor God in their relationships (3:18-4:1). Finally, he added the challenge of devotion to prayer and seizing every opportunity to share Christ with “outsiders.” Paul was consumed with the most important things in life. He never lost sight of his purpose, and he never failed to challenge others to keep their focus as well.

The focal point that Paul emphasized here is *evangelism*, sharing Christ with others. It is our highest calling in life to “go and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19), to be “ambassadors for Christ,” so that we can be used to reconcile others with God (2 Corinthians 5:20). Though our busy lives are full of all sorts of activities, they are but distractions from our primary assignment, which is to be “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). Considering this reminder, how we live our lives, how we get along with other believers, and how we deal with our relationships all have an impact on our effectiveness to share the Gospel. They can either be *helpful* or *harmful* to our testimony. They can be helpful in the sense that others see a difference in us, the positive change that God has made in our life. They can be hurtful in the sense that if we think and act and talk like the world, unbelievers will see no difference in us and, therefore, nothing about our lives will commend a relationship with Christ.

With this focal point of *evangelism*, let’s consider Paul’s admonitions. First, he asserted, “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving” (v.2). To devote oneself is “to direct one’s attention wholly or chiefly” (Webster’s 1828). Prayer is to be a regular, ongoing exercise for Christians, a healthy habit in which we talk with God “without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). When we pray, it is to be with an attitude of gratefulness for what God has done in our lives, for what He has provided, and, concerning evangelism, for using us to bring others to Him. With that in mind, Paul exhorted the Colossians to “keep alert” in prayer. What does that mean exactly?

To keep alert in prayer could mean several things. Jesus told His disciples in Gethsemane to “Watch and pray,” so that they might not “enter into temptation” (Matthew 26:41). Prayer is not something we do for leisure; we are to be fervent and focused, mindful, intentional, looking for and praying against the enemy’s traps. But, in regard to evangelism, keeping alert in prayer insinuates that we ask God for divine appointments with people, opportunities to share Christ with them; and, then, we are to be ready when they come, expectant, so that we can “make the most of the opportunity” (v.5). Paul said as much when he asked the Colossians to pray that God would “open the door” of opportunity for him to share the Gospel with more people (v.3, 4). Even while in prison, Paul was alert for “open doors” to share Christ. He didn’t ask for them to pray for good health or to be released; he asked that he be used for the advancement of the Gospel. Contrast that prayer request with what we normally ask of God.

Paul also added to “conduct yourselves with wisdom towards outsiders, making the most of the opportunity” (v.5). It is important how we act with believers, but it is even more important how we act with unbelievers. A careless act or word could leave a lasting impression in their mind against the Gospel, whereas thoughtful, purposeful acts and words could impact others positively for Christ. Our conversations with “outsiders” need to be strategic. We should desire to develop relationships with unbelievers but with the goal of introducing them to Christ. Paul warned the Colossians to make sure their words were gracious, “seasoned as if with salt” (v.6). Salty words are more than kind words, encouraging words, or positive words; salty words make people “thirsty,” leading them to Christ, the Living Water (John 4:9-14). When talking with unbelievers, our words will either lead them towards or away from the Gospel. Pray for opportunities, be alert, and be ready to use “salty” words.

Playing Your Part

Fulfilling Your Ministry

Leading Idea

God has work for each of us to do in His kingdom; we must be faithful to fulfill it.

⁷ As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant...will bring you information. ⁸ 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; ⁹ and with him Onesimus.. who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here. ¹⁰ 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 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. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of your number... 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. ¹³ For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and Demas. ¹⁵ 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 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.

The closing passage of Paul's letter to the Colossians is more logistical in nature than the rest, similar to making announcements in a worship service. However, it is no less important, because it helps us piece together what was going on at the time of Paul's imprisonment and who the people were who were helping him. Like Nehemiah's list of wall builders (*Chapter 5*), the most effective ministries involve a host of "faithful fellow workers," all doing their part in the advancement of the Gospel. Paul exhibited great humility and gratitude for including them in this valuable letter.

The first name mentioned was Tychicus (v.7, 8). He was a Gentile convert and one of Paul's most trusted emissaries, referred to as a "beloved brother and faithful servant," carrying his letters to the Colossians, Ephesians (6:21), and Philemon (v.9). We find him not only assisting in Paul's ministry but given important posts in the early church (2 Timothy 4:12; Titus 3:12). The second name mentioned was Onesimus from Colossae (v.9), the runaway slave who is one of the main characters in Paul's letter to Philemon. After spending time with the Apostle Paul, he surrendered his life to Christ and became convicted to return to Colossae and serve his master (Philemon). Here is an incredible testimony of what Christ can do in an individual's life and relationships. Next, Paul mentioned Aristarchus (v.10), who was from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4; 27:2). He accompanied Paul on this third journey. He was seized and nearly killed in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). Notice that Paul referred to him as "my fellow prisoner." Evidently, Aristarchus was also arrested and jailed in Rome (Philemon 24).

Barnabas's cousin, Mark, is mentioned next (v.10). Mark (sometimes called John Mark) joined Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 13) but eventually dropped out and returned home. This decision caused a rift between Paul and Barnabas, who decided to split up the second time around (Acts 15:36-41). However, the fact that Paul included Mark in his letter to the Colossians and encouraged them to "welcome him" gives us an indication that Paul had forgiven Mark and their relationship had been reconciled (2 Timothy 4:11). Here is another victory for the power of Christ.

The man called Jesus or Justus was mentioned next (v.11). Since no one would want to be compared to the Savior, this man was more commonly called Justus. We know very little about him, except that he was a converted Jew who assisted and encouraged Paul in Rome. Next, Paul mentioned Epaphras (v.12, 13), who was from Colossae and perhaps helped to start the church there (Acts 19:1-10), which explained his deep concern and constant praying for them (Colossians 1:7-12). Luke is next, Paul's "beloved physician" and chronicler (v.14). Luke often travelled with Paul and, of course, wrote the Gospel of Luke, as well as the book of Acts. Mentioned here also is Demas, who was faithful to the ministry until the attractions of the world led him astray (2 Timothy 4:9, 10; Philemon 24). Paul also mentioned Nympha (v.15). There is uncertainty as to whether this person was a man or woman, but one thing is clear is that the Laodicean church met in this person's home.

Finally, before Paul signed off "with his own hand" (v.18), Archippus was mentioned (v.17). Again, we don't know much about this man but Paul's exhortation to him is noteworthy. "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." As I read this list of Paul's fellow workers, I can't help but be reminded that Paul was not the only one with a ministry. God had called each of these individuals to do His work and, in their own way, assist the spread of the Gospel. Likewise, God has work for you to do, a part to play in His kingdom ministry, whether that is simply serving like Tychicus and Onesimus, enduring persecution for your faith like Aristarchus, being an encourager like Justus or a prayer warrior like Epaphras, being a light in the work force like Luke the physician, or showing hospitality like Nympha. No matter what you have done in the past, you can, like Mark, redeem it through Christ and glorify Him through your service. Do you know what your ministry is? Take heed that you are doing your best to fulfill it.