

COMPLETE IN HIM
Notes of Sermons
on the Epistle to the Colossians

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1. CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATION

Colossians 1.1-8

Brief background to this epistle

Colosse was situated in what was known as the Lycos Valley. At the time this letter was written it was part of the Roman province of Western Asia Minor. This area is now part of modern-day Turkey.

By the time the Apostle Paul wrote this epistle, Colosse had lost its original powerful identity. It had before been the largest city and power base in the locality, but now it was the nearby Roman city of Laodicea, renowned for its cloth, which was the prosperous financial centre. Remember Christ's message in *The Book of Revelation* to Laodicea!

'Because you say, "I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—"I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see' Revelation 3.17-18.

Also mentioned in the epistle is the city of Hierapolis. This city was renowned for its healthy water spas and its temples where various gods were worshipped. This was the holiday and tourist centre of the region, attracting numerous visitors.

Hendriksen comments: 'If one was looking for health, pleasure or relaxation one would go to Hierapolis; if a person was interested in trade or politics he would direct his steps to Laodicea.'

Colosse was the city on the Eastern Highway which had to be gone through to reach the now more important, interesting and developing cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

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What is the significance of all this? It reminds us that God often works in places which are not considered fashionable by society. This is to demonstrate His sovereign grace – His ways are higher than our ways. Jesus was known as ‘Jesus of Nazareth’. One of the reasons for His rejection was, ‘*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*’ (John 1.46).

My first pastorate was in the town of Melksham, considered to be the Nazareth of Wiltshire, the town that you pass through on your way to the picturesque town of Bradford-on-Avon and city of Bath. But there, in that town despised by society, God in His sovereign grace determined to work.

What were the problems identified in this epistle?

While in prison in Rome, Paul had a visit from Epaphras, the minister of the church at Colosse. On the whole Paul received a favourable report of the church. This is reflected in his opening greetings.

‘We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel’ Colossians 1.3-5.

‘For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ’ Colossians 2.5.

However, although the church was on a firm footing, it faced great danger from false teachers. The church was predominately made up of Gentile converts who had been delivered from the darkness and sensuality of paganism. They were trophies of God’s grace who were trusting in Christ alone. But this simple and yet profound, God-given faith was being aggressively tested.

Let us picture in our minds something of the challenges faced in

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addition to that of simply living in a society given over to paganism and immorality.

a. They were being pressurised by the false teachers to conform to traditional rites

‘In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ’ Colossians 2.11.

For example, the false teachers were saying that to be acceptable to God you needed more than faith in Christ alone; you at least needed to be circumcised. ‘You need Christ plus’, said the false teachers.

b. They were being pressurised into ceremony, legalism and the observance of special days

‘So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths’ Colossians 2.16.

‘You need Christ plus’, said the false teachers.

c. They were also being targeted by those advocating mysticism and the worship of angels

‘Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God’ Colossians 2.18-19.

Believers were being told by the false teachers, ‘You have something missing. You need ecstatic experiences – the higher life! There is an easier way than the disciplined Christian life. Come to our meetings. They are exciting and we enjoy extra and special revelation.’ ‘You need Christ plus’, said the false teachers.

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d. Then there were those who insisted the only way to overcome was to neglect the body

‘These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh’ Colossians 2.23.

Continually fast, abuse your body, display your humility to the world through self-imposed depravation. ‘You need Christ plus’, said the false teachers.

The Christians at Colosse were being fed from various camps with heretical philosophy that their Christian faith needed some added extras. They were being given the false notion that they were somehow missing out on something. They were being tempted either to drift back into legalism, or drift into the cul-de-sac of mysticism, all based on the heretical notion that faith alone in Christ alone was insufficient.

As a illustration, when you purchase a car there are what are known as optional extras – the basic model plus! So on the car dashboard there are some blanks where switches could be. What extras is the car missing? What would have been there if you had the fully specified model?

What Paul is saying to the Colossians is that true Christian faith in Christ alone is sufficient. You are not missing out on anything. Christ is the fully specified model! There are no extras! Everything is found in Christ, ‘...in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge’ (Colossians 2.3).

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ’ Ephesians 1.3.

It is Christ alone, not Christ plus!

How does Paul address the problem?

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‘Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother’ Colossians 1.1.

Paul writes to the church with his God-given authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ. He ministers having been called – he serves according to the will of God. This is not Paul exalting himself; it is Paul respecting the office to which God has called him.

When we read the Bible we are reading the inspired Word of God. When the apostles ministered they did so under the special anointing power of God. Paul reminds the church of his God-given office under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In so doing he focuses their attention on Jesus Christ and the sovereignty of God: it is not a matter of my will, but God’s will. He had a right respect for his God-given office as an apostle.

Christ is speaking through the Apostle Paul. He reminds them of his partnership in the Gospel with Timothy, a brother in the Lord. Timothy was not an apostle, but was respected by Paul as a minister being used of God.

‘To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’ Colossians 1.2.

He addresses the church as being *‘saints and faithful brethren’* (verse 2).

- Saints – Paul reminds us of the privileged status of a Christian: set apart and consecrated to serve the Lord and to glorify God. It is a solemn responsibility.
- Faithful – called to be faithful to God, His Word, His people and the Gospel.

Paul’s desire for them is grace and peace, in that order to remind us of the way to peace. Paul is referring here to God’s saving grace and the blessing of peace with God through atonement. There can be no

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peace with God or in our hearts without the experience of grace in our hearts.

'We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you' Colossians 1.3.

Why emphasis this point about God being the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Because it is through Christ that God the Father bestows all blessings to His people. It is upon Christ that the Father has bestowed the authority as Lord of the Church.

The opening greetings and encouragement of the Apostle Paul teach profound pastoral lessons. Consistently Paul commences on a positive note in his letters, focusing on the good points. You will notice this, for example, in his letter to the church at Corinth before he corrects them (*1 Corinthians 1.4-9*). If we are to learn from the Apostle Paul's ministry, we need to focus first on the positives, to encourage.

If we are to learn from Paul we will acknowledge the importance of Christian tact, to greet and communicate with one another thoughtfully and graciously.

Here we are given two essential exercises for meaningful fellowship among the Lord's people.

1. Be thankful for each other – appreciate, enjoy, respect, support, understand and be sincere.
2. Pray for one another – pray meaningfully, intelligently and thoughtfully.

Paul thanked God for:

a. Faith in Christ Jesus

'...since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus' Colossians 1.4a.

This is profound trust in Christ Jesus alone.

'All my hope on God is founded' (Robert Seymour Bridges, 1844-1930, from Joachim Neander, 1650-80) – total dependence.

b. Love for the Lord's people

'...and of your love for all the saints' Colossians 1.4b.

Are your best friends among the Lord's people? This love is loyal, constant, giving and unconditional.

c. Hope in Heaven through the Gospel

'...because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel' Colossians 1.5.

Note here the hope linked to the message of the Gospel which is the truth. Paul refers to this in *Romans 1.1* as *'the gospel of God'*.

Note the triad of faith, love and hope. This is a pattern set down by the Lord Jesus Himself. For example, in *John 11*:

Love: *'Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus' v5;*

Hope: *'Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live"' v 25;*

Faith: *'And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?' v 26*

These three are also linked in these references:

'And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love' 1 Corinthians 13.13.

'Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works' Hebrews 10.22-24.

'...remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labour of

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love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father’ 1 Thessalonians 1.3.

The true Gospel is for the true benefit of sinners, then saints – this is the focus of the Gospel. It has ‘*come to you*’, and it is ‘*among you*’.

d. Fruitfulness

‘...which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth’ Colossians 1.6.

The Gospel of God sent forth in power.

e. Love in the Spirit of God

‘...as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit’ Colossians 1.7-8.

The firstfruit of the Spirit is this unique Christian love. Note how Paul ensures the Triune God is part of the opening greetings.

Here are key fruits to watch out for and desire in the Christian life: faith in God – love for God – hope in God, bringing a fruitfulness inspired by Christian love. Paul sees these fruits in the church at Colosse and thanks the Lord for these evidences of grace. In his encouragement, Paul is intending to remind the church to hold fast to that which is good. ‘Do not be swayed by another gospel; do not be deprived of the blessing of the true Gospel of truth.’

Note Paul’s support for the faithful ministry of Epaphras. Here is a church under pressure to conform to heresy. Paul stands by Epaphras and encourages the church to stand by their pastor, a minister of Christ.

Conclusion

In this letter Paul will be addressing some issues with the church. However, he begins by focusing on the positive aspects

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in encouragement, pointing to the Lord. From this we learn the importance of procedure and attitude in our communication. Avoid a negative criticism of others, constantly looking on the faults of others. If issues are to be dealt with, always focus on the positives first and be thankful for each other.

‘Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

‘I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in everything by Him in all utterance and all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord’ 1 Corinthians 1.1-9.

Never underestimate the wonders of faith, love and hope, three key elements of the Christian walk.

Always desire the best for one another – grace and peace from God the Father. The grace of God in truth, and the truth of the Gospel.

2. HOW TO PRAY FOR CHRISTIANS

Colossians 1.9-12

‘For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.’

In the last chapter we considered that in this letter Paul addresses some serious issues with the church, but he began by focusing on the positive aspects, and in encouragement, pointing to the Lord. The Apostle Paul now describes his prayer for the church at Colosse – what his desire is for them.

Notice that the news Paul receives regarding the faith, love and hope of the church members encourages prayer for ongoing grace, ongoing growth and ongoing strength, for salvation and sanctification. For this reason we continue to pray; we do not sit back and say, ‘The job is done. There is no need to pray.’

Paul is a teacher of improvement, growth, looking forward and pressing on – in other words, of Christian commitment. Here, as in his Christian communication, we learn a lesson from the Apostle Paul. A church is ‘a work in progress’; it never reaches the point where it can say, ‘We have made it!’ There will always be room for improvement – the more we improve, the more we appreciate Christ. It is an exercise

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unto godliness which has the fruit of a developing peace and joy in believing.

Notice also the value Paul puts upon the fellowship of prayer. This is unique to the Christian Church.

So Paul is praying for the growth and maturing of the church at Colosse. There are certain specific characteristics he prays for which will help and guide them to increase. Notice here how Paul introduces the word 'ask'. He is asking God; his is an asking prayer. Sometimes it can be a criticism of church prayer meetings that they are really asking meetings.

Prayer includes Adoration – Confession – Thanksgiving – Supplication (ACTS). Here Paul focuses specifically upon the supplicating, or asking, aspect of prayer.

Paul prays for the church that they will:

a. *'Be filled with the knowledge of His will'*

This is not speaking of God's specific will for a person in decisions for life. It is rather an understanding of the redemptive will of God in Christ for His people in salvation and sanctification. It is understanding the biblical principles of God's will for the Christian walk as a fruit of salvation. It is understanding how we should respond to the wonderful love of God in Christ Jesus to us.

'And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ' Philippians 1.9-10.

'Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to

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Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith' Romans 11.33-12.3.

See also *Ephesians 1.15-2.10.*

A deepening understanding of the nature of God will result in a deepening understanding of His will.

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction' Proverbs 1.7.

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding' Proverbs 9.10.

'Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses' Psalm 25.12.

'The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant' Psalm 25.14.

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever' Psalm 111.10.

'Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth' Hosea 6.3.

Here the Apostle is warning the church against the claims of the false teachers of superior wisdom. Your knowledge and wisdom is

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gained from a growing understanding of the nature of God, and a deepening appreciation of His redemptive purposes in Christ Jesus by enabling of the Holy Spirit.

b. Walk worthy

This desire is that the Lord's people will walk in a way commensurate with their calling of God. There is a right dignity attached to the call of a Christian; it is God's work going on within a person. It is a call to walk according to their responsibilities as a Christian, and to honour and please the Lord. Here is one of the clearest motives for the Christian walk – living to please the Lord, a striving to please God in learning of Him and living for Him.

'Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God' 1 Corinthians 10.31.

'Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God' 1 Thessalonians 4.1.

'Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God' Colossians 3.22.

'Walking worthy' means having a right respect for our calling and responsibilities, and to walk in a way pleasing to God.

'And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him' John 8.29.

- **Worship**

'I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bull, which has horns and hooves' Psalm 69.30-31.

- **Faith**

'But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who

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comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him' Hebrews 11.6.

- Separation

'So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God' Romans 8.8.

- Following Jesus

'Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus' 1 Thessalonians 4.1-2.

If we are employed as a company representative we have a responsibility to have knowledge of the company, a right attitude and demeanour, integrity, commitment, and to dress appropriately. May the Lord enable us by His Spirit to walk worthy with a desire to please Him. This, in a way, is a simple motto to remember: to walk worthy is to please God.

c. Be fruitful

Here we are reminded that the Lord has a work for us to do for Him. We cannot be fruitful if we are not serving the Lord in some way. There can be a tendency among churches, rightly holding to the doctrines of grace, to despise works. However, this is not biblical. We are saved by grace unto good works that God has before ordained for us (*Ephesians 2.10*). This truth brings a serious application to why we go to worship God. If we believe in the doctrines of grace and their outworking, then each time we attend a worship service, we are there for a purpose.

Good works are an outcome of grace, not the root of grace. Fruitfulness is God's manifestation of His pleasure upon our good works by grace. Fruitfulness and good works go together.

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'The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise' Proverbs 11.30.

- Abiding in Christ

'Ephraim shall say, "What have I to do anymore with idols?" I have heard and observed him. I am like a green cypress tree; your fruit is found in Me' Hosea 14.8.

'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me' John 15.4.

- Receiving the Word

'But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty' Matthew 13.23.

- Praise

'Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name' Hebrews 13.15.

- Living in the Spirit

'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law' Galatians 5.22-23.

d. Be increasing

Late Spring is the time of year to plant out bedding plants. We know these plants exhaust themselves in flowering, and die at the end of the season. But the roses endure through the winter, increase in strength and, after pruning, flower again. Or a shrub will increase in strength and growth year by year.

'Increasing' here has the meaning of steady, constant growth, maturing and enduring all weathers. For a Christian this can only be

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possible as there is a constant abiding in the Vine, Christ Jesus. There are times when we need pruning to bring forth more fruit but the purpose is to increase. Experiencing God's power in our lives in answered prayer, His Word speaking to us enables growth.

- Job

In the experience of Job we note his growth in grace through a deepening knowledge of God.

'I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes'
Job 42.5-6.

- The blessing of God-directed faith

'Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion' Psalm 84.5-7.

- The yearning of a maturing believer

'...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death'
Philippians 3.10.

- Paul's prayer for the Church at Ephesus

'Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of

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His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all' Ephesians 1.15-23.

Notice here how the increase is coming about – through a deepening knowledge of God.

e. Be strengthened

The glorious power of God is gracious, understanding, suitable, perfect and spiritually enriching. It does not consume or destroy us, but enables us in our walk with God. It is a glorious power that is eminently suitable for the needs of the Lord's people. It strengthens in a manner which suits the experience we are growing through at the time. So it may be we are in a crisis situation and the Lord grants physical and mental strength to cope. It may be in an ongoing trial, in which the Lord applies His Word to stabilise us and encourage us. It may be the Lord grants strength to stand for the truth and decide for His honour and glory. How are we being strengthened?

- David

'Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God' 1 Samuel 30.6.

- Rehoboam

'Now it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom and had strengthened himself, that he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel along with him' 2 Chronicles 12.1.

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- Daniel

‘And he said, “O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong!” So when he spoke to me I was strengthened, and said, “Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me”’ Daniel 10.19.

- Paul

*‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’
Philippians 4.13.*

f. Be given patience, longsuffering and joy

These characterise a maturing Christian when these fruits are applied in all experiences of life. ‘All’ is used prefixing these fruits to encompass all aspects of the Christian walk. The reward of patience and longsuffering is the inner joy of living under the new nature, the joy of realising we are privileged to walk with God and exercise these fruits by His grace.

‘The joy of the Lord is your strength’ (Nehemiah 8.10) – the realisation of God’s patience and longsuffering towards us.

‘Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ’ 2 Peter 1.2-8.

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g. Give thanks

Here the thanksgiving is centred on the wonder and privilege of being qualified.

'But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth' John 1.12-14.

h. Be partakers of the inheritance

What is this inheritance? It is described as being in the light. Light has dawned upon our souls in the Person of Jesus Christ, the *'light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'* (2 Corinthians 4.6).

It is the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ; the peace of God passing all understanding, keeping our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus the Lord (see *Philippians 4.7*). He is the Light of the world, the Light of truth, the Light of Heaven and the Light of life. One of the evidences of a converted Christian is coming out of darkness into His marvellous light.

'But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light'
1 Peter 2.9.

Conclusion

Paul's prayer for the Christian is: be filled, walk worthy, be fruitful, be increasing, be strengthened, have patience, longsuffering and joy, give thanks and be partakers of the inheritance.

3. KING JESUS

Colossians 1.13–20

‘He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.’

Paul has commenced this letter in an encouraging and gracious manner. He sets the standard for Christian greetings and Christian tact in communications. The news Paul receives regarding the faith, love and hope of the church members encourages prayer for ongoing grace, growth, strength, salvation and sanctification. *‘For this reason we’* continue to pray; we do not sit back and say, ‘The job is done – no need to pray any more.’ Paul is a teacher of improvement, growth, looking forward, and pressing on in Christian commitment.

Here, as in his gracious Christian communication, we learn another lesson from the Apostle Paul. A church is ‘a work in progress’; it never reaches the point where it can say, ‘We have made it!’ There will always be room for improvement – the more we improve, the more we appreciate Christ. It is an exercise unto godliness which has the fruit

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of a developing peace and joy in believing. So Paul is praying for the growth and maturing of the church at Colosse.

Now the Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, focuses on King Jesus, the Son of God. He takes delight in recording the wonderful works of God through His Son, Jesus Christ – His work in creation and His work in redemption.

There is, in Paul's writing, a pattern of perfect harmony between Christ as Creator and Redeemer:

CREATION

verse 15: *'the firstborn over all creation'*

verses 16-17: *'by Him all things were created'*

REDEMPTION

verse 18: *'the head of the body, the church'*

verses 19-20: *'by Him to reconcile all things to Himself'*

Similar wording is also used when referring to the creative and redemptive role of the Lord Jesus in these verses. For example,

'the firstborn' in verses 15 and 18;

'through Him/in Him' in verses 16 and 19;

'in heaven and...on earth' in verses 16 and 20.

Paul's purpose is to magnify Christ in the minds of the Lord's people as Creator Redeemer. This is a response to the heretics, those who were teaching that Christ is not totally adequate to ensure salvation.

These verses are a something like walking along a picture gallery admiring an artist's works. As you walk along the gallery you admire the pictures, developing an appreciation for the works of art. So let us now walk along an inspired gallery of truth revealing the wonder of Jesus Christ.

King Jesus

King Jesus

'He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love' Colossians 1.13.

Why describe Him as King Jesus? Because of the terminology being used by Paul. He refers to the Kingdom of Jesus: God has delivered us 'into the kingdom of the Son of His love', or as the *Authorised Version* renders it, 'his dear son'. Note here the affection of the Father for the Son. He is eternally dear to the Father – the Son of His love.

Remember Paul is writing after Calvary, after the Father had poured His wrath on His Son. Now His Son is at His right hand in Glory as the God-Man Christ Jesus, His only beloved Son. God the Father loves His Son as both God and Man – His dear Son, the Son of His love!

A saved person trusting in Jesus has been delivered, or translated, into the Kingdom of His dear Son. This means you have been transplanted from Satan's kingdom into God's Kingdom, from the domain of darkness into the domain of light. This is true deliverance! You are now at liberty to grow in the soil of God's Word, for ever increasing in Christ. It is described as being delivered from the power of darkness. The hymnwriter puts it like this:

*Out of my bondage, sorrow and night,
Jesus, I come; Jesus, I come;
Into Thy freedom, gladness and light,
Jesus, I come to Thee.*

William True Sleeper, 1819-1904

The power of darkness is an entrapping power, a blocking power, a harmful power, a destroying power. So the Apostle Paul reminds us that God the Father, in His grace, has delivered us through His Son. We are to give thanks to God for our deliverance from darkness to light.

If we adopt this mindset of darkness and light, it helps us to de-

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velop hatred for sin and love to God. Satan is the master of the twilight zone, the most dangerous time to drive, the in-between. Satan presents darkness as light and light as darkness, and the result is a twilight zone. Sin becomes reasonable and not that bad, and truth becomes irrelevant to life, and we become lukewarm. God teaches it as it is – Satan and sin are darkness: Christ and the truth are light. There is no blurring of the edges, no twilight zone. We are of the day or of the night.

'You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness' 1 Thessalonians 5.5.

'But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light' 1 Peter 2.9.

Saviour

'...in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins' Colossians 1.14.

Redemption here means that the Lord's people are a purchased people. They have been purchased through blood, which means the life and death of Jesus Christ. They are redeemed from hell, condemnation of the Law, guilt, the damning power of sin and the curse.

By His sufferings on the cross at Calvary, where Christ endured the wrath of God on our behalf, we have the forgiveness of our sins – all our sins! God deals with our sins in Jesus Christ and removes them, and determines not to remember them. One of the dangers with fallen man, privy to information about another, is to keep reminding them of it. When there is perhaps a disagreement they will say, 'But back at such-and-such a time you did this.' Our failures are held against us by another as a type of weapon. With God's forgiveness our sin is removed; it is eternally forgiven and forgotten.

'As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us' Psalm 103.12.

"For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has mercy on you' Isaiah 54.10.

'No more shall every man teach his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more' Jeremiah 31.34.

'For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more' Hebrews 8.12.

'Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more' Hebrews 10.17.

Image of the invisible God

'He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation' Colossians 1.15.

This does not mean that Christ is not God, for He is of the same essence as God the Father and the Holy Spirit. It means here that Christ is the revelation of God as the God-Man Christ Jesus.

'For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily' Colossians 2.9.

'...who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high' Hebrews 1.3.

'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld

Complete in Him

His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth' John 1.14.

'Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father?'"' John 14.9.

As the firstborn Son of God He eternally proceeds from God the Father. Before Adam was created God the Son existed eternally. He is the firstborn in His role as Son of God, existing before creation – over the angels! He is the firstborn over all creation – the Lord of creation.

Creator

'For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist' Colossians 1.16-17.

Notice how Paul has magnified the Lord Jesus as King and Saviour, and now here as Creator.

Professor Stephen Hawking has just passed away to meet his Maker and Creator (March 2018). This man undoubtedly had a brilliant mind and his understanding of aspects of science was immense. His perseverance to continue his research even with motor neuron disease was impressive. Hawking acknowledged the wonder of the universe, but at the same time was a confessed atheist. *Time Magazine*¹ records these facts regarding Stephen Hawking:

Hawking invoked the name of God in his seminal book *A Brief History of Time*, writing that if physicists could find a 'theory of everything' — that is, a cohesive explanation for how the universe works — they would glimpse 'the mind of God.' But in later interviews and writings, such as 2010's *The Grand Design*,

¹ *Time Magazine*, 14 March 2018

which he co-wrote with Leonard Mlodinow, Hawking clarified that he wasn't referring to a creator in the traditional sense.

'Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist,' he wrote in *The Grand Design*. 'It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going.'

'Before we understand science, it is natural to believe that God created the universe. But now science offers a more convincing explanation,' he said. 'What I meant by "we would know the mind of God" is, we would know everything that God would know, if there were a God, which there isn't. I'm an atheist.'

The scientist took a pragmatic view of what happens to the brain and body after death.

'I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail,' he told *The Guardian*. 'There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark.'

By contrast, Paul purposely exalted King Jesus to magnify Him in our minds. Here Paul teaches that God the Father created all things through His Son. Creation did not come to pass independently from Christ, but through Christ. In Him resides the creative power, and in Him and by Him all things were created. All things – including the earth, the universe, the stars, the sun and the moon – came into being in Christ, for He is before all things, eternally the Son of God in glory.

'I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth; while as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, or the primal dust of the world' Proverbs 8.23-26.

Complete in Him

God the Father has so ordained that His Son, existing eternally, should be the centre and Sustainer of creation. Christ not only creates, He also sustains, as in Him all things consist. All things hold together in Him. He is the wisdom of God, the Giver and Sustainer of life. He orders all things in creation by His own appointment, yet according to the perfect will of God the Father.

Creation itself is a most remarkable tool of God to remind us of His almighty power. The beauty of the earth in which we live – creation – is the greatest tourist attraction in the world. To look at beauty with the natural eye impresses, but to view beauty as a believer assures faith for praise.

*Loved with everlasting love,
Led by grace that love to know;
Spirit, breathing from above,
Thou hast taught me it is so.
Oh, this full and perfect peace!
Oh, this transport all divine!
In a love which cannot cease,
I am His, and He is mine.*

*Heaven above is softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green;
Something lives in every hue
Christless eyes have never seen:
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,
Flow'rs with deeper beauties shine,
Since I know, as now I know,
I am His, and He is mine.*

George Wade Robinson, 1838-77

He has the whole world in His hands – universe, stars, galaxies, space, time and light years. Christ is the Creator of that which is im-

mensely great and that which is infinitesimally small. Do not let us ever be limited in our thinking about Jesus, but ever increasing in our understanding.

Head of the Church

'And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence' Colossians 1.18.

Here the Church is described as a body, by way of illustrating many members with different functions. As He is the Head and Sustainer of the universe, so He is the Head and Sustainer of the Church.

'And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all' Ephesians 1.22-23.

'...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love' Ephesians 4.15-16.

Later on in this letter Paul warns about the danger of not relating to Christ as the Head.

'Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God' Colossians 2.18-19.

He is the beginning and Giver of natural life in creation as the eternal firstborn Son of God. He is the beginning and Giver of spiritual life as the firstborn from the dead, now the eternal Son of Man. While

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others before Him were raised from the dead, Christ was the first to be raised by His own power, taking upon Himself a glorified body to die no more. Christ, as the firstborn from the dead, gives resurrection life spiritually to all who believe in Him. He is the Resurrection and the Life and will give glorified bodies to all His people on the resurrection day.

The Pre-eminent One

'For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell' Colossians 1.19.

Nothing could be clearer than this verse to teach that Christ-centred thinking is what pleases the Father. It has pleased the Father that all fullness dwells in Christ. He is the way to the Father; He is the One in Whom the Father is well pleased. To exalt Christ is to exalt the Father and manifest the work of the Holy Spirit within us. Christ is the Head of creation and Christ is the Head of Church.

The heretics taught that God the Father mediated His power through angelic intermediaries. Christ was just one of many sources through which God worked. A biblical understanding is that God the Father mediates His power through His Son and by the Holy Spirit. It is a triune display of power wherein the triune God is perfectly in harmony.

Here Paul clearly puts Christ in His rightful place for our understanding. All fullness dwells in Christ – He is all sufficient as Creator, Saviour and Lord.

*A fulness resides in Jesus our Head,
And ever abides to answer our need;
The Father's good pleasure has laid up in store
A plentiful treasure, to give to the poor.
Whate'er be our wants, we need not to fear,*

King Jesus

*Our numerous complaints His mercy will hear;
His fulness shall yield us abundant supplies;
His power shall shield us when dangers arise.*

*The fountain o'erflows our woes to redress,
Still more He bestows and grace upon grace;
His gifts in abundance we daily receive,
Rich treasures in plenty for all that believe.*

*Whatever distress awaits us below,
Such plentiful grace will Jesus bestow,
And still shall support us, and silence our fear,
For nothing can hurt us while Jesus is near.*

*When troubles attend, or dangers, or strife,
His love will defend and guard us through life;
And when we are fainting, and ready to die,
Whatever is wanting His hand will supply.*

John Fawcett, 1739-1817

Conclusion

These verses are Christ-centred and meant to magnify Him in our minds. We are to have increasingly high views of Jesus Christ. This will impact positively and graciously upon our life, behaviour and theology. Do not allow Christ to be 'dumbed down' by the prevailing trends – in Him all fullness dwells.

4. RECONCILED TO GOD IN CHRIST

Colossians 1.20-29

We saw in the last chapter how Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, focuses on King Jesus, the Son of God. He takes delight in recording the wonderful works of God through His Son Jesus Christ – His work in creation and His work in redemption. Paul's purpose is to magnify Christ in the minds of the Lord's people as Creator and Redeemer.

This is a response to the heretics who were teaching that Christ is not totally adequate to ensure salvation. No; all truly saved people have been conveyed by God into the Kingdom of the Son of God's love. Jesus Christ is the King and has of Himself made entrance into His Kingdom possible.

So the Apostle Paul exalts Jesus Christ in His inspired writing as Saviour, the Image of the invisible God, the Creator, the Head of the Church and the Pre-eminent One. We are to have increasingly high views of Jesus Christ. This will impact positively and graciously upon our life, behaviour and theology.

Now Paul glories in the reconciliation accomplished in Christ.

Extent of the reconciliation

'...and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross' Colossians 1.20.

Christ is the one and only Reconciler between God and man. Those who went to Heaven before the coming of Jesus Christ here on earth, entered by faith in the Messiah. Those who enter Heaven after the coming of Jesus Christ here on earth, enter by faith in the Saviour. Those saved on this earth and still living at the end of the world, will

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enter Heaven by faith in the Saviour. Thus the one and only Reconciler for saints on earth and in Heaven is Jesus Christ the Saviour.

At the end of the world, in the new heavens and new earth, the new creation will be reconciled to God in Jesus. There will be absolute and total harmony in creation – between saints, angels and the triune God.

God the Father has so ordained it that His beloved Son, the Son of His love, is the eternal Reconciler. God will be in total harmony with the Church, the holy angels and new creation by the work of Jesus Christ; peace with God through the blood of Christ.

‘...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot’ 1 Peter 1.18-19.

‘Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone” 1 Peter 2.6-7.

The blood is precious because of Whose it is – Jesus the Son of God; because of its power and efficacy; because of its eternal impact and blessing; because it brings us into perfect peace and communion with God. Christ at Calvary is an eternal wonder. Christ is the eternal Peacemaker.

*Peace by his cross has Jesus made;
The church’s everlasting Head
O’er hell and sin has victory won,
And, with a shout, to glory gone.*

Reconciled to God in Christ

*When o'er thy head the billows roll,
And shades of sin obscure thy soul;
When thou canst no deliverance see,
Yet still this Man thy Peace shall be.
In tribulation's thorny maze,
Or on the mount of sovereign grace,
Or in the fire, or through the sea,
This glorious Man thy Peace shall be.
Yea, when thy eye of faith is dim,
Rest thou on Jesus, sink or swim,
And at his footstool bow the knee,
For Israel's God thy Peace shall be.*

John Kent, 1766-1843

The wonder of the reconciliation

'And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight' Colossians 1.21-22.

Here Paul teaches us the contrast between what we were and what we are now in Christ Jesus. 'Alienated' means hostile in your mind towards God, evidenced by sinning without confession and without concern. Your works of the flesh are the result of the enmity in your mind towards God. These works were not only outward sins, but those inward sins known only to God. There were those works of rebellion wherein you purposely entered into situations and places of ungodliness. There were conversations that evidenced an ungodly, selfish and corrupt mind.

But then there were the unseen works of the mind wherein you embraced bitterness, anger and hatred. You may have been brought up to

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attend church. On the outside you were presentable, but on the inside you harboured resentment.

'And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others' Ephesians 2.1-3.

After the Fall the only Person born truly innocent is Jesus Christ, being conceived of the Holy Spirit and, protected in the womb of Mary, indwelling sin was not imparted to Him. This is not the case with every other person. We are all born in sin and shapen in iniquity

'Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me' Psalm 51.5.

To grasp the wonder of the reconciliation we need to grasp our sinful state by nature as recorded by Paul. 'Alienated enemies' is what we are by nature. People may say they have always believed in God: so does Satan! Believing in God does not mean you are reconciled to God if you are rejecting His Son. Probably a great number of people believe in God casually, but with no desire to be reconciled to Him.

Here Paul is pointing us to the wonder and essential need of reconciliation in Christ Jesus the Lord. His flesh was pure, meaning His works, life, actions and thoughts were absolutely pure. He presented His perfect life and body as the one and only perfect offering, a sacrifice through death. At Calvary Christ not only suffered for our sins, bearing the punishment to obtain our forgiveness and justification; at Calvary Christ presented His works, life and body as an offering to God, following His perfect obedience. Through the obedience, suffering and death of Christ we have reconciliation with

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God. In contrast to our wicked works there is Christ and His perfect works – His righteousness. Through faith in Christ and His Person, work and death at Calvary He presents us holy, blameless, above reproach in His sight, and unproveable before God! This does not mean while here on earth we are without blemish; it means in Christ we are free from the charge of it.

The fruit of the reconciliation

‘...if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister’ Colossians 1.23.

Here Paul reminds us of the significance of the Christian walk for assurance and comfort of the Gospel. A warning here about the ‘New Calvinism’ movement. This presents salvation without sanctification, and doctrine without dedication.

‘New Calvinism’, so-called, came to the attention of the worldwide Church following the publishing of a book entitled *Young, Restless and Reformed*. In this book its author, Collin Hanson, goes on a journey of research into new Calvinism. He describes ‘The Passion Conference’, 2006. At this conference he observed uninhibited, contemporary worship united together with Reformed teaching. It was said the shackles of old-fashioned Calvinism had been broken at this conference. Now young people can be Reformed and worldly as well, and the term ‘New Calvinism’ was coined. It boasts adherence to the Reformed biblical doctrines taught by Calvin, Edwards and Spurgeon. But this has to be understood as their teaching filtered through the teaching of the ‘New Calvinism’ leaders.

For example, Timothy Keller takes a theistic evolutionary position, but claims this is under God’s creative power. In so doing he denies *Genesis* as a factual account, referring to it as rather like a poem, or a song. Keller is also a major protagonist of contemporary

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contextualisation of the Gospel; the claims of humanistic philosophy, worldliness and evolution must mould the message of the Gospel.

Here Paul teaches that consecration and commitment form the fruit of true Christian faith. He says:

- *'continue in the faith'*;
- *'grounded and steadfast'* – settled in your belief in the Gospel of God;
- *'not moved away from the hope of the gospel'* which is suitable for all the world, whatever culture or nationality.

Salvation and sanctification were never, ever meant to be separated in God's order of the Gospel. Are you setting out to be a consecrated Christian or a contemporary Christian?

The ministry of the reconciliation

'I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God' Colossians 1.24-25.

Here Paul describes the experience of ministering the Gospel of God. This ministry of reconciliation in Christ Jesus involves suffering for Christ's sake. Now when Paul speaks here about what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, He is not speaking about Calvary. It is not as though ministers, like priests, are suffering to add to the saving atoning suffering of Christ. What this refers to here is the ongoing ministry of suffering with Christ for the sake of the Gospel.

Jesus speaks of taking up our cross and following Him (*Matthew 16.24; Mark 8.34, 10.21; Luke 9.23*). Serving Christ involves suffering with Christ in ministry. Ministry is for the sake of the Church, for salvation and sanctification of the Church, the body of Christ.

Paul considers the ministry of the Gospel, partaking in Christ's sufferings as a minister, a cause for rejoicing. My sufferings are not

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pointless or without purpose; they have an outcome, a fruit – for the sake of the Church.

‘For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ’ 2 Corinthians 1.5.

‘Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God’ 2 Timothy 1.8.

The mystery of the reconciliation

‘...the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory’ Colossians 1.26-27.

‘Christ in you, the hope of glory’. The glory of this mystery! Christ indwelling by the Holy Spirit, receiving Christ into your hearts by faith. This is the hope of glory – an anchor of hope.

‘Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit’ Romans 15.13.

This has to be one of the most encouraging and positive statements in all Scripture.

- God is the Anchor of hope; the Author of hope; the Authority of hope; and the Appreciation of hope.

Adoniram Judson once said: ‘My future is as bright as the promises of God.’

The purpose of the reconciliation

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

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Jesus. To this end I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily' Colossians 1.28-29.

Pauls reveals that in the pathway to Glory and perfection there is the ministry of comfort and correction, the ministry of warning. There is also the ministry of teaching. '*In all wisdom*' refers to teaching from the Word of God, so our wisdom is of God and not of man, by the power of the Holy Spirit attending our labours – unction from God.

The grand purpose is to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. This involves a labour, a struggle.

Conclusion

The doctrine of the reconciliation of Christ is one that should fill our hearts with joy and gladness. We have looked at the:

- extent v20;
- wonder v 21-22;
- fruit v 23;
- ministry v 24-25;
- mystery v 26-27; and
- purpose v 28-29.

*Dear Lord, what heavenly wonders dwell
In Thy atoning blood!
By this are sinners snatched from hell,
And rebels brought to God.*

Anne Steele, 1717-78

'And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation' Romans 5.11.

Reconciled to God in Christ

'Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation' 2 Corinthians 5.18-19.

5. TREASURES OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE IN CHRIST

Colossians 2.1-5

For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.'

These verses from the Apostle Paul are set in the context of academics boasting about their unique, elite knowledge. These so-called Gnostics taught that, as a select few, they enjoyed secret, mystical, transcendent knowledge. This sect claimed their mystical knowledge to be authoritative, secret wisdom coming from the angelic realm. So around them they created an aura of mystique and fascination that made them feel proud and superior.

In gatherings they claimed their supernatural, transcendental experiences set them apart as being special. Their meetings centred around the worship of angels who, they claimed, gave them unique wisdom.

In the early New Testament Church they attempted to intermingle their philosophy with the Christian faith, so as to make the Christian walk a mystical experience, rather than a 'growth-in-grace' experience.

Complete in Him

Paul had a deep burden for the church at Colosse being assaulted by heretics pulling away from the Gospel. He teaches the importance and significance of fellowship as a means of resistance. For this fellowship to be meaningful it requires unity of love, attaining to the full assurance of understanding of the mystery of God, both the Father and Christ. The ‘mystery’ here is the mystery and wonder of the Gospel of God understood in the Father and Christ.

The Gospel is a truth with infinite value and blessing. It is simple in its message of hope and deliverance to sinners, yet eternally profound to believers who desire to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. To attain and understand, Paul teaches us we need to learn about and know Christ for ourselves. There are infinite riches in Christ – finding and experiencing Him, growing and walking with Him.

Paul teaches that, rather than heeding the mystical, mysterious nonsense of the Gnostic heretics, the Lord’s people need to develop in their spiritual understanding and assurance in Christ. Treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him. They are not locked away, forever unattainable, but hidden that we might exercise ourselves spiritually to search for and find them.

Paul points people to the infinite wisdom and knowledge coming from Christ, the fruit of which is available to all – rich, poor, intellectual, non-intellectual – all who have truly trusted in Jesus Christ.

Verse 3 makes a great unmistakable claim: all wisdom and knowledge is in Christ. This is an incredible statement that deserves our close attention.

The first reason

Christ is the revelation of the fullness of the Godhead bodily – we can know God in Christ. He is the revelation to this world of the wisdom and knowledge of God the Father. He is the evidence of the

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perfect, eternal union between God the Father and God the Son. We can only come to God the Father, and know God the Father, through the Son.

The second reason

To encourage our trust in Christ (verse 2). Two particular treasures are mentioned here for faith relating to Christ – wisdom and knowledge. There is no limit to the knowledgeable understanding of Christ.

Some years ago I had to visit Romania on a number of occasions and got to know about life there. The parents told me something about what schooling was like. In the state schools the education given was based upon memory. Exams or tests required remembering quotes from textbook by rote, so it was not so much a question of understanding the reason or meaning, but simply remembering the words. They needed knowledge of the textbook content, but not necessarily the meaning of what the text books contained

The Lord Jesus Christ not only knows all things, He understands the reason for all things infinitely. Whereas our knowledge and understanding is limited, His knowledge is infinite and unbounded. Then, in harmony with His infinite knowledge, is His infinite wisdom, this being His limitless capacity to apply His infinite knowledge in a perfectly wise way, forever. So His wisdom and knowledge are in perfect harmony and complement each other.

This is a wonderful and glorious characteristic of Christ for our assurance and encouragement. We may meet people who are like a walking encyclopaedia of knowledge but lack wisdom in application. We hear the saying he or she is like an absent-minded professor. In other words, they have a brilliant mind without common sense. But in Christ we have a Person in Whom infinite knowledge and infinite wisdom are in perfect partnership.

Here is our starting point – Christ the Son of God made Man, infinitely glorious in wisdom and knowledge. When we speak about the

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wisdom and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must never limit it to a human level. Human wisdom is limited, fallible and open to error, but God's wisdom is infinite, infallible and without error. It is this divine wisdom and knowledge which is glorious and infinitely in Christ as God. However, in the Person of Jesus Christ as a Man in a body like ours, His wisdom and knowledge is shown to us graciously in a way to which we can relate. This encourages faith and assurance in Him as the Saviour and Shepherd to this needy world.

I want to share with you three examples of this – the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in His love, caring sympathy and leadership.

The treasures of wisdom and knowledge found in His love

Here we have God's greatest message to the world – that He really cares about our situation. In Christ, God has shown this world the depth and reality of His love. He has sent to this world the One in Whom is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

But note: the love of God in Christ is a knowledgeable love. By that I mean Christ knows all about us. This is not a blind love, but a love which knows every detail of our lost condition by nature. Christ knows that by nature we hate Him, we rebel against Him, we will not have this Man to reign over us (*Luke 19.14*). Christ knows by nature we love the darkness rather than the light (*John 3.19*). He knows our true condition before God. He knows we are proud and independent from God. He knows we want go our own way in our lost condition. He knows, as the Bible says, that we are born in sin and shapen in iniquity (*Psalms 51.5*). Our whole being is affected by sin.

But His complete knowledge of all things did not deter Him, but motivated Him in love to come as Saviour. It led him to apply His wisdom to His knowledge of our state and condition in love to deal with our problem. Just before Christ entered into His final days here on earth we read He knew His hour had come (*John 13.1*). He knew that meant the cross at Calvary! He knew what lay ahead of Him, yet

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in that knowledge He still set His face steadfastly in love to go forward in the wisdom of God.

But then, on His way to Calvary, Christ must enter one last time into the Garden of Gethsemane, His favourite place of contemplation and prayer. This time in that garden His knowledge of all the suffering that lay ahead of Him caused Him great anguish. But here we see His wisdom applied to that knowledge, understanding that the wise way of applying His knowledge of all things was obedience to His Father's wise way. So in obedience to His Father He remained on course to Calvary, there to stand in the place of sinners.

On the cross He had to endure the wrath of God; He had to bear the eternal punishment due for the sins of all who trust in Him. He did so out of love. Christ knew this was the only way whereby God's justice could be satisfied and atonement made. This was the only way whereby man could be reconciled with God, and peace be made between God and man.

This wisdom and knowledge in Christ is the real mystery. This is what the angels desire to look into (*1 Peter 1.12*). Here at Calvary we view a perfect Man, the Son of God, Who cares for our whole being for time and eternity. Here at Calvary is the most profound and perfect example of applying wisdom to knowledge in love. He knew the problem, and understood why we had the problem, then applied His wisdom to solve the problem. So we read that just before He died Jesus took the cup and gave thanks and expressed His fervent desire.

'Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer"' Luke 22.15.

He gave thanks knowing that the same cup symbolised His suffering and death, and knowing what would be accomplished through that suffering and death.

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‘But God demonstrates [commends] His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us’ Romans 5.8.

The treasures of wisdom and knowledge in His caring sympathy

Christ is now in Heaven as the sinless High Priest Who knows and understands all about life here on earth. The Bible says we do not have an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmity. Christ is in Heaven interceding for all who trust in Him, and sympathises with an understanding care and concern.

‘And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need’ Hebrews 4.13-16.

This wonderful promise is centred in Christ, in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, the One in Whom we can have complete confidence, Who will never turn us away as too difficult to handle. He knows our past, present and future. He knows what we are thinking right now. He ever lives to intercede! See these wonderful characteristics of wisdom and knowledge in intercession while here on earth.

‘So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first”’ John 8.7.

The treasure of wisdom and knowledge in His leadership

‘I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep’ John 10.11.

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Back in the Old Testament David looked to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, as His Shepherd to lead him on. In *Psalms* 23 we read:

‘The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters’ Psalm 23.1-2.

In gaining sure, spiritual comfort from these verses we can be encouraged by this certain fact. God, the Great ‘I AM,’ the Eternal One, the Creator of the universe, the God of Heaven and earth, actually condescends to be the Shepherd of His people in the Person of Jesus Christ: the One ‘*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*’

Based on this assuring promise, faith appropriates her Saviour God as being ‘my Shepherd.’ This is one of the secrets to getting real comfort out of *Psalms* 23. Do not focus on yourself, but focus on the glorious and worthy attributes of your Shepherd. He is worthy of your complete trust and dependence. He is the knowing Shepherd.

‘My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me’ John 10.27.

But now we must ask ourselves a vital question. You may say, ‘Yes, I believe that Christ is indeed the great, compassionate and chief Shepherd, the One in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.’ But are you taking a step further in your personal faith by saying in your mind and heart, ‘*The Lord is my shepherd?*’ The answer to this vital question rests upon whether or not we have heard and responded to His voice, whether we are following Him by faith. We cannot sincerely call Him ‘my Shepherd’ unless we are willing to respond to His voice and follow Him!

Remember, as we have seen, Jesus said, ‘*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.*’ To hear His voice means to respond wholeheartedly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to repent of your sin

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and turn to Christ as your Saviour and follow Him, willingly submitting to Him as the Lord, your Shepherd – to know Him personally, to follow Him and worship Him. I have never met a person who has not benefitted from knowing Christ, *‘in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.’*

Conclusion

We have been considering Jesus Christ, *‘in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.’* We have sought to show how His infinite knowledge is in perfect harmony with His infinite wisdom. There is every reason to look to Him, to trust our all to Him in Whom dwells all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in His love, care and dealings with us.

- The treasures of wisdom and knowledge in His love;
- The treasures of wisdom and knowledge in His sympathy; and
- The treasures of wisdom and knowledge in His leadership.

Here is the pattern laid out for future development. It is found in Christ, and in Him we will know the Father. All this is possible through the operation of the Holy Spirit.

6. COMPLETE IN HIM

Colossians 2.6-10

The Christians at Colosse were being fed from various camps with the heretical philosophy that their Christian faith needed some added extras. They were being given the false notion that they were somehow missing out on something. They were being tempted either to drift back into legalism or into the cul-de-sac of mysticism, all based on the heretical notion that faith alone in Christ alone was insufficient.

What Paul is saying to the Colossians is that true Christian faith in Christ alone *is* sufficient. Everything is found in Christ, ‘*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*’

‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ’ Ephesians 1.3.

It is Christ alone, not Christ plus!

How does Paul address the problem? Having positively encouraged the believers at Colosse, Paul continues his letter by magnifying Christ and emphasising the significance of the Gospel. His deep desire is that they will remain united in love and in fellowship; that they will develop in their spiritual understanding through a deepening knowledge of the truth, knowing that this truth, found in God’s Word, will bring the fruit of a fuller assurance in Christ.

As he considers the current state of the church he rejoices in their love, and he rejoices in the steadfastness of their faith in Christ. Faith and love are two characteristics Paul consistently commends churches for in his letters.

Notice here in Colosse he also commends them for their order (*Colossians 2.5*). The order of the church in its practice is vitally

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important to Paul. Remember how he told the church at Corinth to do all things decently and in order (*1 Corinthians 14.40*). But now Paul is deeply concerned that the stability in faith, love and order of the church will remain. He is concerned that they will continually resist the heretics.

As we mentioned before, Paul had a deep burden for the church at Colosse. He taught the importance and significance of loving fellowship, united around the Gospel, as a means of resisting the teaching of the heretics. Paul taught the need to know and experience Christ for themselves, to access His treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Now in verses 6-10 Paul instructs in a more practical manner how knowledge of Christ is applied in wisdom. Paul is concerned for the stability of the church to stand in Christ Jesus against the heretics. He further encourages the believers to stand and resist the dangers they are facing in three ways.

Remember your objective

*‘As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving’
Colossians 2.6-7.*

Remember how you received Jesus Christ. You came with repentance over your sin, and with faith in Jesus Christ to be your Saviour. You came to the point of complete dependence upon Jesus. You looked to Him alone. You said with the Apostle Peter, *‘to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life’* (*John 6.68*). Your testimony was Christ alone: He was your hope, your salvation. You asked for forgiveness and received forgiveness. You came in dependence upon God’s grace, being called by His grace. You received Jesus Christ by faith into your life as your Saviour and Lord. You received the Gospel truths as God’s Word, and responded in repentance and faith.

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Paul says, 'Continue to walk in a spirit of faith and dependence on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.' But he also says, 'Now your objective must be to grow in Christ. For your Christian life to be real, you must be continually rooted in Christ alone. Only in this way will your Christian life and walk be established and strengthened. Do not be distracted, but continue to develop and grow in Christ.' It is about development, not distraction.

Now Paul is confident that the church at Colosse has been under sound teaching. They have been taught that their growth needs to be rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. So amidst the pressure for legalism, or for unusual experiences and special revelations, Paul tells the believers at Colosse to keep on track looking to Christ. There is an inexhaustible treasure found in Him. This treasure is revealed through the Word, made real to us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

'You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen' 2 Peter 3.17-18.

Remember your objective is to grow in Christ alone, to be established in Him in a spirit of thanksgiving and praise. As a church, let us continue to base our teaching on the Word of God, pointing people to Christ. Let us continue to abound in it, rejoice in it and be thankful for it. This is what it truly means to keep to the old paths – not regulation but Christ-centred renewal. Our objective is to develop in this truth as it is in Jesus, the fruit of which will keep us in the way! So be on your guard not to be distracted from it.

Note the assuring metaphors used by Paul to encourage us in this godly endeavour.

- **walk** – a military metaphor; a soldier in the army of Christ; stead-

Complete in Him

fastness through direction;

- **rooted** – a creative metaphor; to grow deeper in Christ; stability through knowledge;
- **built up** – a building metaphor; layer upon layer, growing up in Him; strength in relationship;
- **in Him** – Christ is our wisdom, our truth, our hope, our Guide, our strength, our all. The whole up-building of the Church and its members proceeds because of Christ's Person, His finished work on the cross, His resurrection, power, life, intercession and authority.
- **established in the faith** – not a faith as 'one of many' but 'the faith'; appreciating; and
- **abounding in it with thanksgiving**; a continuing Christ-centred exercise.

Remember your objective!

Remember your responsibility

'Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ' Colossians 2.8.

'Beware lest anyone cheat you' is a very strong expression, and is being used to warn against the stealing of your liberty. Beware! Your spiritual freedom in Christ is at stake!

Here Paul is warning against a deceptive philosophy of man which draws away from Christ. Paul is not condemning philosophy as such; there is good philosophy and bad philosophy. Succumbing to heretical philosophy means dependence is no longer on Christ alone. A Christian is responsible before God to beware of hollow and deceptive philosophy.

Sadly, sometimes we do not want to take responsibility for our Christian lives when tempted. We are sometimes like Aaron in the

Old Testament, when the Children of Israel rejected Moses whilst he was on Mount Sinai receiving the Law and Testimonies. Aaron gave in to the idolatrous demands, and made the golden calf for the Israelites to dance before as a god. When Moses challenged him he said:

‘Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, “Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” And I said to them, “Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.” So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out’ Exodus 32.22-24.

Instead of waiting they became wilfully and knowingly careless and rebellious! Moses responded by standing at the entrance of the camp and saying, ‘Whoever is on the Lord’s side, let him come to me’ (See *Exodus 32.26*). There are times when God calls us to stand up and be counted as being on the Lord’s side. These so called ‘added extras’ and temptations, if followed, will draw you away from Christ.

Remember your responsibility!

Remember your status

*‘For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily’
Colossians 2.9.*

All the attributes of God are found in the Person of Christ. He is the image of the invisible God. He is co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit; three distinct Persons, each equally God, of the same essence. You cannot add to God; there are no ‘added extras’ or deficiencies in God.

Paul’s statement is profound and awesomely significant for Christian faith. In Christ, Who took upon Himself a human body, dwells in glory all the fullness of the Godhead. Consider these remarkable verses of Isaac Watts (1674-1748):

Complete in Him

*O for a sight, a pleasing sight
Of our Almighty Father's throne!
There sits the Saviour, crowned with light,
Clothed in a body like our own.
Adoring saints around Him stand,
And thrones and powers before Him fall;
The God shines gracious through the Man
And sheds sweet glories on them all.*

'And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all' Ephesians 1.22-23.

You are complete in Him, in Christ the Son of God. This is your status as Christians! Remember your status, how privileged you are.

*'And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace'
John 1.16.*

There is complete forgiveness in Christ, complete justification, wisdom, grace, security, love and glory in Christ.

'That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me' John 17.21.

'You are complete in Him.'

Remember your status!

Conclusion

Remember your objective to grow in Christ alone; remember your responsibility to remain loyal to Christ alone; and remember your status in Christ alone.

7. CEREMONY AND CONDEMNATION NAILED TO THE CROSS

Colossians 2.11-15

The Apostle Paul now deals directly with the root problem of one of the heresies besetting the Colossian church – the pressure to conform to Jewish legalism as being an essential part of salvation.

The nature of your faith

‘In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ’ Colossians 2.11.

The Christians at Colosse were being pressurised to be circumcised to conform to the Jewish religion. This ritual ceremony was presented as an essential element towards their salvation, to be like a Jew. It is like us insisting on something outward, or a man-made tradition, to ensure one’s salvation.

Here Paul shows that actually it is the spiritual circumcision of the believer’s heart that is essential. This can only be accomplished through Christ and His finished work at Calvary in the power of the Spirit. The putting off of sin through and by Christ has eternal value. It is an inner, spiritual work with an outward fruit of obedience. It is by Christ alone, and therefore is described as the circumcision of Christ.

Circumcision of the heart

- reality
- by the Holy Spirit
- an inward work of grace
- putting off the old nature affecting the whole being

Circumcision of the body

- ritual
- done by hands
- an outward work of the flesh
- putting off part of the flesh as a ceremony

Complete in Him

The first is the circumcision of Christ; the second the circumcision of Abraham and of the Mosaic law.

So the Apostle Paul is teaching us, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, to focus on the inner work, not the outer. The same battle continues to this day. On one side is a religious faith mixed with ceremony, works, robes, incense and special days. On the other side is faith dependent on the Holy Spirit, which is Word-centred, Christ-centred and the fruit of faith.

The profession of your faith

‘...buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead’ Colossians 2.12.

The Christian profession of faith, if true, must be Christ-centred. It professes that Christ lived, He suffered, He died, He was buried and He rose again. It is about Christ in the sinner’s place, for his benefit, redemption and eternal inheritance. He took upon Himself the curse of sin and the condemnation of the Law on behalf of sinners. He satisfied God’s justice – He died as the perfect Sacrifice – He rose victorious from the grave.

Faith rests upon Christ, identifies with Christ, walks with Christ and trusts in Christ. Baptism is an outward sign of an inner work of grace, wherein the saved sinner is buried with Him – that is, he professes outwardly his trust in His death – symbolising death to sin, the world and self.

Being risen with Him indicates new life in Christ, with resurrection power now working in the life of a saved sinner who is trusting in God’s power to live the Christian life, a life that emanates from the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

‘To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory’ Colossians 1.27.

Ceremony and Condemnation Nailed to the Cross

'For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God'
Colossians 3.3.

'Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"' John 3.3.

Witness of your faith

'And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses' Colossians 2.13.

You were dead, utterly helpless and unable to deliver yourself because of your sins. *'But God...'* (Ephesians 2.4)! This is the amazing statement of true salvation.

'Made alive' – What does this really mean for the believer in practice?

– God's forgiveness

Forgiven – God's forgiveness is gracious, bountiful, certain and essential. The repenting recipient displays sorrow for sin, forsaking of sin and becomes a forgiving person.

– God's justice and law satisfied

The requirement of the holy Law of God, for perfection in our walk, has been met in Christ Jesus. The accusation of the Law, that was our condemnation against us, contrary to our old nature, has been taken out of the way, wiped out and is obliterated.

The old ceremonial law, pointing to Christ, is now obsolete. It has no more bearing upon the believer. It has been nailed to the cross, showing the power, effect, decisiveness, reality and freedom of Calvary.

Triumph of your faith

Satan with his evil angels are the chief accusers of the Lord's people.

Complete in Him

‘So Satan answered the Lord and said, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!”’ Job 1.9-11.

‘Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the Angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him. And the Lord said to Satan, “The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?” Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel. Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, “Take away the filthy garments from him.” And to him He said, “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes.” And I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him. And the Angel of the Lord stood by’ Zechariah 3.1-5.

‘Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down”’ Revelation 12.10.

‘For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’ Ephesians 6.12.

There is a spiritual realm which is commanded by Satan, described as ‘principalities and powers.’ But in Christ these powers have been disarmed in their ability to take your soul and deny you salvation.

Ceremony and Condemnation Nailed to the Cross

- Christ rescues from the domain of darkness – *Colossians 1.13*;
- Christ triumphed over them in the wilderness – *Matthew 4.1-11*;
- He bound the strong man – *Matthew 12.29*;
- He saw Satan fall as lightning from Heaven – *Luke 10.18*;
- The accuser of the brethren is cast down – *Revelation 12.10* and *Ephesians 1.20-23*.

By faith Christ's victory is your victory. We have to battle against Satan and the flesh, and in this war some battles are lost – we fall; but some are won – we stand. However the final outcome is certain: it has already been decided. Satan has been disarmed by Christ by His work on the cross. Satan has been disarmed of his power to destroy the Church.

Conclusion

You are complete in Him – you do not need ceremony; you are not under condemnation. The victory of Christ is the believer's victory, entered into by faith.

If England were to win the World Cup, the victory of eleven men on a football pitch would become the nation's victory. The whole nation would celebrate a victory that lasts for just four years. If this is the case in sport, how much more is it true perfectly and eternally of the victory of Christ?

There is no need to turn to additions for salvation, or be overwhelmed by the principalities and powers. Despite the oppression and the assaults, you serve Christ in the knowledge that victory is certain.

8. RESISTING THE COMPROMISE OF REGULATION

Colossians 2.16-23

Paul has been alerting the Church at Colosse against assimilating Jewish ceremonial practice, warning against the pressure to bow to the wisdom of the religious world, and adding to salvation by grace alone. He continues, to the end of this chapter, by focusing upon the problem of the worship of angels. He is repeating constantly the theme of salvation by grace alone, in Christ alone. Religious regulation can give us a sense of security; religious mysticism can give us a sense of being spiritually superior, but in fact it only feeds our pride.

Let no one judge you

‘So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths. which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ’ Colossians 2.16-17.

The Jewish leaders were insisting that the ceremonial law and ceremonies themselves still had a place and purpose in a Christian’s life. It was evident that there were those who had set themselves up as the conscience of the Christian. They would criticise and attempt to impose restrictions upon their lifestyle, pushing Christians into bondage.

For example, attempts were made to maintain an approved ceremonial list of allowable food and drink. Religious leaders were overstepping the mark in imposing rules and regulations beyond obedience to Christ. The Christ-like principle regarding food and drink is moderation with thanksgiving unto God for all His benefits.

There is an important warning that Paul gives us here, as did the Lord Jesus, against a judgmental spirit. Jesus said, *‘Judge not, that you be not judged’ (Matthew 7.1).*

Complete in Him

In addition, there were those judging people's adherence to festivals, such as the New Moon and Sabbaths. Christians were being made to feel guilty if they did not observe the ceremonial law for these occasions. The Jewish understanding of various festivals carried with them a weight of importance beyond their purpose. Their original purpose was that of being types and shadows, pointing to the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. After the coming of Christ, the ceremonial law was ended – finished. It no longer had a purpose. In fact, continued adherence to these laws was undermining the witness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, for the focus was moving from dependence upon the Word and Spirit to dependence upon works.

The substance of Christian living is Christ. He is the Saviour, Lord and the One through Whom blessings flow. Anyone truly walking with Christ will desire holiness, desire to serve Him and desire to be a witness for Him. This lifestyle does not come about by ceremonial regulation but by the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. It is a lifestyle motivated by a relationship with Christ, not by regulation imposed by man.

Labour was suspended on the day of the New Moon, and it was kept with feasting and religious instruction. It was now treated as a holy day, as were other festivals, and their significance was lost in the tradition of the date.

'Sabbaths' may refer here to the annual festivals and special rest days. In this context they were referred to as high Sabbaths, or additional Sabbaths. It is more likely that they do refer to the weekly Sabbath, the concern being the manner in which they were kept. The Jews were also still keeping the weekly Old Testament Sabbath day, Saturday, in an incredibly legalistic fashion.

The Sabbath was no longer a delight for worship, but had become a boring a day of restriction and rules. It was all about not doing any work whatsoever on the Sabbath. On this issue Jesus was severely

Resisting the Compromise of Regulation

criticised. He ministered in worship, He healed, He relaxed by taking a walk with the disciples and He enjoyed hospitality, all on the Sabbath.

The Jewish leaders were now attempting to impose all their ceremonial regulation upon the Christians. But Christians were now keeping just the Lord's Day, the first day of the week, as a day for services of worship. Paul says, 'Do not let anyone judge you, but follow the new Way and enjoy freedom in Christ.'

Let no one cheat you

'Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind' Colossians 2.18.

This means, 'Let no one set themselves up as your judge and consider you disqualified if you do not follow them. Let no one deprive you of your freedom in Christ, adding so-called "essentials" to be sure of salvation.'

Paul now turns to the heresy of angel worship. Why were the false teachers worshipping angels, and what is the connection with so-called 'false humility'? Evidently, in their error, they were claiming they needed angels to intercede for them, and so worshipped them. The reason for this was a false humility in their profession that they were too unworthy to approach God. Because they did not believe in Christ as the great High Priest, now in Heaven, they needed angels to intercede for them.

They also believed angels should be worshipped because of their unseen ministry to believers. God does use angels to minister to His people, but this ministry is secret and holy, beyond our understanding. So to claim insight and promote the worship of angels is to intrude into an area known only to God.

Complete in Him

The angelic worship experience was transcendental, and excited the emotions and imaginations. Ecstatic experiences and superior knowledge were claimed. Those involved were claiming super-spirituality and understanding that made them feel proud and superior.

The false humility is also considered to be subjection in an act of worship to bow before angels, a humility that is misdirected and false in its object and desire.

There is clear evidence that angelic worship is wrong and against God's Word.

'And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy"' Revelation 19.10.

'Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God"' Revelation 22.8-9.

Angelic worship denies Jesus Christ, Who is the One Who ever lives to make intercession for His people, the One before Whom the angels bow, worship and adore, and minister to His people at His command. The effect of angelic worship is to puff up the mind by fleshly knowledge, to become vain in your imaginations. Paul says there is no warrant for this: it has no foundation, it is nothing more than vanity. Visions are claimed, knowledge is puffed up and special revelation is claimed. Such knowledge puffs a person up, whereas love builds up a person. These false teachers wore a veneer of false humility, but this covered a mind of pride and vanity. So Paul says, 'Let no one cheat you, or persuade you that you are missing out, or not truly saved because you do not enter into their angelic worship experiences.'

Resisting the Compromise of Regulation

What relevance does this have for us today? There always have been attempts to move away from dependence upon the Word and Spirit. This always has the effect of drawing us away from Christ, and this is what Paul now warns us about.

Regulations and angelic worship do not need Christ

‘...and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God’ Colossians 2.19.

Here is the problem – not holding fast by faith to Christ, from Whom all blessings flow. Note the Lord’s teaching in *John 15*.

Here is the secret to steadfastness – holding fast to Christ; understanding that only your relationship with Him can nourish and strengthen you spiritually. This is God’s way; this is God the Father’s way to bless you, through His Son, by the Holy Spirit.

Growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ builds you up, and does not puff you up. Increase that is from God is that which comes through Christ as you hold fast to Him. It is to grow as God wants you to grow. It is so important as a church to remember this – Christ-centred growth. Adore Him, stand up for Him, love Him, serve Him, follow Him, learn from Him and abide in Him.

‘Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations?’ Colossians 2.20.

In verse 20 Paul reasons with believers with reference to their conversion and profession of faith. You have died with Him; Christ crucified is your plea.

‘But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world’ Galatians 6.14.

Complete in Him

‘But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?’ Galatians 4.9.

As you died with Christ, so you renounced the basic principles of the world ruling your life. You are free from the control of principalities and powers. Why, as though living under the old way, subject yourselves again to regulations? Do not go back to the old way. Continue to cherish and nurture your freedom in Christ Jesus the Lord. He is your Lord, not regulation – a relationship in loving submission to your Lord.

Do not touch – do not taste – do not handle

“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men. These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh’ Colossians 2.21-23.

Here Paul takes a leaf out of the heretics’ manual and writes in a manner to express the nature of the heresy. It is actually a religion of ‘do nots’, but these ‘do nots’ in lifestyle are based upon things which are perishing.

In verse 22 Paul is using a very strong expression to teach the perishable nature of regulation and angelic mysticism. He does so because:

- in New Testament times they became commanded regulations of men who insisted they should be continued;
- they were man-made doctrines;
- they only have an appearance of wisdom;
- it is self-imposed religion;

Resisting the Compromise of Regulation

- it is false humility;
- it is negatively teaching neglect of the body;
- it is of no value towards the sanctification of your life.

9. THE BELIEVER'S POSITION AND OBEDIENCE

Colossians 3.1-11

In Chapter 2 the Apostle Paul has been teaching that the secret to steadfastness is holding fast to Christ, understanding that your relationship with Him will nourish and strengthen you spiritually. This is God the Father's way to bless you through His Son by the Holy Spirit. Growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ builds you up and does not puff you up. Increase that is from God is that which comes through Christ as you hold fast to Him. This is to grow as God wants you to grow. Adore Him, stand up for Him, love Him, serve Him, follow Him, learn from Him and abide in Him.

Paul then reasoned with believers with reference to their conversion and profession of faith.

- a. You have died with Him – Christ crucified is your plea;
- b. As you died with Christ, so you renounced with it basic principles of the world ruling your life;
- c. You are free from the control of principalities and powers;
- d. Why, as though living under the old way, subject yourselves again to regulations?

Do not go back to the old way; continue to cherish and nurture your freedom in Christ Jesus the Lord. He is your Lord; it is not regulation but relationship in loving submission to your Lord that is necessary. Therefore why get ensnared in the worship of angels over whom is the Lord, as He is over you? Ceremonial regulation and angelic mysticism will not help but will hinder you in your growth in grace.

Now in Chapter 3 Paul provides essential teaching on how the true Christian life is to be exercised. His teaching comes through two themes:

Complete in Him

1. He assures and encourages believers in their position as saved people;
2. He exhorts them to an obedience that rejects the old nature and puts on the new nature.

Position

'If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God' Colossians

3.1.

In his teaching Paul uses two specific ways to encourage godliness and loving obedience in the Christian. He takes us to Calvary to consider Christ crucified, in the hope that such contemplation will encourage godliness. He also exhorts us to remember the risen Christ and the implications this has for those in union with Him.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the two themes used constantly to encourage godliness. Our relationship with Jesus Christ, Who has died and risen again, is the key to motivating the Christian life. This is a God-given relationship. To be called by grace, chosen by God, saved according to God's mercy in Christ and justified by faith in Him, is the greatest blessing and privilege a person can ever know. It is priceless.

Here Paul focuses on our position through faith in Jesus Christ. You are raised with Him: therefore consider where Christ is. You are hidden with Christ in God: therefore you will also appear with Him in Glory.

Obedience

On the basis of these wonderful truths, now exercise your lives continually in this manner.

Seek

The first lesson to learn under the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit is to seek first the Kingdom of God. Blessings from God come

The Believer's Position and Obedience

to us through the spiritual exercises of the seeker. We do not receive in a half-hearted, casual, careless manner; blessing comes to those who seek.

'The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek God' Psalm 14.2.

The word 'seek' here has the meaning of having an attitude of enquiring endeavour.

'One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple' Psalm 27.4.

See the biblical teaching on seeking:

- Jesus taught the importance of this seeking endeavour in prayer to obtain the blessing of the Lord:

'So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you' Luke 11.9.

- seeking when under the chastening hand of the Lord:

'But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul' Deuteronomy 4.29.

- seeking is a spiritual exercise involving the harmony of the heart and soul:

'Now set your heart and your soul to seek the Lord your God' 1 Chronicles 22.19.

- seek while it is the day of grace:

'Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near' Isaiah 55.6.

- the contrite spirit in seeking the Lord:

'Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your

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fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you' Hosea 10.12.

- the supremacy of seeking the Lord:

'But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you' Matthew 6.33.

'Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore!' 1 Chronicles 16.11.

Note here the first motive Paul sets before us, inspired of the Holy Spirit, for seeking the Lord. Our Saviour is at the right hand of God; He is dwelling at the very epicentre of blessing, at its source. From the Triune God flow all spiritual blessings. Blessings come from God in Heaven, in glory and in majesty. There is no higher or better seeking place than the throne of God – prayer.

Set

'Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth' Colossians 3.2.

We have seen that seeking is the endeavour of an enquiring and inquisitive mind, a mind seeking truth. Now we are told to have constancy with this enquiring, seeking endeavour. To 'set' means to keep on giving serious consideration to, to fix your attention on, and let your mind dwell on something. We are to set our minds on things above, not on things below.

So here Paul is teaching the Christian that this spiritual endeavour of the mind is reserved for God alone. Here on earth we must not seek and set our minds on something or somebody in the same way. We are to be diligent, loving, caring and generous to one another as unto the Lord, but we are not to set our minds, lock our minds, upon our loved ones, work or interests, or they will become idols.

'If riches increase, do not set your heart on them' Psalm 62.10.

The Believer's Position and Obedience

Only God is worthy and worth seeking and setting our minds upon in such a dedicated manner as this.

Such thinking brings stability:

'I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved' Psalm 16.8.

Such thinking is the pathway to blessing:

'Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage' Psalm 84.5.

'That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments. Psalm 78.7.

The alternative attitude is destruction:

'...whose end is destruction...whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things' Philippians 3.19.

The reasons

'For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory' Colossians 3.3-4.

A Christian is a person who has died to the things of this world so that they are no longer the number one priority in his life. A Christian is a person who has died to the dominance and dominion of the world over their lives. Testimony to this truth is the fact the Christian has died with Christ; he is wholly identified with Christ crucified.

'...knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin' Romans 6.6.

'For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you' 2 Corinthians 13.4.

Complete in Him

'I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me' Galatians 2.20.

'And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires' Galatians 5.24.

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.*

Edward Mote, 1797-1874

Your life now is wrapped up in a spiritual relationship with Christ, the hidden working of God in the heart. A Christian is secure with Christ in God. There is an unbreakable bond, dwelling in *'the secret place of the Most High'* (Psalm 91.1). Our spiritual life and nourishment in the Holy Spirit has its source in Heaven, not on earth. This hidden work has an outward fruit in living obedience and sacrificial service unto the Lord.

Put to death

'Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them' Colossians 3.5-7.

Here the apostle Paul is exhorting us to be severe and courageous against the pull of the old nature, the flesh. This is an exercise vital to the spiritual life of the Christian. Only with the enabling of the Holy

The Believer's Position and Obedience

Spirit can we succeed in putting to death the spirit of worldliness. The implication here is that extreme measures need to be taken. If you are struggling with what you are viewing on your computer, then purchase safeguarding software. There is software available which enables an invited, trusted friend to track what you are watching. The Lord Jesus said, *'If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off'* (Mark 9.43). Of course, He did not mean this literally. What He meant was, what your hand is handling, or your eye is seeing in an evil manner – cut it out! For some to have Sky Sports would be a problem, tempting them to watch too much sport, and thus being ensnared.

God in His mercy can give us the strength to walk away from a situation which is going to hurt us or our family. Think of the situation Joseph found himself in with Potiphar's wife (*Genesis 39*).

Here the apostle Paul names some specific sins and vices which Satan would captivate us with:

- Fornication – immoral relationships, including adultery in the mind or in the flesh;
- Uncleaness – moral uncleaness in the mind or in the flesh;
- Passion – lust, inordinate affection;
- Evil desire – a longing for what God forbids, as Adam and Eve did at the Fall;
- Covetousness – being driven to acquire more, irrespective of need; to desire what is another's, or to have more than another. In the culture of the day greed was seen as a strength.

In the final analysis Paul, inspired by the Spirit, summarises this in one word – idolatry. The Apostle John finished his first letter with the warning, *'Little children, keep yourselves from idols'* (1 John 5.21).

Remember the outcome of this way of life is judgment. Do not return to the old way! See this behaviour for what it really is – idolatry and offence to God.

Complete in Him

Put off

'But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all' Colossians 3.8-11.

Here again is a continuing exercise of the soul.

- Anger – an attitude of selfish, proud indignation;
- Wrath – fierceness, breathing out angry words;
- Malice – intent on trouble and hurt;
- Blasphemy – speaking against God;
- Filthy language – vile conversation that feeds the lustful nature;
- Lies – to utter an untruth, but also, in the original, to attempt to deceive another.

Put on

There are also things we must put on which we will look at in the next Chapter in more detail – the new man, the new nature. We are to live by the new nature, renewed in knowledge, growing in the Lord and His Word.

'Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day' 2 Corinthians 4.16.

We must also live according to the image of Him Who created us. We are made in the image of God, manifesting the communicable attributes of God.

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'And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man' 1 Corinthians 15.49.

There are no national, cultural or social divisions. Grace bridges all chasms. Christ is all and in all – the all-sufficient One.

Conclusion

The believer's position – privileged above all others.

The believer's obedience – it is not first what we do, but first what we are.

10. THE BELIEVER'S POSITIVE PURSUIT

Colossians 3.12-15

Again Paul brings us to the consideration of our position as a Christian.

'Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved...' Colossians 3.12a.

Elect of God

Here is one of the many references in the Word of God to the doctrine of election. Every saved person is effectually and personally called, according to God's sovereign grace. This unique work, by the Holy Spirit of God, causes a person to respond consciously, willingly and positively. The message of the Gospel in Christ Jesus becomes real to them.

God the Holy Spirit enters their being and convicts them of their sin. He leads them to trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour, and follow Him as their Lord. The Holy Spirit gives to them spiritual life giving them a desire for righteousness in Christ Jesus. They experience the gifts of repentance and faith in their life. God does this in such a way that their whole being – mind, heart and will – are all engaged.

'Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace to you and peace be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an

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inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time' 1 Peter 1.1-5.

'But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you' 1 Peter 5.10.

'But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light' 1 Peter 2.9.

'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself' Ephesians 1.3-9.

Holy

While the word 'holy' does have its main reference to living a godly life – 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy' (Leviticus 19.2) – here the word 'holy' has to do with being set apart, cut from the ties of Satan and bondage, separated to God. It is used here in the context of our election of God.

Beloved

It is a wonder that we are loved by anyone, considering our fallen natures. But to be beloved of God is indeed a great wonder of His love. We are beloved to God as we are accepted by Him in His only beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

God does not start to love His chosen in time; He set His love upon them before time in eternity.

'...who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began'
2 Timothy 1.9.

'But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth' 2 Thessalonians 2.13.

So this is your position, your status as a child of God. Therefore live according to your calling.

Put on

'...put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering...' Colossians 3.12b.

The Christian walk is not just about putting off the evil, sinful actions and attitudes; it is also equally important to be putting on. The Christian life is actually a life of positive actions. It is clear and unambiguous – put off evil; put on good.

Let us live our lives with this principle constantly before us. When we are tempted to speak harshly or judgmentally, to gossip, to speak unkindly or untruthfully – stop! Put it off! Replace the put-off evil deeds by putting on good deeds, the attitude that accords to the new nature.

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Tender mercies

'...put on tender mercies...' Colossians 3.12b.

This term 'tender mercies' means mercies which are heartfelt – which move us! It means mercy that emanates not only from the mind but from the heart – compassion. We read of Jesus being moved with compassion by some people who gathered to hear Him. He spoke of them as being sheep without a shepherd (*Mark 6.34*). This is tender mercy in perfection. The whole being of Jesus was moved on behalf of needy sinners. This motivated Him on His journey to Calvary.

This exercise of tender mercy for the Christian is far more difficult and searching that we perhaps realise. How do we give? How do we serve? How do we view the lost – people whose lives are in a mess? They may have got themselves into debt, adultery, drugs, alcohol, pornography, stealing or corruption. As saved sinners we may look on these people as being unworthy, losers, wasters or foolish. We need grace to reach out without compromise and with tender mercies to the lost. This is a great need! Do we always have the right attitude towards visitors to the church? Has our attitude to them been kind and merciful?

Think of how Jesus sat with, and saved, the woman of Samaria who had gone through several relationships (*John 4*); how Jesus saved Zacchaeus, the corrupt tax collector, and went to dine with him (*Luke 19*); how Jesus saved Saul the persecutor (*Acts 9*). A further Bible illustration of this grace is given in the parable of the Good Samaritan (*Luke 10.25-37*).

We must pray for the God-given ability to show and have compassion, so we can be trusted with the needy.

Kindness

'Put on...kindness...' Colossians 3.12b.

This is to have a gracious, kindly attitude towards another, in

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harmony with kind actions. It is not confined to kind actions, but also applies to the motive behind the kindness. It means to first have the right attitude – be kindly disposed to another.

Paul reminds us, in his letter to the church at Corinth, that love demonstrates itself in kindness and patience.

'Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up' 1 Corinthians 13.4.

The beauty of kindness is manifested in the manner in which God gave His only beloved Son.

'But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared...' Titus 3.4.

'He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus' Ephesians 2.7.

'And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you' Ephesians 4.32.

Humility

'Put on...humility...' Colossians 3.12b.

Now this was a great challenge for the church at Colosse in a culture where pride was seen to be good and humility despised. Today we live in the same kind of culture wherein image and self-promotion is valued and humility often despised. To help us in this exercise we need to remind ourselves of the example of the Lord Jesus.

'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross' Philippians 2.5-8.

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It is also helpful to remind ourselves of the advice given by Peter in his first letter.

‘The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you’ 1 Peter 5.1-7.

There are great encouragements for salvation and guidance given to the humble.

‘For You will save the humble people, but will bring down haughty looks’ Psalm 18.27.

‘For the Lord takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation’ Psalm 149.4.

‘The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way’ Psalm 25.9.

‘My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and be glad’ Psalm 34.2.

Meekness

‘Put on...meekness...’ Colossians 3.12b.

Meekness, as a humble and gentle attitude to others, is determined

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by a true estimate of ourselves. Meekness is described as a true view of oneself, expressing itself in attitude and conduct towards others.

'...to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men' Titus 3.2.

Meekness here is not to do with a person's natural temperament. It is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, an essential part in the engine of the Christian life.

The word 'meek' in *Colossians 3.12* has the meaning of a mild, stable, gentle and humble attitude, concerned first for the honour of the Lord and then for the well being of others. When meekness is in action it provides something of the fragrance of Christ in a person's testimony. It is sometimes described as the ornament of the Christian life.

a. Meekness is a humble acceptance and trust in the ways of God.

When this is in evidence, it provides a most powerful testimony for good in the life of the believer.

*Whate'er be my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
"It is well, it is well with my soul."*

Horatio G Spafford, 1828-88

b. Meekness means a humble acceptance and trust in the Word of God

'...receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls' James 1.21.

Thomas Watson, the Puritan, describes this meekness as 'flexibility to the Word of God'. Meekness in a person means they are willing to be moulded to God's Word, as clay in the hands of the heavenly Potter, that they may be a vessel unto honour, not dishonour. How flexible are we to the Word of God? How willing are we to change our thinking to God's thinking?

Complete in Him

'The humble He guides in justice, and the humble He teaches His way' Psalm 25.9.

c. Meekness finds its inspirational example perfectly displayed in Jesus Christ

'Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ...' 2 Corinthians 10.1.

'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls' Matthew 11.29 (AV).

Look to Christ and pray that God will make us, by His Spirit, truly and consistently meek and lowly in heart.

d. Meekness is a sign of inner spiritual strength

As you are no doubt aware, meekness is sometimes confused with weakness. This is to misunderstand the actual strength of meekness. Meekness does not need to shout or use aggression to demonstrate its strength. The strength of meekness arises out of an inner confidence in God. It is manifested in a quiet, humble and constant spirit. Meekness controls our behaviour in a positive manner consistently to all.

Meekness:

- is not hasty in spirit;
- bears no malice;
- never seeks revenge;
- avoids evil speaking;
- bears injuries;
- forgives really, fully and often;
- is the master over our own selfish self-interest and exercising of self-control;
- is a daily exercise of mind and attitude;

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- means a person is willing to be corrected and admonished;
- means a person is willing to accept the advice of a helpful critic;
- means a person's approach to teaching and correction will be in humility.

'Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted' Galatians 6.1.

Meekness governs our attitude in witness.

'But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear' 1 Peter 3.15.

John Calvin said:

'Meekness is a defining grace produced by the Holy Spirit in the life of a Christian, which characterises that person's response to God.'

Longsuffering

'Put on...longsuffering...' Colossians 3.12b.

When Moses asked to see God's glory, the answer given at the outset was God speaking of His character.

'And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth"' Exodus 34.6.

It is an absolute reality that we know in our own lives the longsuffering nature of God. Understanding the nature of God helps us to serve Him in the way in which He would have us do.

In this verse the word 'longsuffering' means a consistent restraint of the soul to yield to the passion of anger. It is a brave, courageous attitude that is the master of natural temper and anger. This word means a patient holding out under trial. It has been described as the brave

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patience with which the Christian contends against the various hindrances, persecutions and temptations that befall him in his conflict with the inward and outward pressures of the world. It has to do with our attitude towards others.

Forbearance

‘...bearing with one another...’ Colossians 3.13a.

Closely aligned to longsuffering is the exercise of forbearing with one another. A church and congregation is made up of people with all sorts of temperaments by nature. We all have strengths and weaknesses. Satan is a master at accentuating our weaknesses and hindering our strengths in a bad and evil manner. We may have a short fuse by nature, or be impetuous, lazy, shy, bossy, proud or a busybody. Satan stirs these up.

The Church is in the business of forbearing with one another, not focusing on the faults of others, helping and serving one another with forbearance, understanding, knowledge and wisdom, remembering that *‘a soft answer turns away wrath’ (Proverbs 15.1)*.

We have a choice: we can focus on each other’s faults, or focus on each other’s strengths and help one another. Jesus spoke of this as seeing the speck in another’s eye while ignoring the plank in your own (*Matthew 7.4-5*)!

Forbearance is described as the brave patience with which the Christian deals with trials, temptation, prevarication, opposition and slander. The root of the word has to do with a patience that quells the emotion motivating a natural retaliation in anger. Hendriksen said:

‘In view of the fact that God has been so longsuffering toward me, even though in His holy eyes my sins must stand out far more clearly than do my brother’s blemishes in my eyes, I must surely be patient with my brother.’

Whereas the natural man sees strength in anger and retaliation, the

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Christian understands strength as the God-given ability to restrain the old nature and live by the new. The exercise of longsuffering is for the glory of God and for the sanctification of ourselves.

'...with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love' Ephesians 4.2.

When we consider the many exhortations in Scripture, we can feel overwhelmed. We feel unworthy, and often have to confess difficulties in exercising these wise exhortations. But truly understood, these exhortations can only be in real exercise as an outworking of the new nature. When we try to follow them through our own efforts, our own wisdom, our own strength, we often stumble.

These exhortations are an exercise of the mind, heart and will as they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit in the new nature is influencing and enabling, we will be following the example of Christ. He was lowly and meek, and exercised, in a perfect manner, longsuffering to forbearance. We need to pray for a Christ-like spirit, for this will positively govern the way we behave towards one another.

Forbearance is to bear up under provocation in a spirit of meek gentleness. It is to forbear one another in the exercise of love, characterised by lowliness, meekness and longsuffering. It is to understand that in exercising such a spirit we are actually doing good to our souls. We are a spiritual garden in which Christ is pleased to walk, and support and encourage through His Word.

To have the answer of a good conscience in our dealings is to enjoy peace in the heart. Satan wants us to retaliate, promising satisfaction and the exercise of our rights. The satisfaction of retaliation and revenge is shortlived for the Christian, and merely loads him with a greater burden. Remember God is permitting the situations in your life, and will overturn them for your spiritual good if you forbear.

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Matthew Henry said:

‘Forbearing one another in love signifies bearing their infirmities out of a principle of love, and so as not to cease to love them on the account of these. The best Christians have need to bear one with another, and to make the best one of another, to provoke one another’s graces and not their passions.’

Let us remember, we worship a God who is constantly showing forbearance to us.

Forgiveness

*‘...and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do’
Colossians 3.13b.*

Notice here how Paul uses a continuing word. If you think you have had your fill of forgiving another, you are wrong. Remember Jesus’ own teaching on this in answer to Peter’s question in *Matthew 18.21-35*.

Forgiveness does your soul good and also the body of the church. Why? Because the body is in pain if a wrong spirit is prevailing. Forgiveness is God’s medicine to heal.

‘And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you’ Ephesians 4.32.

Paul uses exactly the same reasoning here to the church at Colosse
Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said²:

‘I say to the glory of God and in utter humility that whenever I see myself before God, and realise something of what my blessed Lord has done for me, I am ready to forgive anybody anything.’

² *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, chapter 36, Eerdmans Publishing, 1984

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God's forgiveness of our sin places an obligation upon us to forgive others. One of the fruits of a saved and forgiven person is demonstrated in their forgiving others. Forgiving others is not easy. One of the greatest obstacles to church fellowship and growth is a spirit of bitterness and refusal to forgive. Our profession of faith is a sham if we stubbornly refuse to forgive those who have wronged us. If the Holy Spirit of God is working in our life, then forgiveness of others will evidence itself. If we have been forgiven by God it will influence our lives and impact upon them. One of the effects is gratitude to God which evidences itself in a forgiving spirit. (See again *Matthew 18.21-35.*)

Corrie ten Boom told of not being able to forget a wrong that had been done to her. She had forgiven the person, but she kept rehashing the incident and so could not sleep. Finally, Corrie cried out to God for help in putting the problem to rest.

'His help came in the form of a kind pastor, to whom I confessed my failure after two sleepless weeks. "Up in the church tower," he said, nodding out the window, "is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope. But you know what? After the sexton lets go of the rope, the bell keeps on swinging. First ding, then dong. Slower and slower until there's a final dong and it stops. I believe the same thing is true of forgiveness. When we forgive, we take our hand off the rope. But if we've been tugging at our grievances for a long time, we mustn't be surprised if the old angry thoughts keep coming for a while. They're just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down." And so it proved to be. There were a few more midnight reverberations, a couple of dings when the subject came up in my conversations, but the force – which was my willingness in the matter – had gone out of them. They came less and less often and at the last stopped

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altogether: we can trust God not only above our emotions, but also above our thoughts.³

The Word of God can be intensely challenging at times. Forgiveness can be described as being like two sides of one coin – God forgiving us and us forgiving others. Forgiven and forgiving are the hallmarks of a true Christian. We are saved by God's grace, but amazing grace brings its responsibilities. It is like faith and works. James is saying, 'Let us see your faith by your works' (see *James 2.14-26*).

Love

'But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection' Colossians 3.14.

Paul concludes with the grace of love. He does this because it is contained in all the other graces a Christian must show: love in Christ Jesus as the Lord of the heart. Without love, Paul tells us in *1 Corinthians 13*, we are no more than a clanging cymbal.

Love:

- supplies kindness and banishes unkindness;
- gives friendship and banishes enmity;
- gives fellowship and inspires forgiveness;
- is the joy of the Christian and the pilot that guides us through treacherous waters.

If we desire to be a mature Christian, to be perfected and matured in our sanctification, then love is the key. The word 'perfection' here has the meaning of completeness. Without love flowing we are incomplete. Paul teaches that love is the bonding of the Church in its fellowship together. The Church, as a body, needs the ligaments of love to bind it together. Often it seems these ligaments get torn, but love binds. Love is our Lord, for God is love.

³ *Guide Post Classics*, Corrie ten Boom, 'Forgiveness', 1972

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'He who does not love does not know God, for God is love'
1 John 4.8.

These are some of the positive pursuits for the Christian and there is enough here for us to getting on with!

Let the peace of God reign

'And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful' Colossians 3.15.

Paul, using the word 'rule' in the context of peace, is considering its use as in the Olympic Games. The umpire, or moderator, of the Games reigned supreme as the final arbiter of the winner of the event. The meaning of this word is set in the inner battle of the heart between the old and new nature. We need a true and wise ruler, such as the peace of God.

As an illustration, the referee in a game of football decides if one player has fouled another; or the umpire of a tennis match decides if a ball is in or out. So Paul says let peace rule as the umpire to ensure the right way of peace is followed. Peace will then be the outcome and have the final say in your relationships with one another. Let it rule; let it be your objective within your heart and to one another.

This not a manufactured peace. It is the peace of God in Christ Jesus that reigns in the heart. Let the Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, rule your hearts. Let God's peace reign; it is the only lasting peace. This means that Jesus Christ rules the heart and the mind by His example, Person and Word.

11. WORSHIP IN WORD AND DEED

Colossians 3.16

The wisdom of the Word of God

‘Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another’ Colossians 3.16a.

‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work’ 2 Timothy 3.16-17.

All Scripture is God-breathed, or inspired, by the Holy Spirit of God. The Word of Christ, in its fullest sense, means all the Scriptures, as they centre in Him as Saviour and Lord. So wherever you are reading in the Word of God, let it ‘dwell richly’ in you as it will lead you to Christ.

Central to Scripture is Christ Jesus, and in this context is it is referred to as Christ’s Word, for Christ is the revelation in Person, as the God-Man of the heart, character and power of God.

‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth’ John 1.14.

However, the phrase ‘*the word of Christ*’ in this verse is the only place in the Bible such a reference is made. Therefore it has a specific application to be considered as regards the ministry of Jesus Christ.

a. The Word of Christ: the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Let the Gospel Word of His suffering, death, resurrection and intercession dwell in you richly.

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b. The Word of Christ: the teaching of Jesus Christ

The Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5-7*) is the perfect example of the way to interpret the Law of God in life.

c. The Word of Christ: the example of Jesus Christ

Let His grace and truth dwell in you richly.

*‘Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus’
Philippians 2.5 (see also to verse 11).*

In the original it reads as ‘Let dwell’. It means let it inhabit your heart and mind, reside, pervade every room, be at home in the heart.

Richly

Let the Word of Christ be the chief guest in the best room of the heart. Do not allow any ‘no go’ areas in your heart that would hinder the Word of Christ from blessing your life. Draw from the riches of the Word and example of Christ, that His influence and Spirit mould your life.

‘I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. Like a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. Like an apple tree among the trees of the woods, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down in his shade with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love’ Song of Solomon 2.1-4.

How can this be exercised in the experience of the Christian? Hendriksen helps us here:

- Heed the Word: *‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear!’ Matthew 13.9;*
- Handle it wisely: *‘Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth’ 2 Timothy 2.15;*
- Hide it in the heart: *‘Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You’ Psalm 119.11;*

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- Hold it forth as the truth the word of life: *'...holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or laboured in vain'* Philippians 2.16.

The greatest desire of a Christian is to be fruitful for the glory of God.

'I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing' John 15.5.

In all wisdom

Have confidence that within the Word of Christ dwells all wisdom. The way of wisdom is to be guided by the Christ-centred Word of God, to be moulded by it and communicating it.

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever' Psalm 111:10.

'For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding' Proverbs 2.6.

'When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul...' Proverbs 2.10.

'Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding' Proverbs 3.13.

'Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding' Proverbs 4.7.

'The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord' Isaiah 11.2.

'The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the

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earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here' Matthew 12.42.

'But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption' 1 Corinthians 1.30.

Teaching and admonishing

There is a serious responsibility given to members of a church in their relationship with one another. Fellowship among us includes this challenge of ministering to one another from the Word of Christ. The term 'teaching' used here is not in the context of the authority of the preaching office; it is teaching and supporting one another through your own personal experience of the Word of Christ. Teaching here is an exercise done in meekness and with humbleness of heart. Only as we seriously engage with the Word of God, submitting to its authority, can we teach others.

Teaching one another here is not in the context of preaching but in the context of fellowship. It could be in a small group Bible Study, men's or ladies' meetings, fellowship breakfasts or one-to-one. It is to share with others what we have learned through the Scripture for mutual benefit.

Likewise in the same spirit is admonition, that is, speaking the truth in love in the context of correction. To be able to admonish one another requires spiritual maturity, humility and grace. Before we can admonish one another we need to be aware of our own dependence upon God's grace.

The word 'admonish' means to watch for someone in a caring, loving manner, being concerned for their soul. This will include giving a word of correction, or raising a concern you have discerned but for positive ends. It means to reprove gently with a genuine concern for the soul.

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‘Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted’ Galatians 6.1.

Paul commends the believers of the church at Rome because they were able to exercise this ministry. The members cared for one another’s souls. They did much of the pastoral work among themselves.

Again, like the other ‘one another’ exhortations, the exercise of this ministry is to be done in love. Never set out to admonish a brother or sister in anger or in a judging spirit. Only do so in love for their good. When we admonish one another the first reaction may be hurtful and one of rejection. However, if that admonition is justified and correct, a true believer will, in time, be thankful to the Lord for it.

The wisdom of worship

‘...in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord’ Colossians 3.16b.

Here is one of the key verses in Scripture that deals with the blessing of collective worship in singing. There is to be doctrinal content based upon the Word of God for teaching one another; and there is to be experiential content based upon the Word of God for admonishing one another. Here is one of the key Scriptures to encourage the use of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.

There is a golden thread that must run through our singing with one another in praise – the truth of the Word, and the unity of worship in praise and practice based upon the Word of God, encouraging ourselves in the Lord.

- Psalms: *The Psalms* in verse form that can be sung with understanding;
- Hymns: doctrine in verses that can also be sung with understanding;

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- Spiritual songs: doctrine in the form of a short ode, or what we would call a chorus, again sung with understanding. In the original Greek it has the meaning of a sacred verse – meaning a short ode based on the Word of God.

The act of singing is to be gracious, God-honouring, thoughtful, respectful, joyful and heartfelt. Singing in worship is unique to a Christian inasmuch as it must include the spiritual exercise of grace in the heart. To sing with grace in our hearts is to sing seriously, engaging our mind to the words; to sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord means to sing in a gracious, thoughtful manner. For example, when the words are of praise, we lift up our voices; when the words are confession, we sing softer. We are singing with understanding of the words.

Singing with grace in our hearts is to sing in a manner whereby others are helped, not hindered, in their worship. We are not to bring attention to ourselves by way of distracting others, but to sing from our hearts unto the Lord.

Another translation of '*singing with grace in your heart*' is to 'sing with melody in your hearts.' This means to sing harmoniously. This care taken in singing, to ensure spiritual enjoyment in worship, is all part of our serving one another. In any event, if we take seriously the exhortation to sing with grace, there will be harmony between us, for we are taught here that we are singing to the Lord, and to sing to the Lord requires reverence and respect, and this encourages unity of purpose.

Singing is not only an act of worship to God, it is an act of service to one another. We encourage ourselves in the Lord as we worship together.

12. WHATEVER YOU DO IN WORD OR DEED

Colossians 3.17

‘And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus’ Colossians 3.17a.

Here is the life wholly committed to Christ, wherein you speak and act in accordance with the Spirit of Christ. This verse provides a guard upon our lips and actions: Can I pray about this? Can I ask God’s blessing upon this? Are these words commensurate with honouring the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? Are these actions in accordance with the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ?

This verse reminds us that the Lord Jesus Christ is not only our Captain, He is also our Advocate on high, for we must pray to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Prayers accepted by the Father must come through His Son, for His Person, His character, His attributes and His finished work upon the Cross speak for us.

This verse teaches us that Christ has authority over our lives; our authority in ministry is in His name. This command includes both our words and our deeds. It is an exhortation that comes with a deep solemnity. It is easy for a Christian to take the name of the Lord in vain. Sadly, we add phrases to our decisions, prayers and conversations which are not always sincere. To ‘do all in the name of the Lord Jesus’ means accepting His authority as Saviour and Lord over our lives. It means to be in a vital, living relationship with Him as our Lord; to be in harmony with His revealed will found in His Word in dependence upon His power. It means following Him, not going before Him; it means in our labours we desire His glory, not our own; it means we are desiring to magnify Him in our souls and by our ministry in the souls of others. It means we submit to His leadership and

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do those things which are reflecting the character of Christ. Then, together with Christ, we receive blessing.

‘...giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ’ Ephesians 5.20’

This is about lifestyle — it is about Who the Commander of our life and is and Whom we are serving. This was the first lesson Paul learnt after conversion.

‘As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” And he said, “Who are You, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” So he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Then the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do”’ Acts 9.3-6.

‘So I said, “What shall I do, Lord?” And the Lord said to me, “Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do”’ Acts 22.10.

Instead of Paul living by religious rules and regulations, he was now to live his life by one principle: letting the Holy Spirit rule his life. So he now enquired, *‘What shall I do, Lord?’; ‘What do You want me to do?’*

But if we are to do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, we must have confidence in His name as our Guide, our Saviour, our Advocate, our High Priest, our Shepherd and our Lord. We need the faith to trust in the name of the Lord as our refuge.

The name of the Lord is a strong tower

‘The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe’ Proverbs 18.10.

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This refers to the character, attributes and reputation of the Lord. Towers in Solomon's day were symbols of strength and safety. You may visit a castle while on holiday that was built hundreds of years ago. Some remain firm and strong even to this day!

Solomon would have learned from his father David the significance of using their symbolism to express God's strength and security. His father David had also learned through experience. After deliverance from his adversary Saul, David composed a Psalm of Thanksgiving. In it he writes:

'The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my Saviour, You save me from violence' 2 Samuel 22.3.

'For You have been a shelter for me, a strong tower from the enemy' Psalm 61.3.

Why were David and Solomon so convinced about the name of the Lord? They believed by faith and learned through experience, like their forefathers Abraham and Moses, about the complete sufficiency of the 'Name of the Lord'.

a. A strong tower of refuge – the name of the Lord is forever

'Then Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there called on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God' Genesis 21.33.

Abraham had lived much of his life as a pilgrim, walking by faith and proving the faithfulness of the Lord. In his old age, having received the fulfillment of God's promise in the birth of Isaac, he established a place of worship where he called on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God. The Lord is not limited by time; He is not 'here today and gone tomorrow'. Here is one name in which we can trust yesterday, today and forever (*Hebrews 13.8*). Abraham believed in the everlasting God. He looked forward beyond time, to a never-ending eternity trusting in the name of the Lord.

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b. A strong tower of refuge – the name of the Lord is gracious and compassionate

‘Then He said, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion”’ Exodus 33.19.

In the context of this statement of truth the Children of Israel had rebelled against God. Moses interceded before the Lord on their behalf. He realised that he could not go on without the Lord, and pleaded for His presence. Having received the promise of God’s actual presence, Moses was filled with spiritual desire and asked God to show him His glory. The Lord revealed more of His character to Moses under the banner of His name.

c. A strong tower of refuge – the name of the Lord is merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth and full of justice

‘Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth generation”’ Exodus 34.5-7.

Moses was on Mount Sinai again to receive from God the Ten Commandments. They had to be written again a second time by God on new tablets of stone, the first having been broken as a symbol of God’s wrath because of the idolatry of the Children of Israel. There the Lord descended in the cloud to meet Moses at the top of the mountain, and revealed to Moses even more about His character, again under the banner of the name of the Lord.

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d. A strong tower of refuge – the name of the Lord is great, perfect, just and right

‘For I proclaim the name of the Lord: ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He’ Deuteronomy 32.3-4.

Moses was now at the end of his life and his testimony of the Lord was all praise: ‘I will proclaim the name of the Lord!’ Moses had learned through experience that the name of the Lord is gracious, compassionate, merciful, longsuffering, abundant in goodness, truth, great, perfect, just and right. Moses had something to sing about and Someone to trust in! Moses was blessed because he took refuge in the name of the Lord.

The righteous run into it

Who are the righteous? The Bible says that there are ‘*none righteous, no, not one*’ (Romans 3.10)! This is absolutely true of fallen humanity, there is no one perfect in and of themselves. So who are the righteous?

Right-minded

This is one of the aspects to this word in the context here. These are people looking in the right direction, to the right Person for safety and security. They evidence that God is working in their lives by right thinking. Right thinking is affecting their lives positively. It is Godward thinking.

Gladys Aylward, the missionary to China more than fifty years ago, was forced to flee when the Japanese invaded Yangcheng. But she could not leave her work behind. With only one assistant, she led more than a hundred orphans over the mountains toward Free China. In the book ‘The Hidden Price of Greatness,’⁴ it is recorded:

⁴ *The Hidden Price of Greatness*, Ray Beeson & Ranelda Mack Hunsicker, Tynedale House, Publisher, Carol Stream, IL: 1991, pages 141-142.

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‘During Gladys’s harrowing journey out of war-torn Yangcheng with more than one hundred orphan children, she grappled with despair as never before. After passing a sleepless night, she faced the morning with no hope of reaching safety. A thirteen-year-old girl in the group reminded her of their much loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

“But I am not Moses,” Gladys cried in desperation. “Of course you are not,” the girl said, “but Jehovah is still God!” When Gladys and the orphans made it through, they proved once again that no matter how inadequate we feel, God is still God, and we can trust in him.’

The righteous

Their righteousness is not of themselves, their righteousness is in the one Whom they trust. They evidence the work of God’s grace in their life by their faith. They run into the strong tower and find their peace, security and righteousness from the Lord. The faith of the Old Testament believers is a witness to us today. They looked forward by faith to the Messiah; their hope and security was in Him.

‘In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS’ Jeremiah 23.6.

And are safe – lifted on high

The story is told of a monastery in Portugal, perched high on a 3,000 foot cliff and accessible only by a terrifying ride in a swaying basket. The basket was pulled with a single rope by several strong men, perspiring under the strain of the fully loaded basket. One American tourist who visited the site got nervous halfway up the cliff when he noticed that the rope was old and frayed. Hoping to relieve his fear he asked, “How often do you change the rope?” The monk in charge replied, “Whenever it breaks!” There is none of this insecurity in the name of the Lord. Those trusting in Jesus Christ are eternally secure:

Whatever You Do in Word and Deed

‘...giving thanks to God the Father through Him’ Colossians 3.17b.

Our Christian lives must always be with thanksgiving unto God the Father through God the Son. In this thankful spirit our lives are lived for His glory, and can therefore be lived out in His name with thanksgiving unto God.

‘In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you’ 1 Thessalonians 5.18.

Thanksgiving to God in everything is a statement of faith in God’s will. It is also a statement of submission to God’s sovereignty.

The Scottish minister Alexander Whyte was known for his uplifting prayers in the pulpit. He always found something for which to be grateful. One Sunday morning the weather was so gloomy that one church member thought to himself, ‘Certainly the preacher won’t think of anything for which to thank the Lord on a wretched day like this!’ Much to his surprise, however, Whyte began by praying, ‘We thank Thee, O God, that it is not always like this.’

Thanksgiving to God in everything is a statement of confidence in God’s power and plan. When we rejoice in the Lord, and depend upon Him in unceasing prayer, we will see that life has a purpose. We will realise that nothing happens by chance. In all our circumstances God is overruling to comfort, challenge and correct, and to mould us through His Word in Christ Jesus. When we see God as our heavenly Husbandman, pruning our lives to bring fruit, then we will see the relevance and significance of this spiritual duty commanded by God.

In everything give thanks through Him

We are what we are through the work and Person of Jesus Christ. Christ is never bypassed in the Father’s relationship with His people! Thanksgiving must be centred in Christ Jesus to be approved by God the Father.

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We:

- are chosen in Christ;
- are created in Christ;
- are saved and forgiven in Christ Jesus;
- are justified by faith in Christ;
- are accepted in Christ;
- are sanctified by the Holy Spirit in Christ;
- suffer with Christ;
- die in Christ;
- are resurrected in Christ;
- are glorified in Christ.

'For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's' Romans 14.8.

What a privilege, above all else, to be in Christ!

13. SUBMISSION GOD'S WAY

Colossians 3.18-4.1

At this point in his letter to the Colossian church, Paul turns to some practical application to the Christian life.

'Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord'
Colossians 3.18.

He is dealing primarily in this verse with the exercise of submission. So, at the outset, we will be considering the biblical nature of submission. In this day and age, the very thought of submission tends to raise an immediate, negative response in the mind. But actually, submission, as taught in Scripture, is something intended to bring about blessing.

Submission is an adornment of grace; it is something well-pleasing unto the Lord. The perfect example of submission is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, when the Lord Jesus submitted to the ordinance of baptism, God the Father spoke from Heaven and said, *'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'* (Matthew 3.17).

This submission is seen as the cost of sacrifice to Himself, His body, mind and soul. Christ always submitted to His Father's will whatever it was, and this was part of His perfect life and example. It was His Father's will that He should submit to the authority of His earthly parents, as He grew into manhood. At the age of twelve, having astounded the religious leaders in Jerusalem with His theological knowledge, He returned home and was subject to his earthly parents.

Submission was an exercise experienced constantly in the life of the Lord Jesus as the perfect Man. We see it at the end of His life in its most profound depth. This is submission in its total reality and depth.

'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done' Luke 22.42.

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The point at the outset is that submission is an exercise our Lord undertook, and it always resulted in blessing. Submission of the Lord Jesus to the will of God the Father resulted in our salvation on the cross at Calvary. So we need to properly assess that the issue of submission is actually to be in God's way, which is a pathway to blessing. To ignore the exercise of submission in our life will result in spiritual heartache and pain. Please bear in mind these opening comments on submission as it relates to Christ as we work through this passage.

Husbands and wives

'Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them' Colossians 3.18-19.

Notice here the connection between the submission of the wife and right attitude and love of the husband. You will remember that Paul makes this same connection to the church at Ephesus.

'Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her' Ephesians 5.22-25.

Submission, in its positive sense, needs to be seen beyond the husband, as obedience unto the Lord. Submission to one's husband is not required if he is directing you against the Lord and His Word. But if the husband is leading, advising and caring according to the Word of God with spiritual leadership, then it is right and proper for the wife to submit to the headship of the husband, whatever the cost. Not to do so is to disobey God's order and put yourself in front of your husband as being the one in control, to go back to the Garden of Eden. This was one of the problems relating to the Fall.

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'So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate' Genesis 3.6.

The order of marriage was reversed. Eve was tempted by Satan, and Adam relinquished his role as head. Adam followed his wife, despite the command of God. Satan purposely worked through Eve rather than Adam. Reversing the order is displeasing to the Lord, as Eve was taken out of Adam to be his helper, not his head.

To keep God's order is fitting in the Lord as a witness and as a testimony pleasing to God. The great need in marriage is for men to be husbands according to God's order and lead in love; and for wives to accept that submission to their husband in the Lord is actually the pathway to blessing.

To ensure the welfare of the wife, the Lord says to the husbands, *'Love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.'* This word 'bitter' is put here to mean the exact opposite of love. In the original it can mean to be bitterly hateful. But rather husbands are to lead in a way in which submission to the headship proves to be a pathway of blessing for the wife.

'Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honour to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered' 1 Peter 3.7.

But what about unbelieving husbands with a believing wife? What is the role of the wife in this instance? Marriage remains a creative ordinance of God, and the role of the husband is unchanged. But so is the command for a husband to love his wife; whether he is a believer or not, it is a creative ordinance.

'Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that

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even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands’ 1 Peter 3.1-5.

‘But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things— that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. Exhort bondservants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things’ Titus 2.1-10.

Fathers and children

‘Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged’ Colossians 3.20-21.

Again, we can see this command in the context of submission,

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obedience, and the specific role of the father. As children grow up in the home, God's order is that the fathers provide, protect, discipline, and set an example. We know in so many broken homes this is not the case, but God's standard remains the same, and is to be respected. We know society teaches a very different approach, where submission is rejected, but God's truth remains.

A Christian father is the spiritual head of the home to ensure the children are brought up in the fear of the Lord. This is God's order for a happy family home spiritually. But also, practically, in the home God's creative order remains the same even if a father is not a believer. There remains a creative principle of leadership for the father that must be exercised in love and respect. Fathers are to love their children and never, ever provoke their children to anger.

This word 'provoke' means for a father to irritate his children, causing them to be resentful; to be unreasonable, teasing them unmercifully, expecting too much, driving them too hard, being thoughtless in discipline and leadership, not listening to, or being aware of, or ignoring the child's concerns.

'And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord'
Ephesians 6.4.

Children are called to obey their fathers in all things.

'Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right'
Ephesians 6.1.

There is further encouragement to do so. Such obedience is pleasing to God. Often you may not want to obey your father; you may want your own way and cannot see the point. But always remember one thing – disobeying your father is actually displeasing to God.

Employees

'Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to

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the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God' Colossians 3.22.

Here we are encouraged to serve our employer as an opportunity for witness, bringing honour to the Lord.

'Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors...'
1 Peter 2.13-14.

We are encouraged to obey with sincerity and truthfulness, and see this is an opportunity of our higher calling to serve the Lord, not being concerned to simply please our employer, but actually to serve them in a manner which pleases God. This calls for integrity, stability and commitment, serving with a true heart fearing God.

Work is a creative ordinance of God; it is not something to begrudge but an opportunity for witness. You are called to work to please the Lord with one purpose in mind. This sometimes means taking a stand for the truth which will make you unpopular, but the principles to bear in mind are sincerity of heart and fearing the Lord. Remember Elijah before Ahab, who said, *'As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand'* (1 Kings 17.1). This is similar to what the Apostle Peter teaches.

'Having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. Honour all people. Love the brotherhood.

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Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls' 1 Peter 2.12-25.

Masters

'Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven' Colossians 4.1.

Masters have a great opportunity to witness in their treatment of employees. This was recognised among the Quakers, especially by the building of social housing linked to employment. Terms of employment, working conditions, targets and expectations and those who have people under their management must be just in their witness.

'Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things' 1 Timothy 6.1-2.

See how wise and balanced Paul is in his advice here for husbands

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and wives, children and parents and employees and employers. There is the challenge of submission and obedience, and there is the responsibility of love and care.

Golden rule

‘Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets’ Matthew 7.12.

The manner of the Christian life

‘And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality’ Colossians 3.23-25.

One of the key points Paul is making here hinges on verses 17 and 23:

‘And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus’ verse 17.

‘And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men’ verse 23.

Our Christian service and life is ‘whatever you do’. ‘Whole heartedly’ means sincerely from the soul, seeing life as an opportunity for service and witness, your life lived as to the Lord, to please, serve and honour the Lord, knowing a most wonderful inner secret in your heart that cannot be taken away. Whatever you might have to endure in the struggle of the Christian life, whatever disappointments or setbacks in your employment situation, know one thing for certain: the terms of Heaven will not be altered – the experience of Heaven will not fail you or disappoint you.

‘For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory’

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2 Corinthians 4.17.

This the ultimate issue – are you living your life to serve the Lord Christ? Is He the real backdrop of all your life, to Whom you desire to be accountable and to honour? Here is a warning of neglecting the principles of the Christian life in submission, love and commitment. To neglect these exhortations will place us under the correcting hand of God whoever we are – there is no partiality with God (*Romans 2.11*).

Submission to God's way is a pathway to spiritual blessing and growth.

14. CHRISTIAN DUTIES

Colossians 4.2-6

Paul is coming to the end of his letter and, in so doing, provides further teaching on Christian lifestyle. There is so much helpful teaching in this letter relating to Christian conduct, character and duties. This letter can be viewed as a timeless Christian manual, as the issues dealt with affect all generations.

Remember the issue we dealt at the beginning of the letter concerned the heretics attacking the Church – it is the same today. The Christian doctrine and lifestyle Paul teaches in the following chapters have abundant relevance today. Here Paul focuses particularly on Christian duties the believer is called to exercise in daily life.

Prayer

‘Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it’ Colossians 4.2a.

Note the emphatic wording being used here by Paul.

- Earnestly – praying earnestly means with sincerity and steadfast commitment;
- Vigilant – meaning here to be alert to prayer and the needs, to keep awake to the need of prayer in all things.

He states the exercise of prayer in this way knowing that prayer does not come easily to us all of the time. There are times when prayer flows from the heart and we can feel moved in our souls in this exercise. But there are also times when prayer seems even burdensome and repetitive; it seems our words are just words as we pray. At other times prayer can simply be a sigh – or maybe we just say, ‘Lord, help me’. There are yet other times when prayer is urgent; circumstances drive us to the mercy seat. And then there are times when we simply

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plead the Word of God with God. These are all praying experiences. Whatever our condition, the watchword of the Christian is always, 'Continue earnestly in prayer.'

The Puritans used to say, 'Pray yourself into prayer.' The Holy Spirit will give life to your prayers in the felt deadness; press on even in the wilderness times of prayer, for the wilderness will blossom as the rose under the intercession of the Spirit. We could describe it as 'pressing on in prayer.'

Paul writes in the same manner to the church at Thessalonica – '*Pray without ceasing*' (1 *Thessalonians* 5.17); and to the church at Philippi – '*In everything by prayer*' (*Philippians* 4.6).

Helps to prayer under the enabling of the Holy Spirit

A – Adoration: praising God for Who He is and for what He has done;

C – Confession: acknowledging our sin and pleading the name and work of Jesus Christ;

T – Thanksgiving: thanking God for all His goodness, mercy and faithfulness;

S – Supplication: for help and provision for daily needs, spiritually and practically; and for the needs of others; and the growth of the Church and the honour of God.

When to pray

Regularly. Jesus said that '*men always ought to pray and not lose heart*' (*Luke* 18.1).

Why is prayer so important?

Because:

- prayer is the most vital expression of the Christian;
- it is the sign of conversion, repentance, faith, worship, dependence, wisdom and appreciation;

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- it is God's way for us to receive blessing from Himself spiritually and providentially;
- prayer is God's therapy for the soul;

*The upward glancing of an eye
When none but God is near.*

James Montgomery, 1771-1854

- it is God's provision against the assaults of Satan;
- it is God's vehicle for confession and unburdening of the soul;
- it is God's avenue for worship, adoration and supplication;
- it is God's will that we pray;
- it is essential for spiritual growth and fellowship with God;
- God has chosen to build the Church together with prayer;
- without it there can be no real blessing on our work for the Lord;
- Jesus Christ set the example while here upon earth;

'Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God' Luke 6.12.

'Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak' Matthew 26.41.

- prayer is one of the exercises of the soul in preparation for Christ's second coming;

'Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is' Mark 13.33.

Persevere in prayer – do not lose heart.

'These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers' Acts 1.14.

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‘...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer’ Romans 12.12.

‘...praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints’ Ephesians 6.18.

An iceberg is largely unseen: 80% under water, 20% above the water. Prayer is like this in a Christian’s life – mostly unseen.

Thanksgiving

‘...with thanksgiving’ Colossians 4.2b.

The spirit in which we pray is important to the blessing that comes through prayer. Paul is writing here as a prisoner in chains. Note how he writes to the church at Philippi in *Philippians 1.3-14*. Here is one of the grand examples of thanksgiving in prayer, whatever our situation in life.

‘But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel’ Philippians 1.12.

When he wrote this Paul was in prison in Rome. He had been tried and was awaiting the verdict – deliverance or death. He was writing to an anxious church at Philippi. What was going to happen to Paul? What would happen to the Gospel cause? How could the Lord be glorified in Paul’s imprisonment? What would happen if they lost Paul? In his chains Paul still rejoiced in and thanked the Lord, and sent a note of optimism – no self pity!

Here is a point to remember about our own Christian testimony: there is always a place for optimism. Paul says, ‘I want you to know brethren – not about my suffering, my pain or my chains. No, I want you to know God is in control – God is overruling!’ In adversity Paul remained optimistic and gave thanks to the sovereign God. There was a purpose in all this. Paul could serve God in or out of prison.

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He demonstrated prayer with thanksgiving in his heart: 'I would you should understand – I would like you to know': there is great cause for optimism – the Gospel has had free course and has been glorified.

Your own situation may seem impossible, and yet God can use you even there for His glory! I once heard of two aged ladies, both now in Glory. Both lived in the same village and both had the same care visitor. One lady maintained a positive testimony in suffering, while sadly the other lady was often complaining. The nurse always ensured she tended the positive, optimistic lady last – her testimony encouraged her on.

'Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God' Philippians 4.6.

'Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' Ephesians 5.20.

'In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you' 1 Thessalonians 5.18.

Preaching the Gospel

'Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak' Colossians 4.3-4.

Paul is saying, 'I have a burden to preach the Gospel in a manner that is God-honouring and blessed, as I ought to speak.' Here Paul reminds the Church that even if he is in chains, this does not mean the Gospel is in chains. Even if he is in straightened circumstances – persecuted and awaiting the sentence of death – his desire was for an open door for the Gospel. He prayed that he would be given grace to rise above the flesh and the devil, and speak according to the new

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nature in Christ. He would speak graciously, in a godly manner, for God's honour, boldly and wisely.

Here we consider the importance of praying for the Lord's servants, and what to pray for them. Paul gives us a clear guide. The highest motives for prayer are the spread of the Gospel, the grace of God in serving Him, and bringing glory to God.

'And for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak' Ephesians 6.19-20.

Walk in wisdom, redeem the time

'Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time' Colossians 4.5.

Here Paul reminds us of the importance of Christian conduct. What should be our priorities in walking wisely towards those who are in the world?

1. Conduct – understand our walk and witness matters;
2. Concern – a burden for the lost that they may hear the Gospel;
3. Commitment – using our time wisely in the service of the Lord.

Avail yourself of every opportunity to serve the Lord, especially in the cause of the Gospel, that you may be a blessing to others.

'I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also' Romans 1.14-15.

Paul says that both the educated and the uneducated must be reached with the Gospel. He acknowledges that he is a debtor to the world in this matter of the Gospel. Paul understands that it would be wrong to keep this message to himself in a selfish manner – he is under an obligation to preach the Gospel. In this way he is a debtor

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to the world. Paul understood the Gospel message must be passed on, nothing to be added and nothing to be taken away. Called by God into the ministry, Paul was under obligation to preach that Gospel.

‘For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures’ 1 Corinthians 15.3.

So Paul states his obligation, willingness and attitude in *Romans 1*. ‘I am a debtor’ (verse 14); ‘I am ready to preach the Gospel’ (verse 15); ‘I am not ashamed’ (verse 16). What are we to make of Paul’s example? He is redeeming the time. We still live in the age wherein we can freely preach the Gospel openly to young and old alike. Maybe in some years’ time this will not be possible. Let us not look back over our life at such a time in the future and regret we have not given of ourselves for the Gospel. We are not saved by our works, but faith without works is dead (*James 2.26*). One of the great works of the Christian is to serve the Lord in ministry of the Gospel to young and old alike.

‘Redeeming the time’ means, in the original, to buy up the opportunity, use every opportunity for the Gospel. Redeeming the time is using your time wisely. This exhortation is most relevant to this day and age.

Speech

‘Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one’ Colossians 4.6.

Here Paul reminds us of the significance of gracious speech and communication. Interestingly, in those days culturally, gracious speech, seasoned with salt, had a different meaning. It meant witty speech, attractive speech, easy listening speech, to be a skilled communicator, or to bring laughter. Professional orators and communicators would excite a congregation to entertain – they were paid to

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please. Speech seasoned with salt culturally meant to flavour people with salt, to cheer them up into positive thinking. Sadly, such a worldly attitude to preaching has crept into the Church.

However, Paul means a totally different type of speech. He speaks of grace here as a gift from God, a fruit of the new nature – speaking with grace. Your speech needs to be always with grace, savoured with salt. Salt here is meant in its preserving, cleansing sense. In other words, have a preserving, a blessed effect, a savouring effect on another person's life. It means to be sincere, without offence, to speak the truth in love in a way which is wise, and points us ultimately to Christ. Salt prevents corruption; it savours and preserves. Here is meant speech that preserves the soul.

'Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers' Ephesians 4.29.

– the right words at the right time.

'I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called' Ephesians 4.1.

Conclusion

In this passage Paul has been reminding us of three Christian duties:

- continue earnestly in prayer;
- walk in wisdom, redeeming the time;
- let your speech be with grace.

15. FELLOW SERVANTS OF GOD

Colossians 4.7-15

We have now arrived at the conclusion of Paul's *Epistle to the Colossians*. From the content we learn the great value Paul places on his fellow workers in the Gospel. No less than eight ministers are mentioned here, showing how Paul understands ministry to be working together.

Remember the example of Nehemiah in the Old Testament, how he spoke in the plural: '*We built the wall*', '*Let us...*' (*Nehemiah 4.6; 2.17*). There is no room in the work of the Lord for one man to see himself as an independent worker for the Lord, a worker separate from church fellowship, and from the support of brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul shows here how much he respects and values fellow ministers in the Lord, so as we follow the pattern of the inspired Word of God, there must be some teaching here for us. The various servants of the Lord mentioned show us that God works through people of differing gifts and ages. The harmony is in the same doctrine they teach, and the one and only God they worship. The purpose here is to learn from each of these servants' testimonies and to be encouraged in our own Christian service.

Tychicus

'Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me' Colossians 4.7.

We first read of Tychicus joining Paul at Troas while Paul was on his missionary journeys in Asia (*Acts 20.4*). For the next four years he accompanied Paul, witnessed his lifestyle and sat under his ministry. Tychicus became one of Paul's envoys, delivering Paul's letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians. Tychicus also had the responsibility of

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delivering Paul's *Epistle to Philemon*.

From this we see Tychicus was a man of integrity – a man who could be trusted to deliver the inspired letters. He was a man of sound judgment who would declare to the churches Paul's state sincerely and honestly. He was a man who would represent faithfully the doctrine being laid down by the apostles, not only being faithful to the Gospel, but knowing how to comfort the brethren through the Word of God. He was a man of spiritual discernment who knew how to apply the promises of the Word and to encourage.

From the example of Tychicus we learn the value of integrity, faithfulness, discernment and encouragement. Paul was in prison when he wrote those letters, and he needed someone he could trust to deliver them. Remember how Abraham sent his servant Eliezer, who had oversight of all his affairs, to represent the family (see *Genesis* 24). We read that this servant went on his mission as a family envoy, depending upon the Lord to guide him. The Lord brought him into to contact with Rebekah, whom God had ordained to marry Isaac. When Eliezer was brought to the head of the family, Laban, we read Eliezer spoke well of his master Abraham. Paul would only send a man on a mission who he knew would speak the truth, and speak well of Jesus Christ. When we go on our journeys, remember we are not only ambassadors of Christ, but representatives of the Church.

Onesimus

'...with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here' Colossians 4.9.

Onesimus was a remarkable trophy of God's grace. He had been a servant who had robbed his master Philemon, and then run away to Rome. This was despite the fact that evidently Philemon was a kind and generous man. Philemon had been wonderfully converted under the ministry of Paul some while before. Paul wrote to Philemon as an

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old friend and brother in the Lord on behalf of this young man Onesimus – see *The Epistle to Philemon*.

Onesimus had no doubt been ‘living it up’ in Rome with his ill-gotten gain, but life was not easy, as he would be constantly evading the authorities as a runaway servant and thief. Evidently he came under conviction of sin and a deep concern for his soul. He now had an inescapable burden, a convicted conscience from which he could not escape! God had intervened in his life with a view to saving him from his sin, according to His grace in Christ Jesus.

Onesimus considered the matter before him – he was convicted, unhappy and in soul trouble. What to do? Why not go and visit his master Philemon’s friend, Paul? He must have heard or known that Paul was imprisoned in Rome. He would have remembered Philemon, his old master, speak so warmly of Paul as a preacher and pastor. So in his trouble Onesimus decided to visit the prisoner Paul. Even as a prisoner Paul ministered to him with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Onesimus repented of his sin, put his trust in Jesus Christ and followed Him as Lord of his life.

His conversion was both remarkable and transforming. God took the runaway servant and thief, saved him and equipped him for the ministry. So much was God’s grace evident in him that Paul was reluctant to let this young man go back to Philemon. Onesimus had proved in a very short while to be a blessing to Paul and to be growing in grace assuredly. However, integrity and justice meant Onesimus must return to his master Philemon in humility.

What do we see here at this point? God’s sovereignty. We can run away from home but not from God! See how kind the Lord is to those who come to Him in repentance. See how the Lord used Paul, even as a prisoner, to help and intercede for Onesimus. This is picture and symbolic of how the Lord intercedes for repenting sinners and undertakes for them. Onesimus was liberated from the slavery of sin,

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and even the slavery of his master Philemon.

There are so many reasons in this account why we should be encouraged to come to Christ to be saved. Paul gives an authoritative, wholehearted appeal in *Philemon.8-14*:

‘Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ—I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me. I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.’

‘For love’s sake!’ This was the foundation of his intercession and the foundation of Christ’s intercession for sinners. Notice how Paul identifies himself with Onesimus. A rebel whose heart had been changed is now as a son to Paul, saved by grace under Paul’s ministry. The change is described by two words – ‘unprofitable’, meaning lazy, and ‘profitable’, now diligent, so much so that Paul would like to retain him for the preaching of the Gospel. However he has run away from his employer and must return home again.

‘Receive him’ as he is now in my heart, receive him as you would receive me. Welcome him home as you would welcome me; consider him as a close brother to me. I am sending him back to you as such!

This is a picture of how the Lord intercedes for sinners before God the Father. He has saved them, redeemed them and now speaks for them to be accepted in Him and because of Him.

Paul gives a profound request *Philemon.15-17*:

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‘For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.’

God in His sovereignty had overruled the rebellion in such a way that Onesimus should be received forever. There is only one way in which Onesimus could be received forever, and that is as a brother in the Lord, for that union is eternal and rises above any human relationship in time. Great mercy must be shown to Onesimus by Philemon, great forgiveness and complete acceptance, no longer as a slave but as a brother in the Lord.

This was totally counter to the culture of the day. The law and culture would condemn Onesimus. He had run away, he had stolen from his master. Paul says to Philemon: forgive him – receive him – consider him as a beloved brother.

This is a picture of what the Lord provides for us. When we repent of our sin and put our trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, we are forgiven and received into God’s family as beloved, accepted in Christ Jesus the Lord.

Paul gives an assured guarantee in *Philemon.18*:

‘But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.’

Here we have the deep, sacrificial love of Paul who is willing to pay all the debts of Onesimus. We do not know how much he was indebted to Philemon, nor did Paul know himself the exact amount. However he was willing to pay whatever – *‘if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account’!*

This reminds us that the Lord Jesus Christ is both able and willing to pay our debt of sin to God through His merits and suffering on Calvary’s cross. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can step forward and say,

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‘Put it to My account – I will repay anything owed’!

Onesimus saw in Paul a type of Christ, for Paul had dealt with him compassionately and kindly; he had interceded for him and was willing to pay his debts whatever they were. Paul did this, we are told, for love sake. Paul’s love for God compelled him, inspired him and moved him. So it was that Onesimus was drawn savingly to the Lord Jesus Christ by the loving example and ministry of Paul. He trusted in Jesus as Saviour, and followed Him as his Lord. As a saved person he returned back to his master but as a brother in the Lord, equal in Christ. This was all of God’s grace

‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen’

Philemon.25.

Now here in *Colossians* he is described as a faithful servant of the living God. The name Onesimus means profitable, helpful, wholly reliable. God’s grace made his name come alive

From the testimony of Onesimus we learn about the power of God’s transforming grace. Every convert of the Lord has tremendous potential for the good of the Church under God’s power. This is why Satan constantly attacks the Church. Every saved sinner becomes an enemy of Satan.

Note here the Apostle Paul’s pointed comment – ‘*who is one of you*’ (verse 9) – a beloved brother in Christ. Do not despise Onesimus because of his past behaviour, but receive him as a trophy of God’s grace.

Aristarchus

‘Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you’ Colossians 4.10a.

We first read of Aristarchus when he was seized with Paul in Ephesus in the uprising of those worshipping idols (*Acts 19.29*). The Gospel was having a dramatic effect in Ephesus, turning people from darkness to light. Those making serious money out of idols of Diana

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of the Ephesians were incensed that their profit was down.

Aristarchus was known as a travelling companion of Paul, one who was with him to support and encourage. He accompanied Paul with Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus and Sopater on their missionary trip to Asia (*Acts 20.4*). Later we read of him accompanying Paul in a ship to go to Italy and Rome, sailing along the coasts of Asia (*Acts 27.2*). Aristarchus would have been with Paul in the terrible storm when, under God's power, they all got safely to land, some swimming and some on broken pieces of wood, being shipwrecked on the island of Malta (*Acts 27.39-44*). Aristarchus was not a 'fair weather friend', but one that remained loyal in the good and the bad times.

Note that in verse 10 he is described by Paul as his fellow prisoner. This confirms that Aristarchus, Paul's travelling companion, was apprehended as a prisoner in Rome with Paul. He was treated as a fellow prisoner with Paul, being in prison as a support and in prayer, as bound with him in chains. He was caring, encouraging and having fellowship with Paul in prison.

From this we learn that fellowship with our brethren is a ministry which is strong in the ups and the downs – '*Many waters cannot quench love*' (*Song of Solomon 8.7*). Aristarchus was not ashamed to be identified with Paul the prisoner. The issue here is one of unity and loyalty to Paul, whatever the cost of the association.

Mark

...with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)' Colossians 4.10b.

Mark is the one recognised as the writer of the *Gospel of Mark* and the cousin of Barnabas. Sadly, Mark had a problem earlier in his ministry, when he had deserted the senior ministers and gone home (*Acts 15.38*). Because of this apparent cowardice and disloyalty, Paul was

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against giving him a second opportunity. On this issue there was a separation between Paul and Barnabas, described as a sharp contention (*Acts 15.39*), which was later healed. Now we read of Mark being in fellowship with Paul, proving his worth in the Gospel ministry, having been given a second chance. Paul no longer regarded him as a liability but as a fellow worker and valuable servant of God. In fact, in *2 Timothy 4.11* Paul describes as very useful to him in the ministry:

'Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry.'

What factors, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, brought about the change?

1. the kindness and teaching of Barnabas, whose name means 'son of encouragement';
2. the discipline of Paul, that would have shaken John Mark, waking him up to the seriousness of ministry;
3. the influence of Peter, who calls Mark 'my son' (*1 Peter 5.13*);
4. Paul had told the church at Colosse to receive Mark as a servant in the Lord reconciled, redeemed and useful.

From Mark we can be encouraged to see that a minister can be restored to usefulness after failure. However, Paul's response teaches us that discipline is required in ensuring repentance. Grace is required to receive a brother back into the ministry, as Paul showed later in love and respect for Mark. Restoration and redemption are two of the most wonderful blessings of grace under God's power.

Justus

'...and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me' Colossians 4.11.

It is evident that Justus, together with the other converted Jews,

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Mark and Aristarchus, were of comfort to Paul. He describes them as fellow workers in the Kingdom. This is a very important statement as Paul has the Kingdom of God in mind, the building of the Church, whereas unconverted Jews had an earthly kingdom in mind.

It is good to remind ourselves that when the preaching of the Gospel is blessed, God's Kingdom is extended. God's servants are builders, fellow workers and fellow servants.

Why was Paul so appreciative of Justus? It was because, together with Aristarchus and Mark, he stood firm on the doctrines of grace. There were other Jews professing conversion who were emphasising works and circumcision – 'Christ plus'. These Jews treated Paul with suspicion because of his dependence on grace alone, by faith alone. But these three fellow workers in the Kingdom comforted him in their adherence to the doctrines of grace.

From this we learn that true comfort can only really be known spiritually on the basis of true doctrine. The foundation of truth being laid down by the apostles formed the bedrock of true comfort in the Holy Spirit. Meaningful comfort comes through that which is based upon the Word of God, the Gospel.

We have considered some Jewish Christian servants of the Lord; now we come to some Gentile Christian servants.

Epaphras

'Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis' Colossians 4.12-13.

Epaphras was the evangelist used of the Lord to plant churches in Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis. 'One of you' means here that he is a member of the church at Colosse, and was actually their pastor. He

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was on a visit to Paul to encourage him in prison, but also to benefit from advice and teaching from Paul.

Epaphras is described as *'a bondservant of Christ'*. This is the best and most meaningful job description we can have in life. All true Christians are actually servants of Christ Jesus. They are redeemed, being purchased by His precious blood on Calvary's cross. They are not their own to live for themselves, but for their Saviour and Lord, Christ Jesus. To Him they owe their undivided allegiance, and upon Him they depend for their salvation and sanctification. Through Him they receive all spiritual blessings. Christ Jesus is the Head and the uniting Person of the Church of God. As we speak millions of people here on earth are looking to Him by faith, coming to the Father through the Son.

Epaphras ministered in the name of Christ Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit. It was in Christ Jesus that he found true liberty of soul and spirit. It was in Christ Jesus he would receive a glorious, eternal reward, and served Him with eternity in mind.

'And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness...But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life' Romans 6.18, 22.

'But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter' Romans 7.6.

From this we learn how important it is to constantly keep this principle in view – we are servants of Christ Jesus. We serve under His authority, His direction and His wisdom. To be a servant of Christ Jesus is the greatest privilege on earth. It is a far greater privilege than a knighthood.

'Labouring fervently for you in prayers.' Here we have one of the

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secrets to the success of any ministry for the Lord – fervent support for the Church in prayer. I would like to take this opportunity of mentioning the blessing of support in prayer, and to testify that it is actually a felt experience as we seek to serve Christ Jesus.

Note here the term ‘labouring’. Paul often refers to the ministry in this manner, teaching that serving Christ Jesus requires labour. This is not the first time Paul has used this word ‘labour’; he uses it in his other letters. For example he speaks of his ‘fellow labourers’.

Paul also uses the expressions ‘fight the good fight’ (1 Timothy 6.12); ‘stand fast’ (Philippians 4.1; 1 Thessalonians 3.8; 2 Thessalonians 2.15); ‘endeavouring’ (Ephesians 4.3); ‘be strong in the Lord’ (Ephesians 6.10); ‘press toward the goal’ (Philippians 3.14); ‘hold fast’ (1 Corinthians 15.2; 1 Thessalonians 5.21; 2 Timothy 1.13); ‘endure hardship as a good soldier’ (2 Timothy 2.3); ‘endure’ (1 Corinthians 9.12; 2 Timothy 2.12; 2 Timothy 4.5); ‘suffer’ (Romans 8.17; Philippians 1.29; 2 Thessalonians 1.5; 1 Timothy 4.10; 2 Timothy 3.12).

Earlier in this letter he uses the term ‘labour’ together with striving, or traving (Colossians 1.29). Paul also refers to his fellow workers in this context. This constant theme is common in Paul’s writings, inspired by the Holy Spirit. From this inspired writing we learn that serving the Lord requires us to labour – it requires fervency. Now this is not legalism – it is meant as a labour of love, devotion and sacrifice. The word ‘labouring’ here means a person is labouring in a conflict against Satan, in a spiritual battle for souls.

‘...that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.’ The desire of Epaphras is for spiritual stability and maturity of the church at Colosse; for them to have a constant desire and willingness to be moulded in their Christian life to the will of God; that they may stand mature in the doctrine and order of the church, according to God’s will; that they may stand perfect in Christ Jesus their Head, and in His spotless righteousness.

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'Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus' Colossians 1.28.

'...and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power' Colossians 2.10.

Continue believing in Him, and looking to Him for righteousness and strength, in Whom all the fullness, the perfection, of grace dwells; and where we find the holiness of perfection in Him. Be filled, be complete, taken up with knowledge of the revealed will of God, both as to doctrine and practice. Be given the grace and strength to act according to it.

To stand perfect, mature and complete in the will of God speaks of a life totally surrendered to God. The desire of Pastor Epaphras for the members of the church at Colosse is to grow in God and godliness. To grow in God requires us to grow in His Word and His will.

'Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you' 1 Timothy 4.16.

'Great zeal for you.' Epaphras has spent some time with Paul, and it is clear his heart for labour remains with his church at Colosse. *'A great zeal'* means a life given over in service to the Church and its best interests. This is zeal according to godliness, that understands what is the greatest need for the churches – stability and maturity in the will of God, being complete in Christ Jesus; that they be not seduced by error or Satan's wiles, but stand firm on the truth.

This is evidently a man with a pastor's heart who labours, endeavours and wrestles on behalf of his flock. He is also mindful of the work of the Lord in the other churches in which he has been instrumental. The ongoing prayers of the brethren for others is so valuable. It is so encouraging to know others are praying for us.

Luke

*'Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you' Colossians
4.14*

Luke is the servant of God who wrote the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Acts of the Apostles*. He was a physician by profession, but also an evangelist and travelling companion of Paul. He was undoubtedly a brother who combined his profession and his preaching in harmony together. It may have been that God also used his skill as a physician to open doors for the Gospel. A number of missionaries in the history of the Church have combined the medical and spiritual medicine.

Luke and Paul worked closely together. In fact, on one occasion Paul said, *'only Luke is with me' (2 Timothy 4.11)*. Hendriksen comments that they were of similar gifts, educated men of culture, broad-minded and sympathetic. While Paul reached out to the likes of Onesimus a runaway servant, the jailor and despotic rulers, he gained great comfort, no doubt, engaging in conversation with Luke on a similar intellectual level.

Luke was gifted of God with a wonderful intellect and discernment. In his profession he had a loving, compassionate manner in the use of his diagnostic capability. We know this from the manner in which he was described by the Apostle Paul here as the *'beloved physician'*. Later Paul also respectfully describes him to Philemon as his *'fellow labourer' (Philemon.24)*.

It is generally acknowledged that Luke was one of the leading researchers of his day. He was recognised as a historian who thoroughly examined the testimony and evidence given to him. In his research Luke dealt with first-hand witnesses and ministers of the Word, who were respected as such. Luke had been privileged with receiving these first-hand accounts of the life of Jesus from the apostles. He therefore had a mature and accurate understanding of the facts, and put those facts in order. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Luke wrote his *Gospel* in the

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form of narrative theology.

The *Gospel of Luke* is a perfect example of how the Word of God is suitable for every generation. Luke's *Gospel* is God's message to a world that increasingly thinks through narrative and picture language. As a narrative it is doctrine conveyed through the story of the life of Jesus, the Son of God. In other words, in harmony with the statement of faith and doctrine, we have the life of faith and doctrine. Luke's great desire is that all the world might know the truth, and that the truth will bring true freedom.

In harmony with this, Luke also places great emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit of God. His overriding objective is to develop faith on certain facts in a world of uncertainty, heresy and fables. Christianity is based upon facts. It is facts believed by faith. Luke, inspired by the Holy Spirit, presents facts for faith in an orderly manner.

A man like Luke, gifted with skill as a physician and also gifted as a Christian who remains humble, is a blessing.

Demas

*'Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you' Colossians
4.14*

At this stage Demas was still with Paul, identified with Paul and working with Paul. He was able to join in sending greetings to the church at Colosse as a fellow worker with Paul. However, note here how Paul simply says he sends greetings; there is no actual commendation. Maybe Paul already had some reservations about the depth of this man's character, for sadly, it turns out later on, in Paul's *Second Epistle to Timothy*, that Demas had forsaken Paul.

*'...for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world,
and has departed for Thessalonica' 2 Timothy 4.10.*

It is thought that Paul's *Second Epistle to Timothy* was written later

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than this letter to the church at Colosse. The backsliding of Demas is thought to occur afterwards, and no further mention is made of him. Demas loved this present world more than the sacrificial labours of the ministry.

Before his going away, Demas was an influential figure, respected, and given many pulpits to preach in. However, in his heart a warfare was going on – Satan was presenting the world in a very attractive way. Eventually he succumbed, and went off back into the world (2 Timothy 4.10-16).

The Church of Jesus Christ is often hindered and hurt by those going back into the world. How should we react to such a sad truth?

‘And Jesus answered and said to them: “Take heed that no one deceives you”’ Matthew 24.4.

‘Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is’ Mark 13.33.

‘Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness’ Luke 11.35.

‘Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood’ Acts 20.28.

‘According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it’ 1 Corinthians 3.10.

‘Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall’ 1 Corinthians 10.12.

Conclusion

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We have considered a number of Paul's fellow servants of God. Each one is different in their temperament and gifts, but each one has something to contribute to the ministry. Paul values diversity that unites around the truth of the Gospel and the building of the Kingdom of God. He accepts the redeeming, restoring power of God in a backsliding servant of God, and is willing to delegate responsibility to other servants of God. Paul has supreme confidence in the grace of God to convert, as seen in the testimony of Onesimus. He does not dwell on the past, but rejoices in the present power of God to transform and to use whom He will.

16. PAUL'S SALUTATIONS

Colossians 4.16-18

'Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it." This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen' Colossians 4.16-18.

Greetings

We recognise the importance of maintaining fellowship with other churches. Here we have the example of Paul concerned to greet the churches in the locality, recognising them as churches working together in the Gospel.

Colosse was experiencing serious challenges with the oppressions of heresy and the like, but despite this they must press on in the work and fellowship with others, looking to the Lord, being strong in Him.

Instructions

Paul instructs here on the exchange of his letters to this and other churches. This is actually a very important instruction for us. The current trend being taught in certain seminaries is that you must not use other texts from other letters to support the one you are preaching from. The reason for this is given that the *Letter to Colossians* was for that church alone; likewise the *Letter to the Ephesians*. However here Paul clearly speaks of exchanging letters so all the Church could benefit from the teaching. This letter must be passed on to Laodicea. Another letter was to come to them from Laodicea (this is thought to be the Ephesian letter being circulated).

All the Scripture is profitable for all the Church of Jesus Christ for all generations – it is relevant for all time. It has been a solid and proven

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exercise to use supporting texts from different parts of Scripture in preaching. If we consider the example of the Lord Jesus we find Him doing exactly this.

'And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself' Luke 24.27.

Warning

It seems that Archippus needs a warning here, and that openly, to be read by all in the Church. Why does Paul deal with Archippus in such a manner as this? Whenever Paul considered the Church to be in danger he spoke clearly, openly and very firmly.

'Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified"' Galatians 2.11-16.

Archippus was a member of the family of Philemon, who lived in Colosse and at whose home the church was accustomed to gather for worship. Archippus is thought to have been the son of Philemon and

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his wife, Apphia. It is likely that Archippus was still a relatively young man, around thirty-five, called by God into the ministry. In his *Epistle to Philemon* Paul had described him as 'our fellow soldier', one with him in the ministry (*Philemon.2*).

While Epaphras was away in Rome with Paul, his assistant Archippus was pastoring the church at Colosse. Here in this letter Paul is very terse, commanding and firm in his language, which comes across as very direct. Maybe Epaphras had shared with Paul that Archippus was a bit laid back and needed a wakeup call. It is more likely, however, that Paul had in mind to reassure and impress upon Archippus the depth of the call. His command is to remind Archippus of the solemnity of the ministry, and also encourage him to endeavour. He has the God-given authority to serve the church, and with the Lord's help he can fulfil his ministry.

The command is also a message to the church at Colosse, for in the command is the implicit recognition that Archippus is called of the Lord to serve the church. If he is to fulfil his ministry, as received of the Lord, then the church will need to be right behind him in prayer.

Please note the similarity between Timothy and Archippus in the instructions given to them by Paul.

'And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfil it"' Colossians 4.17.

'But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry' 2 Timothy 4.5'

Archippus is greatly privileged to be a servant of Jesus Christ and to have been called into the ministry. This ministry you have received is from the Lord! Do we respect the opportunities God gives us to serve Him?

'That you may fulfil it' – this is our commission to fulfil what the Lord has given us to do. What is your God-given ministry in the local

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church to which you belong? What opportunities has God given you? Are you fulfilling your ministry? Are you redeeming the time? Are you an encourager in the work of the Lord?

Request

'Remember my chains' Colossians 4.18.

'Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also' Hebrews 13.3.

Here we are reminded of the importance of remembering the persecuted of the Church of Jesus Christ. Paul was not ashamed of his chains, but did need the assurance of the prayers of the Lord's people. These brothers and sisters in the Lord are experiencing actual mistreatment in their suffering and distress. Many are imprisoned for their faith; many have lost their homes and employment, and are living in refugee camps. If we remembered more often in prayer the suffering of the saints, it would help us get our own problems into perspective.

Blessing

'Grace be with you' Colossians 4.18.

What a positive way to end a letter. What better blessing can we desire for one another than this? God's favour be with you. God's enabling saving, strengthening, securing and sanctifying grace be with you. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ – Gospel blessings be to you: forgiveness, peace and victory in Him.

God teaches us that grace is His favour shown to us freely and perfectly, even though we do not deserve it. Grace has been described as being: 'Everything for nothing given to those who don't deserve anything.'

What does the message of God's grace in Christ Jesus the Lord mean

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to needy sinners? God's grace shines as it is magnified in our minds by contemplation of its blessing to us as sinners. We, by nature, are guilty before God – guilty of breaking His law and of rebellion. We are all guilty. In this condition we are enemies of God, we remain under His righteous wrath and have no peace of mind.

The Bible warns us solemnly that to die in this condition means we will go to hell, the place of unforgiven sin, a place the Bible describes as the *'blackness of darkness forever'* (2 Peter 2.17). It is a place of eternal punishment and regret. We do not deserve to be saved, delivered or rescued from this! This is our position by nature before God – utterly helpless, condemned and spiritually dead in trespasses and sin.

But grace shines into this dreadful darkness with an eternal beam of hope – the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. God has shown His great love and grace to this world in the most powerful manner through Jesus Christ. Using the fuller title of *'the Lord Jesus Christ'*, Paul reminds us that this is God's authoritative grace in Him. He has come in the greatest act of grace this world has ever known, to make a way of peace for us with God.

'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich' 2 Corinthians 8.9.

The poverty of the Lord Jesus Christ meant coming from the glory of Heaven and the throne of God, to be born of humble birth and laid in a manger. It meant living life in abject poverty, while maintaining perfection! At the end of His life He must experience the humiliation of suffering in agony and dying upon a cross of shame. Why do this? Because of God's wonderful, loving grace in Christ Jesus! Because in His sovereign grace God determined that sinners should be saved through His Son that, through the life, suffering and death of Jesus Christ, His justice would be satisfied. His divine justice would be satisfied and His wrath atoned for.

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'He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed' Isaiah 53.5.

Jesus Christ is a great Saviour for great sinners. Salvation through Him is a gift of His amazing grace. Just before he died John Newton, the author of the hymn 'Amazing Grace', was visited by William Wilberforce. By that time Newton's memory had nearly gone, but he could remember God's grace. This is what he said:

'My memory is fading but I remember two things very clearly:
I'm a great sinner, and Christ is a great Saviour.'

I was reading a while ago of a plumber who had some signage on his new van to advertise his business. It said: 'There is no place too deep, too dark or too dirty for us to handle.' What a wonderful description of God's grace!

*Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?*

Samuel Davies, 1723-61

Here in this benediction prayer Paul desires this constant flow of free grace to come to the Lord's people; the gracious goodness of God flowing to believers through the Person of His Son Jesus Christ the Lord. The grace spoken of here is that grace that brings forgiveness, reconciliation and peace with God; from which flows spiritual life, sanctification and godliness; which brings hope of eternal life in Glory, in Heaven. We are taught in *Psalms 84.11* that, '*The Lord will give grace and glory.*'

The grace here in our verse is also that grace whereby we stand justified by faith in Christ Jesus. It is that grace from which flows a Christ-like spirit and lifestyle. This is why Paul prays, in his concluding words to the church at Galatia, '*Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen*' (*Galatians 6.18*). This grace is that which motivates living for the glory of God and the service of others.

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You will notice that Paul often starts his letters mentioning grace, and also finishes his letters mentioning grace. He knows how crucial grace is to our walk as believers in times of adversity and prosperity. The Lord Jesus Christ encouraged Paul by reminding him of His all-sufficient grace to sustain him in trial (*2 Corinthians 12.9*).

The Apostle Peter writes of grace as coming from the God of all grace.

'But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you' 1 Peter 5.10.

This teaches us that from the God of all grace in Christ Jesus we know His:

a. Sovereign grace – 'Who called us'

Here the Apostle Peter is referring to what is called 'the effectual call' of the Gospel. This call was ordained of God to His chosen people before time in eternity. According to His sovereign love, He has chosen to redeem a people unto Himself from darkness unto light, from sin to salvation. These are called 'the elect'. Salvation from the beginning is the work of God, for His glory and praise, and for our blessing.

b. Saving grace – 'to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus'

Here Peter is clearly showing the outcome of saving grace by Christ Jesus. Peter magnifies God's saving grace by directing his prayer to its ultimate triumph. It is good for us to remind ourselves of the ultimate outcome of the saving grace of God. Nothing less than God's eternal glory by Christ Jesus is promised. God will complete the work He has begun right up until Glory – saved according to His sovereign grace, called to an eternal inheritance in Glory.

c. Sufficient grace – 'after you have suffered a while'

Peter is truthful; he understands that living the Christian life here

Complete in Him

on this earth involves suffering. In fact, Christ had told Peter that this would be the nature of his own death. Suffering and God's all-sufficient grace are a central theme of his letter.

'In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ' 1 Peter 1.6-7.

'Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin...Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy' 1 Peter 4.1,12-13.

'By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand' 1 Peter 5.12.

d. Sanctifying grace – 'perfect'

This means that God will finish His work in your life thoroughly and completely. When you get to Glory you are the finished article. By that I mean both justified and sanctified. There is no unfinished business with the Lord; there will be no unfinished jobs in God's heavenly home!

e. Establishing grace – 'establish'

This means to be fixed in a manner which gives stability. This reminds us of the support of God's Word. It provides the unchanging stability required to persevere in the Christian life. Our stability comes through our union with Christ.

Paul's Salutations

'Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me' John 15.4.

f. Strengthening grace – 'strengthen'

As Paul prayed to the Lord for the church at Ephesus, *'that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man'* (Ephesians 3.16).

g. Securing grace – 'and settle you'

This word is to do with the foundation. How important the foundation is to a property! Peter is absolutely confident in Christ as the Chief Cornerstone of the foundation. He knows our security comes only as we build on this foundation. Paul has the same teaching:

'...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone'
Ephesians 2.20.

*On the Rock of Ages founded,
What can shake thy sure repose?
With salvation's walls surrounded,
Thou may'st smile at all thy foes.*

John Newton, 1725-1807

Conclusion

Let us adore this God of all grace.

*Great God of wonders! all Thy ways
Are matchless, godlike, and divine;
But the fair glories of Thy grace
More godlike and unrivalled shine.
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?*

Complete in Him

*O may this strange, this wondrous grace,
This godlike miracle of love,
Fill the wide earth with grateful praise
And all the angelic choirs above.
Who is a pardoning God like Thee?
Or who has grace so rich and free?*

Samuel Davies, 1723-61

‘Everything is of grace in the Christian life, from the very beginning to the very end’ Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

God’s grace is not only amazing and all-sufficient for the way, but it is abounding. It is an ever-flowing stream. As we drink from this stream we will find the resources to continue in the way. The God of all grace has infinite resources for His people. The hymnwriter put it beautifully:

*He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labours increase;
To added affliction He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.*

*His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His power has no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again!*

*When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father’s full giving is only begun.*

Paul's Salutations

*His love has no limit, His grace has no measure,
His power has no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again!*

Annie Johnson Flint, 1866-1932

'To him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen'
1 Peter 5.11.