

Certainly our bodies now are lowly bodies of humiliation. They are subject to disease, to old age, to cancer, to infections, to allergies, to sores, to disfigurement, and to death. At the time of Christ's coming our bodies will become glorious, powerful, honorable, spiritual, and immortal. (I Cor. 5:42-44, 53-54).

8. Christ's own glorious body, which he now has, and which ours will be made like, is described (at least to a degree) in Rev. 1:13-16. He is no longer a disfigured root out of dry ground, with marred visage, and no beauty that we should desire him, the man of sorrows. (Isaiah 52:14—53:3).
9. The transformation that Christ will make in our bodies will be done easily and powerfully. It shall be done in a manner corresponding to the working which Christ customarily does as he subjects all things in the universe unto himself.

Therefore the resurrection of the dead and the transformation of human bodies need not surprise us. These acts will be in perfect harmony with the power that Christ is now using, and shall continue to us as he triumphantly subjects all things unto himself. (I Cor. 15:25-27; Heb. 2:6-9).

4:1 seems to be more of a conclusion to chapter three than an introduction to chapter four. Nevertheless, it will be discussed in the notes on the next chapter.

Study and Review

Questions Over Philippians Chapter Three

1. What does *finally* in 3:1 mean?
2. What was Paul's final (?) exhortation in 3:1?
3. In what (or in whom) are we to rejoice?
4. To what things did Paul refer when he said, "To write the *same things* is not grievous"?
5. Did Paul mind repeating himself? What did he say about this?
6. Explain the expression, "For you it is safe".
7. Who were the *dogs* of whom the Philippians were to beware?
8. Is the term *dog* complimentary?
9. Explain the word *concision*. What is its relationship to *circumcision*?
10. What people are the true "Circumcision" at the present time?

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11. What do people do when they worship by the Spirit of God? (3:3)
12. Explain what Paul meant by saying that Christians have no confidence in the flesh.
13. How well could Paul have compared with other men in fleshly distinctions and honor?
14. From what Hebrew tribe had Paul descended?
15. Explain the phrase *a Hebrew of Hebrews*.
16. How did the Pharisees regard the law of Moses? (3:5)
17. How zealous was Saul (Paul) before his conversion? (3:6)
18. How righteous was Saul before his conversion? (Acts 23:1)
19. Harmonize Saul's righteousness under the law as described in 3:6 with I Tim. 1:15.
20. Define *count* in 3:7, 8.
21. How did Paul regard those things that were gain to him under the law?
22. How did Paul regard ALL things when he compared them to Christ?
23. What are the tenses of the verbs *counted* and *count* in 3:7-8? What do these tenses indicate about the times when Paul counted all things loss?
24. Explain the term *righteousness* in 3:9. Give a synonym for it.
25. Why is the righteousness of the law described as *mine own righteousness*? Is such righteousness really attainable?
26. Through what does the righteousness which Paul sought come?
27. Why should Paul have been seeking to *know* Christ when he was already a devoted follower of Christ? (3:10)
28. What is involved in knowing the power of Christ's resurrection? When may this power be known? (Compare Eph. 1:18-20)
29. Why did Paul desire to know the fellowship of Christ's sufferings? What benefit would this have been to him? (3:10)
30. Why did Paul strive to attain unto the resurrection from the dead, when the resurrection is a certainty? (Compare Acts 24:15). Does the *resurrection from the dead* connote more than the resurrection of the fleshly body?
31. Had Paul attained his life's objectives? (Give scripture for your answer)
32. Who had apprehended (that is, laid hold on) Paul?
33. What did Paul seek to apprehend (lay hold on)?

CHAPTER THREE

34. What was the *one thing* Paul sought to do? What did he constantly forget (disregard)? (3:13-14)
35. What is the prize of the high calling of God?
36. By what rule, or standard, must we walk (conduct ourselves)? (3:16)
37. Whom were the Philippians called upon to imitate? (3:17)
38. Define *ensample*.
39. Whom were the Philippians to mark (that is, take note of)?
40. Who, possibly, were the people who were enemies of the cross of Christ? (3:18)
41. How much emotion did the ungodly lives of some people stir up in Paul?
42. Why was the cross the focus of the enmity of the ungodly? (3:18)
43. Define *perdition*. (3:19)
44. How can a person's belly be his god?
45. What do people do when they "mind earthly things"?
46. Explain the phrase: "Whose glory is their shame."
47. Define *antinomian*.
48. Explain the word *conversation* in KJV 3:20.
49. Where is our *citizenship*?
50. How did the colonial status of Philippi illuminate the thought of 3:20.
51. What do we look for, or await, from heaven?
52. Explain the word *vile* in KJV 3:21.
53. What will Christ do with our bodies when he comes back again?
54. What will our bodies be made to be like?
55. What activity of his power will Christ use to change our bodies? (3:21)
56. What can Christ's working, or ability, do? (3:21)
57. Our expository outline of Phil. 3 on p. 68 calls the chapter "A mind of Right Values." Suggest another title for the entire chapter if you can.

PHILIPPIANS CHAPTER FOUR A MIND OF MANY VIRTUES

The fourth chapter contains several paragraphs not directly related to one another, but all reflecting the good mind of Paul and the Philippians. They seem to be fruits growing on the tree of a good Christian mind.

1. *Virtue of standing fast*; 4:1.
 2. *Virtue of harmony (being of the same mind)*; 4:2-4.
 3. *Virtue of joy and prayer*; 4:4-7.
 4. *Virtue of right thinking*; 4:8-9.
 5. *Thanks for the Philippians' gift*; 4:10-20.
 - a. Paul's feelings—joy and contentment; 4:10-13.
 - b. The Philippians' fellowship with Paul; 4:14-16.
 - At the present; 4:14
 - In the past; 4:15-16
 - c. Paul's feelings (resumed); 4:17-20.
 - He sought fruit from them; 4:17
 - He was now well-supplied; 4:18
 - God would supply their needs; 4:19-20
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Salutations and Benediction; 4:21-23.

Outline of 4:1-23

- G. Final exhortations and thanks: 4:1-23.
1. Exhortation to stand fast; 4:1.
 2. Exhortation to two women to be in harmony; 4:2-3.
 3. Exhortation to joy (4:4), forbearance (4:5), and prayer (4:6-7).
 4. Exhortation to right thinking; 4:8-9.
 5. Thanks for the Philippian's gift; 4:10-20.
 - a. Paul's feelings; 4:10-13
 - (1) He rejoiced in their act; 4:10
 - (2) He did not speak because of want; 4:11-13
 - (a) He could be content in any state; 4:11-12
 - (b) He could do all things in Christ; 4:13
 - b. The Philippians' fellowship with Paul; 4:14-16
 - (1) They did well in their present act of fellowship; 4:14
 - (2) In the past also they had fellowship with Paul; 4:15-16
 - c. Paul's feelings (resumed); 4:17-20.
 - (1) He did not seek their gift; 4:17
 - (2) He sought fruit for them;
 - (3) Because of their gift he now had sufficiency; 4:18
 - (4) God would supply all their need; 4:19
 - (5) Glory be to God; 4:20

Salutations and Benediction; 4:21-23

4:1. Wherefore, my brethren beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my beloved.

Translation and Paraphrase

4:1. So then, (in view of the glorious future that we look forward to,) my brothers, beloved and longed for, my joy and (my) crown (of glory), stand firm thus in the Lord, (my) beloved.

Notes

1. "Stand fast in the Lord." This is the main message of 4:1. Christians all need to stand firm, and not be swept away into sin or into accepting doctrines not plainly taught in the

scriptures. Compare II Thess. 2:15; I Thess. 3:8; I Cor. 16:13; Eph. 6:12-14; Col. 4:12; I Peter 5:12.

2. The "Wherefore" at the beginning of 4:1 refers back to things stated in the preceding verses, that give us reasons for standing fast. We stand fast because Christ is powerful (3:21), and because he will transform our lowly bodies when the dead are raised, and because our citizenship is in heaven (3:20).
3. "My brethren." We should look upon our fellow Christians as brothers, for they truly are just that. Also we should call one another "Brother." This practice appears a bit queer to worldly people (who after all do not have much brotherliness between one another!); but the very fact that we call one another "Brother" serves to emphasize the relationship and to assist us to practice brotherliness.
4. "Beloved". Notice the two occurrences of this word in 4:1.
5. "Longed for" suggests the pain felt by Paul because of his separation from the Philippians.
6. "My joy". Christians should find a basic joy in fellowship with other Christians, as Paul did. I Thess. 2:19.
7. "My crown". There are two Greek words translated *crown*: (1) *Diadem*; a king's royal crown. This word occurs in the New Testament only in the book of Revelation. (2) *Stephanos*; This is the word used here. It refers to a woven crown such as was awarded to victors at races, and was made of such materials as olive branches, laurel, parsley, pine, myrtle, etc. This type of crown was also sometimes placed upon the heads of banqueters at feasts. Compare I Thess. 2:19; Prov. 12:4.

The fact that the Philippians were Christians at all, and especially the fact that they were such good Christians was an adornment to Paul's reputation. On the day of judgment our converts will cause us to "shine . . . as the stars for ever and ever." Daniel 12:3. Thus they will be our crown.

8. We stand fast in the Lord. (Phil. 4:1). We are of the same mind in the Lord. (Phil. 4:2). We rejoice in the Lord. (Phil. 4:4).

In this world with its cruelties, conflicting interests, and conflicting ideas, we either stand *in the Lord*, or we probably do not stand at all, but rather are like the waters that are blown about by shifting winds. Eph. 4:14.

2, I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3. Yea, I beseech thee also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Translation and Paraphrase

2. I urge (our sister) Euodia and (our sister) Syntyche to be in agreement (as Christians) in the Lord (all the time).

3. Yes, and I request you (also, my) sincere (and genuine) brother who bears the yoke (of Christ) with me, (take hold of this problem, and) help these women, who have labored with danger and suffering in the (work of the) gospel with me, and (with) Clement, and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.

Notes

1. 4:2-3 is an exhortation to two women at Philippi, named Euodia and Syntyche, to stop their quarrelling and to agree together in the Lord. Paul further calls on the preacher (?) at Philippi to help these women get along better with one another. (The KJV spelling *Euodias*, a masculine form of the name, is incorrect.)
2. Paul urged Euodia and Syntyche separately to be of the same mind. This indicates emphasis.
3. "Be of the same mind," that is, be harmonious. Compare Phil. 2:2; Rom. 12:16; 15:5; II Cor. 13:11.
4. It is a bit tantalizing to realize that we know almost nothing about Euodia and Syntyche except that they were having a disagreement. Besides this we know only that they had previously labored in the gospel with Paul and certain others.

So very often the Bible tells only a few facts about people. Yet strangely these few facts often give us vivid impressions about the character of these people. We wonder what might be written about us if an inspired writer were to write a one-sentence summary of our lives. It might not be flattering!

5. The reference to Euodia and Syntyche reminds us that women played a prominent part in the activities of many local churches in New Testament times. We read about the womenfolk in Macedonia in Acts 16:13-14; 17:4, 12. There is no real reason to believe, however, that the women in Macedonian and Greek

churches took a more prominent part in the church life than the women did elsewhere.

6. Paul's true (that is, sincere, natural-born) *yokefellow* was called upon to help Euodia and Syntyche to come to agreement. Paul mobilized the whole church to help mend a quarrel.

The term *yokefellow* means one joined with another under a yoke. Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you." (Matt. 11:29). All who take His yoke are yokefellows.

Some scholars have suggested that the Greek word for yokefellow (*szugos*, or *sunzugos*) is a proper name, Synzygus. This is a possibility, although the word is not known as a proper name elsewhere in contemporary literature. Some have speculated that he may have been the husband of Euodia or Syntyche. Others have thought that he might be Timothy or Epaphroditus. No one knows.

It seems to us that most likely the "true yokefellow" was simply the local preacher or evangelist at Philippi. The church at Philippi had more than one elder and more than one deacon (Phil. 1:1), so obviously the particular yokefellow in mind was not one of these officers.

7. Euodia and Syntyche had labored (Gr. *sunathleo*) with Paul in the gospel. This verb indicates activity attended with danger and suffering. It is used only here and in Phil. 1:27. The related verb *athleo* is used elsewhere, and refers to contending in athletic games (II Tim. 2:5), and also to contending in battle.
8. A little contention can cause so much distress in a local church that it outweighs a lot of good service. Compare Eccl. 10:1. Thus the good work that Euodia and Syntyche had done was being clouded over by their later disagreement.
9. The Clement to whom Paul refers was some familiar Philippian Christian, judging by the familiar way he is referred to. We know nothing else about him besides the incidental reference here. He is not the famous Clement of Rome, who lived much later (about 95 A.D.), and certainly not the great Clement of Alexandria, who lived about 190 A.D.
10. The names of Paul's fellow laborers ARE (not might be) in the book of life.

The book of life, elsewhere called the Lamb's (Jesus') book of life) is the book which contains the names of all saved

people. It is elsewhere referred to or alluded to in Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; Luke 10:20; Ex. 32:32, 33; Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1; Ezek. 13:9 (?); Isa. 4:3 (?).

11. Life in an early church:

- (1) Involved toil; (4:3)
- (2) Gave a prominent place to women;
- (3) Centered about personalities;
- (4) Was not always harmonious.

4. Rejoice in the Lord always: again I will say, Rejoice. 5. Let your forbearance be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

Translation and Paraphrase

4. Be rejoicing in the Lord (Jesus) always. Again (after considering all the possibilities of sorrow in this world,) I (still) say, Be rejoicing.

5. (By kind deeds) let your gentle, reasonable nature be known to all men. The Lord is near (unto us always; yea, his visible coming is always near too).

Notes

1. Wm. Barclay describes these verses as "Marks of the Christian Life." The two marks are joy and moderation.
2. *Rejoice* is present tense: Be rejoicing!
3. We rejoice in the Lord. Only in the Lord is constant joy possible. Paul could rejoice in the Lord even in chains in the dungeon at Philippi. Acts 16:23-25.
4. Paul repeats the command to rejoice. It seems as if he said, "After considering all the possibilities for sorrow in this world, I repeat with emphasis, REJOICE." Compare Phil. 2:17, 28; 3:1; 4:10.
5. Let your forbearance (KJV, *moderation*) be known. This word means reasonableness. It implies a quality of gentleness and mildness; a nature not unduly rigorous, not overly strict, not judging people severely. Some related forms of this word are translated *gentle*. (It is thus rendered in I Tim. 3:3; Titus 3:2; I Pet. 2:18; James 3:17).
6. Forbearance must be shown to all men, not just to church members.

7. "The Lord is at hand." This can either mean that the Lord is always near, always close at hand (which is true; Matt. 28:20); or it has also been interpreted to mean that the Lord's second coming was thought to be near. (James 5:8). Either meaning is a good reason to cultivate the quality of forbearance, as the Lord desires.

To the Christian the second coming of the Lord is always looked upon as near. I Thess. 5:2-6; Matt. 24:42-44. In this sense the Lord is always near.

However, to allege that Paul was under a delusion common in the first century that Christ was definitely going to return in that generation is a serious accusation against an inspired apostle of God. The simple statement that the Lord is near does not necessarily imply such a far-reaching conclusion.

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- 6. In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.**
7. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.

Translation and Paraphrase

6. Do not be anxious (and worried) about a thing; instead (of worrying) let your requests be made known to God in everything (you do) by prayer (of devotion) and supplication (for your needs), with thanksgiving.

7. And (if you will do this) the peace of God which exceeds all (human) understanding will keep guard over your hearts and thoughts (protecting both your emotions and your mind, and keep them safe) in Christ Jesus.

Notes

1. These verses tell of the peace that comes through thankful prayer.
2. "Be careful for nothing" means "Be anxious (or worried) about nothing." "Be full of cares over nothing."
3. These verses sound like an echo of the sermon on the mount. See Matt. 6:25-34. Compare Psalm 145:18-19.
4. The remedy for anxiety is prayer (this word give prominence to the element of devotion) and supplication (gives prominence to the expression of personal needs). Compare Luke 18:1; I Peter 5:8.

In prayer, however, we must not forget to let our requests be made known with *thanksgiving*.

5. God likes us to offer specific requests in prayers. Vague generalities are usually meaningless formalism.
6. The peace of God here promised is that inward peace of soul which comes from God, and is based on God's presence and promises. Compare Col. 3:15; Phil. 4:9.
7. "Peace which passeth all understanding" is peace that transcends the power of the human mind to understand it. It can also mean that the peace that God gives surpasses all human understanding as a means of bringing tranquility to the heart. (We prefer the first meaning.)
8. God's peace guards our hearts and thoughts. The Biblical *heart* includes such inward qualities as the intellect, the will, the conscience, and the emotions.

By *thoughts* Paul refers to the mental perceptions, the things that proceed from the heart.

When the heart and the thoughts are protected, a man's whole being—even to a great degree his physical being—is safe. Prov. 17:22: "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine."

Christians should be able to live above emotional tension, nervous breakdowns, mental illness, and anxiety symptoms. The reason that many do not is simply that they do not pray. They seem to feel, "Why pray when you can worry?"

9. Notice that the protection is in Christ Jesus. This promise is not extended to everyone, but only to those in Christ.

8. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.
9. The things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

Translation and Paraphrase

8. (And now) finally, (my) brothers (as for what remains on my mind, I urge you to set your minds on the good things)—whatever things are true, whatever things are worthy of reverence, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are truly pleasing, whatever things are well-spoken of—if there is

any virtue (in life), and if there is any praise (that is due to anything, then) think about these (good) things.

9. (The things I want you to think about are those things) which you learned and received, and heard, and saw in me (in my life); do these things and the God (who is the creator) of peace will be with you.

Notes

1. We could entitle the paragraph made up of these two verses "The Homeland of the Christian Mind."

Every human mind sets itself upon something. When the mind has dwelt long enough in any line of thinking, it can (almost) never get out of it. Therefore it is important that the Christian keep his mind in the true homeland of the godly mind, upon those things that are true, honorable, just, pure, etc.

2. Be careful of thoughts; they have a way of popping out in words and deeds.

What you are thinking writes lines on your face.

Actions, places, reading materials, and ways of thinking that excite evil thoughts should be shunned, if for no other reason than that they do this.

Evil thoughts defile a man. Mark 7:21.

Let the meditations of my heart be acceptable; Psalm 19:14.

Bring every thought and imagination into captivity to the obedience of Christ; II Cor. 10:5.

Let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts; Isa. 55:7.

Be transformed by the renewing of your mind; Romans 12:2.

3. "Finally" does not mean "In conclusion," but "In consideration of another remaining matter." See notes on 3:1.
4. Note the six descriptions of the things we are to think about: (1) true; (2) honorable (Gr. *semnos*, worthy of respect and reverence, revered, worshipped); (3) just (Gr. *dikaios*, upright, righteous, agreeable to justice and law); (4) pure (Gr. *hagnos*, pure sacred, free from fault); (5) lovely (Gr. *prospheiles*, acceptable, pleasing, exhibiting love toward all); (6) of good report (Gr. *euphemos*, sounding well uttering words of good omen).
5. Paul appeals to the Philippians to think on good things by saying, "If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

Everyone of us has some things in our memory and acquaintance that are dear to us, some things that are inspiring, that call us to a more virtuous way of life, that are worthy of praise. If there are such things, then we ourselves ought to direct our minds to good thinking, such as will lead us become like that which is praiseworthy in others.

6. 4:9 gives four methods of exposure to the truth:

(1) Learning; True teaching is learned. It does not develop in us naturally.

(2) Receiving; True teaching is received. This implies a fixed body of beliefs that are to be handed down from generation to generation. It implies also that part of our education is the response of the will as well as the response of the intellect.

(3) Hearing; (4) Seeing; The truth may be heard (Rom. 10:14) and seen exemplified in a person's life and actions.

7. "The God of peace shall be with you." God is only with us when we do what he commands us. "The Lord is with you while you are with him." (II Chron. 15:2; Isa. 55:6; 59:1-2; James 4:8). Peace comes to those who are in a right relationship to God.

8. Regarding the expression "God of peace," see Rom. 15:33; II Cor. 13:11; I Thess. 5:23. God's nature is peace-loving. He is the creator of peace (Isaiah 57:19), and the giver of peace.

10. But I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length ye have revived your thought for me; wherein ye did indeed take thought, but ye lacked opportunity.

Translation and Paraphrase

10. But I rejoice in the Lord (very) greatly, because now at length your thought for me has blossomed anew. (I realize, of course, that) you have indeed been thinking of me, but you lacked opportunity (to show it).

Notes

1. 4:10 begins a new paragraph in the outline, "Thanks for the Philippians' gift (4:10-20). In spite of the fact that the paragraph is obviously a section expressing thanks, the word *thanks* is not in it. Paul expressed this thanks without being fawning, or condescending, or conventional. His thanks are

all the more meaningful because they do not contain a trace of such superficiality as "I just don't know what I'd have done without your wonderful gift."

2. How did Paul feel when the Philippians sent money to him? He *rejoiced* in the Lord greatly. (The Greek verb is actually a past tense form; but this was frequently used as a literary device wherein the writer placed himself in the reader's position, and expressed his feelings as past, even though the action may have still been in progress when the reader read of it. Thus Paul *rejoiced*, but he doubtless was still rejoicing.)
3. How long had it been since the Philippians had sent help to Paul? It had been a long time: at length.
4. "Ye have revived your thought for me." *Revive* (Gr. *anathello*) means "shoot up again, sprout again, grow green again." The New English Bible translates this well: "Your care for me has now blossomed afresh."
5. Had the Philippians temporarily forgotten Paul? By no means: "Ye did indeed take thought (a Gr. imperfect tense form, indicating continuous past action), but ye lacked opportunity" to show it. Paul had been in several prisons in Judea, and on a long ship trip, and marooned on the island of Malta, etc. Mail was slow where it existed at all in those times. For a long time the Philippians could hardly even have known whereabouts of Paul.

11. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content. 12. I know how to be abased, and I know also how to abound: in everything and in all things have I learned the secret both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want. 13. I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.

Translation and Paraphrase

11. (It is) not because of want (and need) that I speak. For (personally) I have learned to be content in (any) circumstances (wherever) I am.

12. I know both (how) to be lowly, and I know (how) to have abundance. In everything (individually) and in all things (collectively) I am fully instructed (by my experiences) both (how) to be full and (how) to be hungry, (how) to have abundance, and (how) to suffer need.

13. I can do all things through (Christ) who (always) empowers me.

Notes

1. In 4:11-13 Paul declares that he does not write about his joy over their gift because he had been in want (although as a matter of fact he was in real affliction). Paul knew how to endure all things, both abundance and poverty, through Christ Jesus.
2. Paul's expression of joy was not uttered because his personal needs had been met, but because of something else. That "something else" is identified in 4:17.
3. Paul had learned to be content in all situations wherein he found himself. *Content* (*autarkes*) means "sufficient for one-self; independent of external circumstances; contented with one's lot, with one's means, though the slenderest." (Thayer). This word was a favorite of the Greek Stoics. The Stoics sought to be content by eliminating all desires, all emotions, and feelings by a deliberate practiced act of the will. Paul was not self-sufficient in this way, but self-sufficient because he was in Christ, and Christ was in him. This is the grand secret of true contentment.
4. In 4:12 Paul itemized some respects in which he had learned to be content:
 - (1) He knew how to be made low (economically and socially).
 - (2) He knew how to have abundance, more than he needed, without becoming proud or overconfident.
 - (3) He knew how to be full (well fed).
 - (4) He knew how to be hungry.He asserts that in everything individually and in all things collectively he had been initiated into a knowledge of how to bear up. (He belonged to the Order of Contented Saints! The Greek verb *mueo* used here is mostly used in classical Greek to refer to initiation into the Greek mystery religions.)
5. Christ strengthened Paul. The verb *strengthen* is in a present tense form, indicating continuous action. II Tim. 4:17.
6. Notice that Paul makes no formal expression of thanks beyond his recognition and commendation of the moral and spiritual significance of their act, in which he acknowledges a benefit to

himself. He was far from being unthankful, but he chose this means to express his feelings.

14. Howbeit ye did well that ye had fellowship with my affliction. 15. And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but ye only; 16. for even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my need.

Translation and Paraphrase

14. Yet, you (Philippians) did well (in your act of) sharing with me in my affliction, (in sending your offering to me here at Rome, which Epaphroditus delivered).

15. Now you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, (that is, when you first heard the gospel and accepted it,) when I departed from (you folks in Macedonia, that) no church had a part with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone.

16. (How very greatly you have participated in giving is very plain) because even in Thessalonica, (the first place I preached after leaving Philippi,) you sent (assistance) for my need once, and (then) again.

Notes

1. 4:14-16 contains a commendation of the Philippians' giving, both at the present (to Paul in Rome), and in the past for their giving to Paul right after he left Philippi and went to Thessalonica.
2. The "Notwithstanding" or "Howbeit" in 4:14 makes a contrast between Paul's state of self-sufficiency (described in 4:11-13), and the fact that the generosity of the Philippians was truly beneficial both to Paul and to them.
3. *Communicate* in KJV 4:14 is a suitable translation, if it be understood in the old meaning of *share*, or have in common. See Romans 12:13. The Philippians had made common cause with Paul's affliction by sending help to him, and by sending Epaphroditus to assist him. In doing these things they had done well. See Heb. 10:33.
4. The reference to *affliction* in 4:14 indicates that Paul was in dire need before the gifts from the Philippians came.

5. Paul did not often address his churches by name as he does here. (4:15; Compare II Cor. 6:11). The times when he did so express special earnestness, or affectionate remembrance. Paul usually preferred to refer to provinces, rather than to individual cities. (Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:15; II Cor. 2:13; 7:5; 8:1; 9:2).
6. "The beginning of the gospel" in 4:15 obviously refers to Paul's first preaching tour in Macedonia and Philippi.
7. There are many ways that we as Christians can have fellowship with one another. See notes on Phil. 1:5. The Philippians had fellowship (a participation) with Paul in the matter of giving and receiving.
8. We should here recall the list of places visited by Paul during his second missionary trip right after leaving Philippi. (They are narrated in Acts 17-18). Philippi, Amphipolis, Appolonia, Thessalonica, Beroea (all of these were in Macedonia); Athens, Corinth (these last two were in Achaia). Thessalonica is about a hundred miles from Philippi, in a generally southwest direction.
9. "No church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving, but ye only." In that period of time right after he left Philippi for the first time, Paul did not receive nor request offerings for his personal needs from any church except that at Philippi. (Compare II Cor. 11:7-9; 12:13—very important verses.) Paul does not say that he had never previously accepted offerings from other churches, or that in later times other churches had not helped him. But at that particular time none except the Philippians did help. The church at Antioch had previously helped him. Acts 15:3, 40.

We do not know all of Paul's reasons for refusing to take money from other churches at that time. But in the case of the Corinthians Paul felt that there was a need of cutting off any opportunity for the pretended apostles to say that Paul was just like them in preaching for money. Therefore Paul would take no money from the Corinthians for himself. He did later request money from them to help the poor saints in Jerusalem.

As a general rule the more the leaders can be led to give, the better it will be with that church. "Where your treasure is there will your heart also." Matt. 6:21. By giving, fruit increases to your account. Phil. 4:17. Paul himself wrote to the Corinthians about how he had taken no money from them,

and then adds, "Forgive me this wrong." (II Cor. 12:13). We recognize that these words might have been spoken in sarcasm, but then again they may have been at least partly serious.

10. "Fellowship in the *matter* of giving and receiving." *Matter* here (Gr. *logos*) means an account, a reckoning, a score. The word *logos* has the same meaning in 4:17. Paul here by a charming figure of speech refers to the gifts of money which the Philippians gave him as being entered into their book-keeping records as expenses, while he himself enters them in the account of receipts.
11. The Philippians sent offerings to Paul in Thessalonica at least twice. These cared for his need, which was apparently then quite acute. We know from II Cor. 11:9 that while Paul was at Corinth (during his second missionary trip) that brethren from Macedonia (presumably Philippi) came down to Corinth and supplied the measure of his want. In these actions the Philippian church was unique at that time.

Besides the gifts to Paul personally, they also contributed "beyond their power" and "out of their deep poverty" for the poor saints in Judea. II Cor. 8:1-4.

12. All of this giving had been done by the Philippians in the face of grinding poverty.

The district of Macedonia had suffered three civil wars, and had been reduced to such poverty that Tiberius Caesar, hearkening to their petition, had lightened their taxes. But in addition to this general poverty, the churches had been made poor by persecution.¹

17. Not that I seek for the gift; but I seek for the fruit that increaseth to your account.

Translation and Paraphrase

17. (I do) not (write this) because I am seeking (or have ever sought) the gift; on the contrary I am seeking (for YOU) the fruit that will overflow to your account (as a result of your sacrificial giving).

1. J. W. McGarvey, and P. Y. Pendleton, *Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans*, (Cincinnati: Standard Pub. Co. 1916, p. 210.)

Notes

1. Paul denied in 4:11 that he wrote about the Philippians gift because he had been in want. So here in 4:17 he denies that he writes about it because of covetousness, because he sought the gift.
2. Instead of seeking the Philippians' gift for himself, Paul encouraged their giving because it would bring fruit to their account. (Compare note 10 under 4:14-16.)
3. The fruit Paul refers to is the recompense which the gift would bring to the givers. Compare II Cor. 9:6. Generous giving brings us the fruit of sufficiency (II Cor. 9:8); and the means to give more (II Cor. 9:8-10); and the fruit of thanksgiving from others (II Cor. 9:12ff); and of hearts set in the right place (Matt. 6:21).
4. This fruit "increaseth," or is abounding. This is a present tense form, indicating continuous action. Every act of Christian ministering develops and enriches him who performs it.
5. The generosity of a good church:
 - (1) Sympathetic generosity; 4:14.
 - (2) Repeated generosity; 4:16.
 - (3) Fruit-bearing generosity; 4:17.

18. But I have all things and abound: I am filled, having received from Epaphroditus the things *that came from you*, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.

Translation and Paraphrase

18. Nonetheless (as a result of your gift) I (now) have all things (which I need) and (indeed) I have more than enough. I (who have at times been hungry am (now) filled, because I received the (gift) from you (which was delivered) by Epaphroditus. (Your gift is) an odor of a sweet smell (like the Old Testament sacrifices), a sacrifice acceptable (and) well-pleasing to God.

Notes

1. The Philippians' gift must have been generous and substantial, for Paul writes that he now has all things, and even abounds (that is, he has some left over).
2. Regarding Epaphroditus and his work, see notes on Phil. 2:25-30.

3. When giving is rightly done, it can be a sacrifice much like the Old Testament sacrifices. Except that it is not a blood sacrifice, it can resemble the ancient sacrifices in nearly every way. Compare Heb. 13:16.

The expression "an odor of a sweet smell" is frequently used in the Old Testament to refer to animal sacrifices. Compare Eph. 5:2; Gen. 8:21; Lev. 26:31; 1:9, 13, 17.

19. And my God shall supply every need of your according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Translation and Paraphrase

19. But (though you have given so much, you need never worry about having your needs provided, for) my God will fill all your need (just as you have filled mine; and he will do this) in a glorious way, according to his (limitless) riches (in glory, which are dispensed) in Christ Jesus.

Notes

1. Lest any of the Philippians should be fearful as to how they could now get along since they had given such a large gift to Paul, Paul assures them that God would supply ALL their needs.

The Philippians lived in a depressed, poverty-stricken area. See note 12 under Phil. 4:14-16.

2. Phil. 4:19 is one of a number of precious verses that assures us that God will always care for the physical needs of his children. Matt. 6:33; II Cor. 9:8.
3. Paul speaks of God as MY God." He is very near and real to Paul.
4. God will supply our need "according to his riches." God owns everything. (Ps. 24:1; 50:10-12). His glory fills the whole earth. (Isa. 6:3). This promise is too vast for us to comprehend even in part. But it is a promise that we can rejoice in to the very utmost of our capacity to grasp it.
5. The phrase "in glory" probably refers to the manner of God's supplying ("He will gloriously supply"), rather than to the location or nature of the riches ("riches up in glory").

20. Now unto our God and Father be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Translation and Paraphrase

20. And now (may) the glory (be) unto our God and father for ever and ever. Amen (Truly!).

Notes

1. Paul's epistles are full of doxologies such as this one. When Paul reached the conclusion of some exalted line of thought, he burst forth with "Glory to God!" Here his doxology was produced by the wonderful thought that God will supply all our need. For other doxologies see Rom. 11:36; 16:27; Gal. 1:5; Eph. 3:21; I Tim. 1:17.
2. The word *doxology* is derived from two Greek words, and literally means "A word of glory" or "An expression of glory." Let us not be too stiff and formalistic to burst forth into an occasional doxology.
3. "For ever and ever" is (literally translated) "unto the ages of the ages." This is an expression frequently used in the scriptures to describe eternity.

We cannot comprehend the length of eternity. We can only conceive of one age, followed by another, and yet more and more. This is the view of eternity presented in the Bible by the expression "for ever and ever." It presents eternity as a succession of ages (Gr. *aion*, or eon), going on as far as we can perceive and then farther yet.

21. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren that are with me salute you. 22. All the saints salute you, especially they that are of Caesar's household.

Translation and Paraphrase

21. Greet all the saints (the holy ones) in Christ Jesus (all that you meet). The (Christian) brethren with me (my special helpers and associates) greet you.

22. (Yea) all the saints (here in Rome) greet you, in particular those from the household of Caesar (send greetings).

Notes

1. Paul closed a number of his epistles, as he does this one, with salutations or greetings. Romans 16:3; I Cor. 16:19, 21; Col. 4:10ff.

2. The Philippians were requested to greet every saint in Christ Jesus individually. ("In Christ" may go either with *salute* or with *saint*.) There is a great blessing in Christians' knowing one another well and greeting one another as brothers.
3. Except for Timothy we do not know the names of any of the brethren who were with Paul. Paul spoke about his associates back in 2:20 in a manner which (at first glance anyway) does not appear very complimentary (but see the notes on that verse).
4. All the church members (the saints) in Rome sent their greetings to the Philippians, along with Paul.
5. The reference to Christians in Caesar's household thrills us. There were a few godly people in King Ahab's court and kingdom. There were a few Christians in Caesar's (Nero's) household. Compare Phil. 1:13. There are Christians today in Communist and Mohammedan lands.
6. The expression *Caesar's household* probably refers not to the imperial family, but to employees in the house—slaves, cooks, guards, and such.
7. The "especially" in 2:22 seems to point out that the Christians in Caesar's household particularly wanted the Philippians to know of their existence in such difficult surroundings, and wanted the prayers and fellowship of the Christians elsewhere. In many places it is hard enough to be a Christian even when you have encouragement from brethren elsewhere. How much harder it is to be faithful without their fellowship and prayers.

23. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Translation and Paraphrase

23. May the favor of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.
(Amen)

Notes

1. Paul closes Philippians with his characteristic closing wish that the favor (grace) of the Lord Jesus Christ may be with our spirit. Compare Gal. 6:18; II Tim. 4:22; Philemon 25. Our spirit needs the help of Christ's favor even more than our physical nature, for we have many unseen spiritual enemies. Eph. 6:12.

2. The reading "with you all" in KJV is not as well supported by the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament as the American Standard version reading "with your spirit," which we follow.

Study and Review

Questions Over Philippians Chapter Four

1. How many times in Philippians four do such phrases as "in the Lord," or "in Christ," or "in him" occur? How many times altogether in the whole book of Philippians?
2. What descriptive terms does Paul use in 4:1 to refer to the Philippians?
3. What are the two Greek words translated *crown*? Which word is used in 4:1? What do the two words mean?
4. What small phrase is repeated three times in 4:1-4? What is the phrase applied to in each case?
5. Name two respects in which Christians should stand fast? (4:1)
6. Who were Euodia and Syntyche, and why, apparently, are they mentioned in 4:2?
7. How prominent were the womenfolk in the churches of Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea)? Acts 16:13, 14; 17:4, 12.
8. Explain the term *yokefellow*. To whom may it refer?
9. What resources and efforts were mobilized by Paul to mend a quarrel in the church at Philippi?
10. What commendable thing had Euodia and Syntyche done?
11. Who was Clement?
12. What is the book of life?
13. How emphatic is the command to rejoice? In what respect can we always be rejoicing?
14. What is forbearance (or moderation)? To whom is our forbearance to be made known?
15. Does the statement that *the Lord is at hand*, mean that his second coming is near, or that he is always close to us?
16. What is to cause us anxiety or care?
17. What is the remedy, or alternative, to anxiety?
18. What will be the result of telling our requests to God?
19. What connection is there between godliness and sanity?
20. What is to crowd out falsehood, dishonesty, impurity, etc. from our minds? (4:8)

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21. What appeal was used to urge us to think on things true, honest, etc?
22. From whom had the Philippians obtained a proper knowledge of godly living and thinking?
23. What deed of the Philippians had caused Paul great joy?
24. Had the Philippians previously been unconcerned with Paul's needs?
25. Why had the Philippians neglected Paul?
26. Did Paul express joy because his wants had been supplied?
27. What valuable attitude had Paul learned? (4:11-12)
28. What were some of the circumstances in which Paul had learned to be content?
29. What was the source of Paul's strength to do all things in all circumstances?
30. If Paul was relatively insensible to want, what made the Philippians' generosity so pleasing to him? (4:14, 17)
31. What does *having fellowship* (or communicating) *with my affliction* mean?
32. To what does Paul refer by the expression *the beginning of the gospel*? (4:15)
33. How many other churches had given to Paul as the Philippians had?
34. Were the Philippians a wealthy people? (See II Cor. 8:1-3)
35. What is the *fruit that increaseth to your account*? (4:17)
36. Why did Paul desire the fruit that increased to their account?
37. Where, in particular, had the Philippians sent money to Paul previously? How many times?
38. What is the action, or event, or thing alluded to in the figure of speech, an *odor of a sweet smell*?
39. Can a financial offering be like a sacrificial animal offering? If so, in what ways?
40. How will all a Christian's needs be supplied?
41. According to what measure will God supply all our need?
42. What moved Paul to utter the doxology of 4:20?
43. What does the word *doxology* mean?
44. What does *salute* mean? (4:21)
45. Who were some of the brethren with Paul? (4:21)
46. In what astounding place did some of the Roman Christians reside?
47. What is Paul's characteristic benediction in this letter?
48. Suggest, if you can, a title for this whole chapter that more fully sums up its contents than our title, "A Mind of Many Virtues."

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INTRODUCTORY SECTIONS ON COLOSSIANS

- A. Importance of the Epistle to the Colossians.
- B. Facts about the Epistle to the Colossians.
- C. Facts about Colossae and the Lycus Valley.
- D. Facts about the Church in Colossae.
- E. The Colossian Heresy.
- F. Gnosticism.
- G. Relationship of Colossians to Ephesians.
- H. Christ in Colossians.
- I. Outline of Colossians.
- J. Questions over the Introductory Sections.

INTRODUCTION

A. IMPORTANCE OF THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

1. Colossians is the most Christ-centered epistle in the New Testament. Colossians enables us to see clearly what it means to be in Christ. No other book is so concerned with the exaltation of Christ. With its emphasis upon the supremacy of Christ Colossians contains the very heart of the Christian message.

With the modern day pressure of non-Christian religions and of non-religious civilization, we need to see clearly the place of Jesus Christ in God's plan. (See study H, Christ in Colossians.)

2. Colossians presents a strong criticism of the heresies current in Asia Minor in the first century. We could accurately say that the theme of the book is "Christ's supremacy vs. Heresy." We do need to know why some teachings are wrong, as well as why some are right.

In our age with its emphasis upon ecumenicity, and its deemphasis upon fixed beliefs, we need to look again at books like Colossians, to see what the apostles of Christ really taught, and to see if we have surrendered the true foundation of Christianity.

To many people today such concepts as the authority of Christ and the finality of the Christian faith are myths. The book of Colossians is a powerful rebuttal to such an attitude.

B. FACTS ABOUT THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

1. It was written by the apostle Paul.
2. It was written from Rome, about A.D. 62/63.
3. It was delivered to the Christians in Colossae by Tychicus. (Col. 4:7)
4. Tychichus delivered the epistle to the Ephesians on the same trip during which he delivered the epistle to the Colossians. (See Eph. 6:21-22)
5. Tychichus travelled with Onesimus when he delivered the Ephesian and Colossian letters. (Col. 4:9)

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Onesimus was a runaway slave, who had fled from his master Philemon. Philemon lived at Colossae. Paul won Onesimus to Christ in Rome, and sent him back to his master Philemon, bearing the short letter to Philemon. (See Introductory Sections on Philemon.)

6. While Paul was in Rome he had learned from Epaphras, the preacher from Colossae, about the affairs of the Colossian church. The church there was being disturbed by false doctrines. (See Study E, The Colossian Heresy.). This was Paul's primary reason for writing and sending the letter of Colossians.
7. "Christ's Supremacy Vs. Heresy" is the overall theme of the epistle.
8. Some objections have been raised to Paul's authorship of Colossians. However the book itself says that Paul wrote it, and there are no really solid grounds for objecting to Paul's authorship.

(1) Some scholars have said that the vocabulary in Colossians includes numerous words not used elsewhere in Paul's writings. This is true; however such other epistles of Paul as Ephesians and Romans also contain words not used elsewhere in Paul's epistles. The reason in each case is that Paul was discussing matters not dealt with in other epistles, and hence different words were required.

(2) Also some have objected to the authorship of Paul because they feel that the false teachings condemned by Paul in Colossians are apparently Gnostic ideas, and these teachings did not become very influential until the second century (100-200 A.D.). It is true that Gnosticism reached its height in the second century, but some of the basic ideas of Gnosticism were being sown in the first century, long before they made their greatest growth in the second century. Furthermore the heresy at Colossae was by no means limited to Gnostic ideas. (See Study F, Gnosticism.)

(3) Some have further objected to Paul's apostleship on the grounds that the theology in Colossians is too advanced to have been written in the mid-first century. These people feel that such sublime ideas as Christ's being the creator (1:16), and the one through whom God will reconcile all things (1:20) took a long time to evolve in the thinking of the early church, and did not develop until after the time of Paul.

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Those who believe that Paul received his message by revelation from God (as we do) will have no difficulty in accepting "advanced" ideas from the pens of tentmakers like Paul or fishermen like Peter. The ideas did not have to evolve in men's thinking; God revealed them.

C. FACTS ABOUT COLOSSAE AND THE LYCUS VALLEY

1. Colossae ((pronounced Ko-LOSS-ee) was a city in what is now called Turkey, in Asia Minor. See map, p. x.
2. It lay about 100 miles east of Ephesus, which was on the western seacoast of Asia Minor (called Asia in New Testament times). Colossae was about 1000 miles from Rome by the route that ships had to follow.
3. Two prominent nearby cities were Laodicea and Hierapolis. (Col. 2:1; 4:13, 15-16; Rev. 3:14.)
4. Colossae straddled the Lycus river (also called the Little Meander). About twelve miles downstream lay Hierapolis and Laodicea, on opposite sides of the river, about six miles apart.
5. The Lycus river ran into the Meander river, which flowed on eastward and emptied into the Aegean Sea just beyond Ephesus.
6. The region around Colossae is very mountainous. The Cadmus range rose behind Colossae.
7. Colossae was very important in ancient times because it commanded the roads leading to the mountain passes.
8. The area of the Lycus valley was known for earthquakes. Severe earthquakes still frequently occur in Turkey.
9. The area had a rich volcanic soil. Its rich soil made sheep-raising profitable. Laodicea was famous for its production of fine woolen garments.
10. The waters of the Lycus river carried much powdered chalk. this caused several effects: (1) It deposited curious white formations and encrustations, which could be seen from far off. (2) It was not good for irrigation because it destroyed some vegetation. (3) It caused the waters of the river to be extra good for dying. The chalk in the water made the dyes take hold of fabrics well.
11. Colossae was in the ancient country of *Phrygia*, located in central Asia Minor. (Acts 2:10; 16:16; 18:23). The name Phrygia was derived from a Thracian tribe that in early times

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invaded and drove out (or absorbed) the earlier inhabitants (including Hittites). Many Phrygian ruins remain in the area today, including tombs bearing the names of kings Midas and Gordius.

12. The Phrygians absorbed many religious superstitions from the Asiatics they contacted. Almost every known pagan religion could be found in Phrygia. This may be the reason why the Colossian heresy was such a mixture of ideas.
13. The Phrygians were known as a lazy race, and were sometimes referred to as a race worthy only of being slaves.
14. The Syrian king Antiochus the Great imported 2000 Jewish families into Phrygia about 170 B.C. These Jews multiplied until it is estimated (by the amount of money they sent annually to the Jerusalem temple as taxes) that there were 50,000 Jews in the area in New Testament times. Paul encountered much Jewish opposition in this general area during his missionary trips.

The presence of so many Jews in the area may explain why the Colossian heresy included some Jewish ideas, and also why the nearby Galatian Christians were affected by Judaism.

15. In Roman times (the New Testament period) there was no country of Phrygia as such. The land of the Phrygians had been divided so that part of it (the larger part) was in the province of Asia and the rest in Galatia. However the line was not sharply drawn between them.
16. Also by New Testament times Colossae had dwindled in importance until it was a very insignificant city. It has been called the most insignificant city to which Paul ever wrote a letter. Hierapolis, and particularly Laodicea, had far overshadowed it. Hierapolis had a famous spa. Laodicea had become the highway center, the trade center, the center of the wool business, and the government administrative center of the district.
17. Not a trace of the city of Colossae remains visible today.

D. FACTS ABOUT THE CHURCH IN COLOSSAE

1. Paul himself had never visited Colossae or Laodicea. (Col. 2:1)
2. Possibly some Colossians were included among the Phrygians

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who were in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost when the church was established. (Acts 2:10)

3. During Paul's third missionary journey, during which he spent three years at Ephesus, all those that dwelt in Asia heard the word of God. (Acts 19:10). Probably the effects of this ministry extended to some of the area around Colossae.
4. The Colossians had learned of Christ from a minister named Epaphras. (Col. 1:6-7)
5. Epaphras had labored in Hierapolis and Laodicea, as well as in Colossae. (Col. 4:13)
6. Apparently Epaphras was still their minister when Paul wrote the epistle to the Colossians. (Col. 1:7; 4:12-13)
7. The Colossian church was mainly made up of Gentiles. (Col. 1:21, 27; 3:5-7)
8. One of the Colossian Christians was Philemon, the master of Onesimus the slave. Apparently the church in Colossae met in Philemon's house. (Phm. 19)
9. The Colossian church had faith and love. (Col. 1:4, 8). They also had order and steadfastness. (Col. 2:5)
10. The Colossian church had been infected by the many religious ideas being circulated in their area. (See Study E on the Colossian Heresy.)
11. Apparently Epaphras had gone to Rome for some cause. There he visited Paul and reported to him about the situation in Colossae. (Col. 1:7-9). Paul wrote his epistle to them following this visit of Epaphras.

E. THE COLOSSIAN HERESY

1. The Colossian heresy was apparently a mixture of Jewish, Greek, and pagan ideas. We really know nothing about it, except from the implications in the epistle itself. We suppose that the ideas and practices criticized by Paul in Colossians are indications of beliefs and practices actually current among the Colossians.
2. Basically the Colossian heresy was a denial of the adequacy and perfect supremacy of Christ. See Col. 1:15, 19; 2:2, 9. Thus Paul attacks the heresy by telling of Christ's true nature, glory, and work.

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Every heresy that has ever existed has involved in some way a denial of Christ's perfection and adequacy. Can you think of any heresy that has not in some way downgraded Christ, or rejected part of what the scriptures say about Him?

3. It denied Christ's part in creating the material world (1:16-17). It denied that Christ came in a physical body (1:22; 2:9).
4. It had numerous Jewish teachings: circumcision (2:11); laws about meats, drink, feast days, new moon, and Sabbath days (2:16).
5. It had an emphasis on Philosophy, a Greek emphasis no doubt. (2:8). It exalted human wisdom and knowledge. (2:3).
6. It had an element of snobbishness in it (1:21, 28). It gave its devotees a feeling of superiority over the rest of the poor unenlightened masses. This is a natural feeling for any people who adopt a religion based on human wisdom and philosophy.
7. It included various forms of asceticism. Asceticism is deliberate severe treatment of the body for religious purposes. Thus fasting (not eating), or wearing uncomfortable or nonconformist clothing, or placing oneself in painful positions for long periods of time, are all types of asceticism. The Colossians thought there was religious merit to be gained by obeying such human laws as "Handle not, nor taste, nor touch." (Col. 2:16, 21, 23). They had forgotten that the only merit we can claim is the merit of Christ.
8. In the fact of the real snobbishness produced by the Colossian heresy, there was a deliberately practiced false humility, which was exhibited by acts of severity to the body. (Col. 2:23).
9. There was a worship (or devotion to) angelic and demonic beings. (Col. 1:16, 10; 2:15, 18).
10. There was a lowering of moral standards, a rejection of God's laws about holiness. This is evident from the great emphasis given to holiness in 3:1-17. This idea that we are not under any laws and can live as we please is sometimes called *antinomianism*.
11. Some interpreters (e.g., Wm. Barclay) say that the Colossian heresy included astrological teachings and worship of the heavenly bodies. They maintain that the word *rudiments* in 2:8, 20 refers to the signs of the zodiac. This is by no means a proved fact. The term *rudiments* may just as probably refer to the Jewish law (as it does in Gal. 4:3), or to pagan

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religious ideas, which are very rudimentary when compared to divine truth, even though they are expressed in big philosophical words.

F. GNOSTICISM

1. Gnosticism was a terrible heresy that infected the church very deeply in the first century after Christ, and even more so in the second century. Those who believed in Gnosticism were called Gnostics (pronounced NAHSS-tix). The Colossian heresy resembled Gnosticism in some respects, and that is our reason for considering it here.
2. The name Gnosticism is derived from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means knowledge. Thus the Gnostics considered themselves the knowing ones, the enlightened ones. To them salvation was not a matter of faith, obedience, and holiness, but came by knowing certain mystical information. It was purely an intellectual approach to life and religion.
3. The primary idea of Gnosticism seems to have been that spirit and matter are opposed to one another. Spirit (to them) was all good, and matter completely evil. The two could never come into direct contact.
4. Matter was eternal, they thought.
5. God, being spirit, is all good. He can have no contact with material things, for they are matter. God cannot have been the creator, for that would have involved him in contact with the material world.

The supreme God was sometimes called the *pleroma*, or fulness. Compare Col. 1:19.

6. Jesus, being divine, could not really have come in a human body, for that would have involved mixing spirit and matter. He only seemed to have a material body. Some of the Gnostics were later called Docetists, from the Greek verb *doeko*, which means to *seem*; for they said that Christ only seemed to have a material body. (Observe that this teaching is apparently condemned in Col. 2:9; 1:22; I John 4:2-3; II John 7.)
7. Between God and man there was supposedly a long series of intermediary beings, which were called *aeons*. These intermediary beings became less and less spiritual, and more and more material the farther they got from God. Christ Jesus

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was supposedly one of these aeons, a high one evidently. The lowest aeon, called the *демиург*, was the creator of the earth and material things.

You will observe that Colossians contradicts these ideas, and affirms that Christ was both the very image of God, and yet also the creator of everything. (Col. 1:15-19).

8. Because matter is evil, and because our human bodies are matter, they are evil. Therefore God, being spirit, is not involved with our bodies.

This idea produced two quite opposite practical results:

(1) It produced *asceticism* in some. Some Gnostics said that since the body was evil it should be abused and subjugated by fasting and self-denial. This seems to be reflected in Col. 2:20-23.

(2) It produced *licentiousness* in others. These Gnostics said that since God is not concerned with the body, we could do with it as we pleased. Thus they freely committed sins of all types. This belief and practice seems to be condemned in Colossians, chapter three.

9. Several second century Christian writers (e.g., Irenaeus) wrote strongly against Gnosticism. Recent archaeological discoveries of Gnostic writings in Egypt have given us a clearer idea of the actual teachings of Gnosticism, and have shown us why Paul and the faithful early Christians opposed it so bitterly. (See the *Biblical Archaeologist*, Feb. 1961, pp 10-13, for revealing information.)

G. RELATIONSHIP OF COLOSSIANS TO EPHESIANS

1. Colossians and Ephesians contain many phrases, sentences, and expressions that are much alike.
2. Here is a list of some of the parallel passages:

Ephesians	Colossians
1. 1:7	1:14
2. 1:10	1:20
3. 2:5-6	2:12-13
4. 3:2	1:25
5. 4:2-4	3:12-15

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Ephesians	Colossians
6. 4:16	2:19
7. 4:22-24	3:9-10
8. 4:32	3:13
9. 5:6-8	3:6-8
10. 5:15-16	4:5
11. 5:19	3:16
12. 5:22	3:18
13. 5:25	3:19
14. 6:1	3:20
15. 6:4	3:21
16. 6:5-8	3:22-23
17. 6:9	4:1
18. 6:19-20	4:3-4
19. 6:21-22	4:8-7

2. The fact that there is so much similarity between the two books could be accounted for by one of the following explanations:

(1) Some later author borrowed quotations from one of the books to write the other. Edgar Goodspeed¹ expressed this idea, saying that Ephesians is a book written long after Paul's time by some writer (Onesimus is suggested as possible author) who borrowed expressions from several of Paul's authentic letters, particularly Colossians, to produce a grand summary of Paul's writings, which we call Ephesians.

This contradicts what the book of Ephesians says about its own authorship; it contradicts the unanimous testimony of the early Christian writers, who all held that Paul wrote Ephesians; it raises far-reaching suspicions against the accuracy of the Holy Scriptures and the honesty of their writers. We reject this idea.

(2) More probably Colossians resembles Ephesians simply because they were written by the same author (Paul) at nearly the same time. We have frequently written several friendly letters to people to be sent off at the same time, and found ourselves writing about the same subjects, and using similar expressions in all the letters.

3. In spite of the similar phrases in Ephesians and Colossians we must assert emphatically that Ephesians and Colossians are

1. Edgar A. Goodspeed, *The Key to Ephesians*, (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press 1956), v-xv.

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quite different books. Ephesians deals with the unity and glory of the church. Colossians deals with the supremacy of Christ and the heresies and opposed it. Ephesians and Colossians both present material that the other book does not touch upon at all.

H. CHRIST IN COLOSSIANS

1. Colossians is the most Christ-centered epistle in the New Testament.
2. Our outline of the book (See Study I, Outline.) shows that every topic in the book is a discussion of how Christ relates to various subjects.

For example the purpose of Paul's ministry (1:24—2:5) was to make known the mystery of God, which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory (1:27).

Furthermore the antidote to the false doctrines of men is Christ, "for *in him* dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." (2:9)

Also Christ is the basis of the Christian's holy new life. "Ye died and your life is hid *with Christ* in God." (3:3).

3. Other particularly outstanding verses in Colossians about Christ are:

(1) 1:18—"That in all things he might have the pre-eminence."

(2) 2:10—"In him ye are made full."

(3) 3:11—"Christ is all, and in all."

(4) 3:17—"Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

4. An analysis of the teachings about Christ in Colossians:

I. The Nature of Christ.

1. God is the father of Christ; 1:3.
2. Christ is God's beloved son; 1:13.
3. Christ is the image of the invisible God; 1:15.
4. Christ is the firstborn of all creation; 1:15.
5. He is before all things; 1:17.
6. In him all things consist (hold together); 1:17.
7. He is the beginning; 1:18.
8. He is the firstborn from the dead; 1:18.
9. He has preeminence in all things; 1:18.
10. In him all the fulness dwells; 1:19.

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11. In him are all treasures of wisdom and knowledge; 2:3.
12. All the fulness of the Godhead dwells in him; 2:9.
13. He is head over all principality and power; 2:10.
14. He is the body, of which rituals were shadows; 2:16-17.
15. He is at the right hand of God; 3:1.
16. He is all and in all; 3:11.

II. The Work of Christ.

1. Past:
 - a. Redemption; 1:14.
 - b. Forgiveness of sins; 1:14.
 - c. Created all things; 1:16.
(Created in him, through him, and unto him.)
 - d. Gave us the circumcision not made with hands; 2:11.
 - e. He despoiled the principalities and powers; 2:15.
 - f. He made an open show of the principalities; 2:15.
2. Future:
 - a. He will reconcile all things; 1:20.
 - b. He will present us holy and without blemish before God; 1:22.
 - c. He will present men perfect; 1:28.
 - d. He shall be manifested; 3:4.
 - e. We shall receive just recompense from the Lord; 3:24.

III. Christ and the Church.

1. We are translated into Christ's kingdom by God; 1:16.
2. Christ is head of the body; 1:18, 24.
3. We may suffer for Christ, like Paul; 1:24.
4. Christ is our hope of glory; 1:27.
5. Our task is the reveal Christ among the Gentiles.
Christ is God's revealed mystery; 1:27; 2:2; 4:3.
5. We preach and admonish every man in Christ; 1:28; 4:3.
7. All the body is supplied from the head; 2:19.

IV. Our Relationship and Responsibility to Christ.

1. Relationships:
 - a. We are made full in Christ; 2:10.
 - b. We are buried with him by baptism; 2:12.
 - c. We are raised with him; 2:12; 3:1.

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- d. We died with Christ; 2:20.
 - e. Our life is hid with Christ in God; 3:3.
 - f. Christ is our life; 3:4.
 - g. We shall be manifested with him in glory; 3:4.
 - h. All relationships (wife-husband, slave-master, etc.) are based on our relationships with Christ. 3:18—4:1.
2. Responsibilities:
- a. Faith; 1:4.
 - b. Walk worthily of the Lord; 1:10; 2:6.
 - c. Steadfastness; 2:5.
 - d. Order; 2:5.
 - e. Receive Christ; 2:6.
 - f. Be rooted and builded up in him; 2:7.
 - g. Beware lest any make spoil of us, by human traditions that are not after Christ; 2:8.
 - h. We must hold to our Head; 2:18-19.
 - i. Seek the things in heaven where Christ is; 3:1.
 - j. Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts; 3:15.
 - k. Let Christ's words dwell in us richly; 3:16.
 - l. Do everything in Christ's name; 3:17.
 - m. Wives, be in subjection in the Lord; 3:18.
 - n. Servants be obedient, fearing the Lord; 3:22, 24.
 - o. Work as unto the Lord; 3:23.

I. OUTLINE OF COLOSSIANS

Introductory; 1:1-13.

- 1. Author-receipients-greeting; 1:1-2.
- 2. Thanksgiving; 1:3-8.
- 3. Prayer; 1:9-13.

I. CHRIST—His supremacy and work; 1:15-23.

II. CHRIST—The goal of Paul's ministry; 1:24—2:5.

III. CHRIST—The antidote for false doctrine; 2:6-23.

IV. CHRIST—The basis of a new life; 3:1—4:6.

Conclusion (personal notes); 4:7-18.

(More detailed outlines of each of the outline sections given above are given in the commentary at the starting points of each of the sections. You should memorize the above outline.)

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J. QUESTIONS OVER THE INTRODUCTORY SECTIONS

- A. Importance of the Epistle to the Colossians.
 - 1. How prominent is Christ in the epistle to the Colossians?
 - 2. Should heresies be exposed? What evidence to support your answer can be given from Colossians?
- B. Facts about the Epistle to the Colossians.
 - 1. Who is the author of Colossians?
 - 2. Where was the letter written from? Date?
 - 3. Who delivered Colossians?
 - 4. What other letter did this man deliver on this same trip?
 - 5. Who travelled with this man?
 - 6. From whom had Paul learned of things in Colossae?
 - 7. What was the primary reason for writing and sending Colossians?
 - 8. What is the overall theme of the epistle?
 - 9. Give three reasons why some people have questioned Paul's authorship of Colossians. Is there really any solid ground for objecting to Paul's authorship?
- C. Facts about Colossae and the Lycus valley.
 - 1. Where was Colossae located?
 - 2. How far was Colossae from Ephesus? From Rome?
 - 3. What two prominent cities were near Colossae?
 - 4. What river ran through Colossae?
 - 5. Was Colossae in a plain, or a mountainous region?
 - 6. For what natural events was the river valley known?
 - 7. What was peculiar about the waters of the river?
 - 8. What type of soil was around Colossae?
 - 9. Colossae was in what ancient country?
 - 10. What religious background did Colossae have?
 - 11. How had Jews come to be in the area?
 - 12. How many Jews are estimated to have lived there?
 - 13. How was the ancient country containing Colossae divided in New Testament times?
 - 14. What was the social, economic, and political status of Colossae in New Testament times.
- D. Facts about the Church in Colossae.
 - 1. Had Paul ever visited Colossae? (Give evidence for your answer.)

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2. From whom had the Colossians learned of Christ?
 3. Was the Colossian church predominantly Jewish or Gentile?
 4. What slaveowner was a member of the Colossian church?
 5. What had infected the Colossian church?
 6. Who had reported to Paul concerning conditions in Colossae?
- E. The Colossian Heresy.
1. Of what was the Colossian heresy a mixture?
 2. Where do we obtain information about the Colossian heresy?
 3. What was the Colossian heresy basically a denial of?
 4. What Jewish elements were included in the heresy?
 5. What Greek elements were in the heresy?
 6. What is asceticism?
 7. What is antinomianism?
 8. What effect did the Colossian heresy have upon moral behavior?
 9. Did the Colossian heresy include astrological teachings?
- F. Gnosticism.
1. Where do the words *Gnosticism* and *Gnostic* come from?
 2. Why study Gnosticism in connection with Colossians?
 3. How did the Gnostics think salvation came to people?
 4. What was the Gnostic notion about spirit and matter?
 5. What did the Gnostics teach about God's creating the earth?
 6. What did *pleroma* mean to the Gnostics?
 7. What did the Gnostics teach about the body of Jesus?
 8. What (supposedly) was between God and material world?
 9. What created the earth, according to Gnosticism?
 10. What two quite opposite practical results came from the Gnostic view about the human body?
 11. How did faithful Christians in early centuries react to Gnosticism?
- G. Relationship of Colossians to Ephesians.
1. How extensive are the similarities between Colossians and Ephesians?
 2. How can you account for the similarities between the two books?
- H. Christ in Colossians.
1. How prominent is Christ in the epistle to the Colossians?
 2. Make a list of all the references to Christ in Colossians. Then group these references under various headings, and produce an outline that will clearly show what the epistle

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to the Colossians teaches about Christ. (In listing your references you will need to write down a few words from each of the references to help you keep in mind what the references say about Christ.)

I. Outline of Colossians.

1. Write from memory the brief outline given.

Memory work.

There are many verses and paragraphs in Colossians worthy of being memorized. We suggest that the following definitely be memorized:

1:12-18, 19-22, 27.

2:8-10, 16-17.

3:1-4, 12-17, 18-21.

4:5-6, 8-10, 15-16.

COLOSSIANS CHAPTER ONE

PRAYER

Greeting; 1:1-2

1. *Prayer of Thanks; 1:3-8*

- a. For their faith; 1:4a
- b. For their love; 1:4b
- c. Their faith and love were produced by the hope they had learned in the gospel; 1:5-8

2. *Prayer of Request; 1:9-13*

- a. That they be filled with knowledge of God's will; 1:9
- b. That they walk worthily; 1:10-13
 - (1) Bearing fruit; 1:10a
 - (2) Increasing in knowledge of God; 1:10b
 - (3) Being strengthened; 1:11
 - (4) Giving thanks to the Father; 1:12-13

3. *The Preeminence of Christ—the motivation to prayer; 1:14-23*

- a. We have redemption in him; 1:14
- b. He is the image of God; 1:15
- c. He is the firstborn of creation; 1:15b-16
- d. He is before all things; 1:17a
- e. In him all things hold together; 1:17b
- f. He is head of the body; 1:18a
- g. He is the beginning; 1:18b
- h. He is the firstborn from the dead; 1:18c
- i. What God's good pleasure decided about Christ; 1:19-23
 - (1) All the fulness to dwell in him; 1:19
 - (2) Christ to reconcile all things; 1:20-23

4. *Paul's Ministry; 1:24—2:5.*

(See next outline)

Outline of 1:1-13

- A. Introductory; 1:1-13
 - 1. Author; 1:1. Recipients; 1:2a. Greetings; 1:2b.
 - 2. Prayer of thanks; 1:3-8
 - a. When we give thanks—always; 1:3
 - b. Why we give thanks; 1:4-8
 - (1) Because we hear of your faith; 1:4a
 - (2) Because we hear of your love; 1:4b
 - (3) Your faith and love are caused by the hope you learned in the gospel; 1:5-8
 - (a) The gospel is come to you; 1:6a
 - (b) The gospel increases and bears fruit; 1:6b
 - (c) You learned the gospel from Epaphras; 1:7-8
 - He is a faithful minister; 1:7
 - He declared unto us your love; 1:8
 - 3. Prayer of request; 1:9-13
 - a. Why we make request; 1:9a
 - b. When we make request—without ceasing; 1:9b
 - c. What we request; 1:9c-13
 - (1) That you be filled with knowledge; 1:9c
 - (2) That you walk worthily; 1:10-13
 - (a) Bearing fruit; 1:10b
 - (b) Increasing in knowledge; 1:10c
 - (c) Being empowered; 1:11
 - (d) Giving thanks to the Father; 1:12-13
 - [1] He made us meet to partake of the inheritance; 1:12
 - [2] He delivered us into the kingdom of his son; 1:13

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

Translation and Paraphrase

1:1. (A letter from) Paul, an apostle (one especially commissioned) of Jesus Christ through the will of God (with God's special approval and help), and Timothy the brother (so well known to all),

2. to (all) the saints (the holy ones) and (the) faithful (Christian) brothers in Colossae (who are) in Christ (Jesus—in his church, his service, his care): May favor (that is, grace,) be unto you, and peace (also) from God our father (and the Lord Jesus Christ).

Notes

1. Paul opened his epistle to the Colossians with a greeting that both asserts his apostolic authority and his good will toward the Colossians.
2. Paul calls himself "an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God." He needed to emphasize his office to these Colossians, who had never met him. The word *apostle* means one who is sent, or one specially commissioned. Paul was not merely one sent by some church, but he was one of the special messengers of Christ, on a par with the original twelve apostles of Christ. (Luke 6:13; II Cor. 12:11-12). Paul had divine approval and divine commission for everything he wrote to the Colossians. Compare I Cor. 14:37.
3. Paul's entire work and office was "through the will of God." We also need this sense of divine sending, of doing our service through the will of God, even though we cannot claim the authority that Paul had. As long as we serve God according to the New Testament teachings, we are serving according to the will of God.
4. Timothy is named as co-sender of the epistle, although the composition of the letter was solely the work of Paul. Timothy was also co-sender of II Corinthians, Philippians, I and II Thessalonians, and Philemon. See notes on Phil. 1:1 concerning Timothy.
5. Timothy is referred to as "our brother" (Gr. *the* brother). Evidently the Colossians had sufficient acquaintance with Timothy or his work with Paul to need no further introductions.

The title "the brother" is also applied to Quartus (Rom. 16:23), Sosthenes (I Cor. 1:1), and Apollos (I Cor. 16:12).

The Colossians could read this letter with assurance, for it came from those who referred to themselves as their brothers.

6. Paul addressed the Colossians as *saints*. Our generation (even most church members) seems to be afraid to be saints, or be

called saints. *Saints* means holy ones, sanctified ones, those set apart unto God. Many people are bold to speak evil and do evil. Let us be bold as saints.

7. The expression "saints and faithful brethren" refers to just one group of people, the Colossian Christians. One Greek article relates to both descriptions.
8. Paul addresses this epistle to individuals, rather than to a church. Paul did sometimes address letters to churches in particular cities or areas, but his letters were directed to these smaller groups—to individuals, to saints in particular places, to particular churches. Paul would not approve of the practice of many in our generation who seek to use the whole church everywhere as a corporate pressure group for social revolution.
9. The Colossian Christians lived in two realms. They were *in Christ*, and also *in Colossae* at the same time. Colossae was an ungodly place, like nearly every city. But in the midst of Colossae the Christians had their real residence in Christ. They had not been taken out of the world, but yet they were not of the world. John 17:14-15.
10. Paul wished for the Colossians; (1) grace (outward favor) and (2) peace (inner content). Here in Colossians as in all of Paul's epistles except Hebrews he begins with a wish for grace to be with his readers. Compare Rom. 1:7; Phil. 1:2; Eph. 1:2.
11. Paul's greetings in Col. 1:1-2 reveals much about him. It reveals his firmness as an apostle; his willingness to share the honor of authorship with others like Timothy; his sincere high regard for the Colossians as saints and faithful brethren; his good wishes toward them.

3. We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4. having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have toward all the saints.

Translation and Paraphrase

3. We give thanks (continually) to God (the) father of our Lord Jesus Christ (the Messiah), always praying for you,

4. because we have heard of your faith (and faithfulness) in Christ Jesus, and (of) the love which you (always) have toward all the saints.

Notes

1. Most of Colossians chapter one is a prayer. Some of it (like 1:12-23) consists of thoughts that grow out of Paul's remarks about his prayers; but it still relates to prayer.
2. In 1:3-8 Paul expresses his constant thanks for the Colossians. Compare Eph. 1:16. He was primarily thankful for their faith and love.
2. In 1:3-8 Paul expresses his constant thanks for the Colossians. In all cases his thanks were sincere. He did not say he was thankful just because that was a psychologically good approach.
4. Paul expressed his thanks in prayer. Prayer was the constant habit of Paul's life. Compare I Thess. 1:2.
5. The Colossian church had faith, love, and hope, the three great virtues. Col. 1:4-5. Compare I Cor. 13:13 and I Thess. 1:4-5.
6. Colossians 1:4 indicates that the Christian life is primarily directed toward two people: (1) toward Christ Jesus; and (2) toward the saints.
7. Paul was particularly thankful for the faith and love of the Colossians. We in our generation with its organized and militant unbelief should also feel very thankful to God for our brethren who have faith, wherever they are and however imperfect their faith may be.
8. Faith comes first, and then love. Love without faith is only sentimentality and perishable humanitarianism. However, faith without love is cruel; yea worse than that it is utterly nothing. I Cor. 13:2.
9. Paul had heard of the faith and love of the Colossians from their minister Epaphras, who visited him in Rome. Col. 1:4; Cf. Eph. 1:15.

5. because of the hope which is laid up for you in the heavens, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.

Translation and Paraphrase

5. (You have cultivated this faith and love) because of the hope (that is) laid up (and reserved) for you in the heavens. (This hope is the hope) which you heard about previously in the message of the truth, (that is, in) the gospel.

Notes

1. The message of the gospel tells us about the *hope* laid up for us in the heavens. This hope produces faith and love within us, as it did in the Colossians.

If we expect people to have faith and love as the Colossians did, we must tell them of the hope laid up for us. How long has it been since you preached a sermon or taught a lesson about heaven?

2. Our hope is laid up in the heavens. Compare I Peter 1:4, 13; Titus 2:13; Heb. 6:18-19. This is the "one hope" of Eph. 4:1.

Our generation has largely repudiated every religion based on a hope in the world to come, on "pie in the sky." Even many theologians and clergymen (and surely God despises both of these titles) openly scorn the hope of a heavenly home.

But the fact remains that those who believe most earnestly in the world to come live the present life in the best way. Heaven-loving Christians are not lawless anarchists and revolutionaries.

If heaven has lost its appeal to you, go and study Revelation 21 and 22 and John 14. Study these chapters on your knees; meditate; pray over them until the light of heaven's glory crowds out the last bit of love for the world's gaudy glare.

3. The gospel is the word of *truth*. Eph. 1:13; II Pet. 1:12; I Thess. 2:13. We have the gospel in written form, but it is still *truth*. This is indicated by the honesty and sacrifice of its authors; by the endorsement of Christ; by the fulfillment of the prophecies in the Scriptures; by the consistent close agreement in the wording in ancient Bible manuscripts; and by the power of the gospel in our lives.
4. The Colossians had heard of their heavenly hope sometime previously, when the gospel had first been preached to them.

6. which is come unto you; even as it is also in all the world bearing fruit and increasing, as *it doth* in you also, since the day ye heard and knew the grace of God in truth;

Translation and Paraphrase

6. (The truth of the gospel is) present among you, just as it is (present with saints) in all the world, bearing (good) fruit and increasing (everywhere), just as it also (does) in (the midst of)

you, from the day you (first) heard and accurately knew (of) the grace of God in truth (until now).

Notes

1. Col. 1:6 gives a description of the spread of the gospel: (1) It had come even unto the Colossians. (2) It bore good fruit wherever it spread. (3) It was increasing rapidly. (3) It had done these things consistently among the Colossians, ever since the day they heard the gospel and knew the truth about God's favor.
2. The rapidity of the spread of the gospel in the first century is indicated by Paul's remark "as it is also in all the world."

Compare Col. 1:23, where we are told that the gospel was preached in all creation.

We understand this to mean "in all the known world," and not necessarily as far away as the North American continent at that time.

If the gospel could spread into all the world in the first century with its limited means of communication, we should be assured that it can yet be spread over all the world in our generation with its improved communication and transportation facilities.

3. The gospel bears many fruits, all of them good. See Gal. 5:22-23; Isaiah 55:10-13.
4. The gospel has been increasing ever since it was first preached. "Of the increase of his (Christ's) government and of peace there shall be no end." (Isaiah 9:7). We may sometimes forget that there are more Christians in the world today than there have ever been before. Proportionally the percentage of Christians in the world's population may be less because of the population explosion, but the increase in number is still real.
5. The nature of the gospel: (Col. 1:5-8).
 - (1) It is good news (*gospel* means good news).
 - (2) It tells of a heavenly hope.
 - (3) It is truth.
 - (4) It spreads rapidly.
 - (5) It bears fruit.
 - (6) It tells of God's grace.
 - (7) It is humanly transmitted.

7. even as ye learned of Epaphras our beloved fellow-servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8. who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

Translation and Paraphrase

7. (All these things about the hope in the gospel, and the way it is increasing, you know. They are realities to you,) just as you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-slave (of Christ), who is a faithful servant (or minister) of Christ in your behalf.

8. (Epaphras is the one) who also made known to us your love in the Spirit (the love produced by the Spirit within you).

Notes

1. The servants, or ministers, of God from whom we learned the truth of God are worthy of honor. "How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things." (Romans 10:15; Isaiah 52:7). Therefore Paul reminds the Colossians that Epaphras had taught them of the grace of God in truth.
2. Epaphras is referred to in Col. 1:7-8; 4:12-13; and Philemon 23. From these verses we learn the following about him:
 - (1) He first had taught the Colossians of the grace of God.
 - (2) He was a faithful minister.
 - (3) He was one of Colossians.
 - (4) Paul loved him.
 - (5) He was a servant (bondservant) of Christ Jesus.
 - (6) He prayed much for the Colossians.
 - (7) He labored much for them.
 - (8) He also labored for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis.
 - (9) He told Paul about the love of the Colossians, and presumably other things about them also.
 - (10) He was a fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus with Paul in Rome. We do not know any details about this imprisonment.
3. The ancient manuscripts are divided on whether 1:7 says "on *our* behalf," or "on *your* behalf." With some hesitation we choose the reading "on your behalf." Besides the fact that this is the reading given in many old Greek manuscripts, it is also given in the Latin New Testament. But perhaps most convincing to us is the fact that it seems to make better sense than the reading "on our behalf." Epaphras was not a minister

on behalf of Paul, but he was definitely a minister on behalf of the Colossians.

4. Epaphras was Paul's fellow-servant." This title means "fellow-slave" (Gr. *sundoulos*).
5. Epaphras was a faithful minister. *Minister* here is a translation of the Greek *diakonos* (from which we derive *deacon*), which means servant, attendant, waiter, minister, etc. The word should probably not here be taken in a professional sense. Epaphras was a servant (or minister) in the way every Christian should be a minister. He may have been a business man of some type. His job was preaching Christ; he may have made his living at some trade.
6. Epaphras had told Paul of the Colossians' love in the Spirit. Probably we ought not to attempt to dissect and examine this expression "love in the Spirit." It is better to exemplify it in our lives than to examine it minutely. Doubtless it refers to the love which they had in their hearts and displayed in their lives because the Holy Spirit was in them, and they were in the Spirit, yielded to his control, assistance, and guidance. The first fruit of the Holy Spirit is love. Gal. 5:22.

9. For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray and make request for you, that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10. to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Translation and Paraphrase

9. On account of this (love which you have) we also, since the day when we (first) heard (about it), do not cease praying and making request (to God) in behalf of you, that you may be filled with the precise knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

10. (And that you may have the motivation and strength) to walk (and live) worthily of the Lord, (making it your goal to attain) unto ever (thing) pleasing (to God), bearing fruit and increasing in the precise knowledge of God.

Notes

1. 1:9-13 contains Paul's prayer of request for the Colossians. His prayer contains two requests: (1) that they be filled with the

knowledge of God's will; (2) that they walk (that is, live) worthily of the Lord.

These are comprehensive requests. They sum up everything that is of real importance in the Christian life. What more could we ask than that we know God's will and that we do it? Physical needs will be cared for if we know and do God's will.

2. Paul not only had a constant gratitude (1:3), but also a continuing prayer (1:9). Compare Eph. 1:15-19.
3. Let us join Paul in prayer that we all may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. We all have a long way to go to attain this. There are vast portions of the Bible with which most of us have almost no acquaintance. Furthermore it is probably pure presumption to say that we really know the parts with which we are acquainted.

Until we sense how very little we know, we really know nothing at all. I Cor. 8:2.

We should stop trying to make God listen to us, and begin listening to God.

4. Paul's prayer that they might know God's will was perhaps a dig at the Gnostics, who thought that they knew all. See Introductory Study on *Gnosticism*.
5. We are to be filled with precise knowledge of God's will. The Greek word for knowledge here is *epignosis*, a somewhat stronger word than *gnosis*, basic knowledge. Compare II Tim. 3:7.
6. The implications of the phrase "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" are very broad. These words recall to our minds the introduction to Proverbs, which says that that book was written so that we might "know wisdom and instruction; to discern the words of understanding." (Prov. 1:12.) Thus it seems to us that Paul was praying that the Colossians might know all of the practical godliness portrayed in Proverbs and other parts of God's word.
7. Paul wanted the Colossians to walk (live) worthily of the Lord. They were to translate the knowledge of God into human situations. How sad it is to see a man who is a master of theology and a failure in living.

The concept of a worthy *walk*, a worthy way of life, is very common in Paul's writings. Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; I Thess. 2:12.

8. To walk worthily . . . "unto all pleasing" means simply "unto every pleasing thing." To arrive at the point where pleasing God is more important to us than pleasing ourselves should be our goal.
9. There are four participles or participial phrases in Col. 1:10-12 that describe what Paul meant when he said that we were to walk worthily of the Lord:
 - (1) being fruitful; 1:10.
 - (2) Increasing in the knowledge of God; 1:10.
 - (3) Strengthened with all might; 1:11.
 - (4) Giving thanks; 1:12.
10. "Bring fruitful in every good work" is a primary goal for every Christian's life. A plant or tree lives for the purpose of blooming and bearing fruit and reproducing itself; likewise fruit-bearing should be the purpose of our existence as Christians. The fruit of a Christian's life includes such things as holy living, a good influence, relief of human misery, and soul won to Christ. See Rom. 1:13; John 4:36; 15:4-5, 16; Phil. 1:22; Col. 1:6; II Pet. 1:8.
11. Paul's phrase in 1:10 about "increasing in the knowledge of God" seems at first glance to be a repetition of the prayer in 1:9 that we be filled with the knowledge of God, and in truth it is a repetition. (Both verses use the word *epignosis*, meaning precise knowledge.) In 1:10 increasing in knowledge is mentioned as a part of our worthy walk, and not as something distinct from it. Christian knowledge and Christian living are in one way distinct items (as in 1:9), and yet in another way they are inseparable (as in 1:10).

11. strengthen with all power, according to the might of his glory, unto all patience and longsuffering with joy;

Translation and Paraphrase

11. (and) being strengthened by all (the) strength (from God), according to his glorious manifested power, (until you attain) all endurance (in your own life) and patience (toward others) with joyfulness.

Notes

1. An essential part of walking worthily of the Lord lies in our being strengthened by the Lord's strength, literally "being made powerful by all power." Other scriptures also stress this point. Eph. 1:18-19; 3:16.
2. The degree of power available unto us is indicated by saying that the power is "according to the might of his glory," or "according to his glorious might." The might available unto us is therefore as unlimited as God is unlimited.
3. The strengthening of God is to bring us unto all patience and longsuffering. *Patience* (Gr. *hupomone*) means the ability to endure and bear up and remain faithful under every assault. *Longsuffering* (Gr. *makrothumia*) refers to our ability to keep a forgiving, hopeful attitude toward people, to avoid hastily retaliating a wrong.
4. Our longsuffering is to be with joyfulness, rather than with Stoic submissiveness.
5. Col. 1:11 raises the question as to how God's power is to be released to work in our lives. How do we get hold of God's power, and experience the strengthening that He gives? The world and much of the church too is crying for the answer to this question. People want to see a display of divine power rather than to hear a sermon. This explains in part the appeal of many "Pentecostal" religions. They loudly claim that they have found the secret of loosing God's power suddenly into people's lives, and this is appealing.

However the matter is usually neither simple nor quick. Observe that even when we are empowered with all power we still must have patience and longsuffering. We shall always be faced by opponents, critics, and doubters. Tribulation is never taken from us in this life (Acts 14:22). God *never* seems to be in a hurry from our point of view of time. He may take centuries to fulfill His objectives (though sometimes He does things so quickly that we are astounded). To us it may appear that God's longsuffering means either that He has no power or does not care to use it. Both of these ideas are totally false. Again, our own sins (even our marital incompatibility! I Pet. 3:7) may keep God's power from working within us. (Isa. 59:1-2). God did tremendous things through Abraham, Jacob, and David. But think of the years God took to do the

great things through their lives and think of the trouble these men had. God always works in such a way that his people must have faith in him at every stage for the future. God's use of his power in our lives does not instantly solve all mysteries, remove all obstacles, and leave us triumphant and crowned. The best approach to gaining the strength from God seems to be: (1) Believe in God's promises always; (2) Work as if everything depended on you; (3) Pray as if everything depended on God; (4) Leave the results to God.

12. giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints, in light; 13. who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love;

Translation and Paraphrase

12. (Also let us be) giving thanks to the father who made us worthy to obtain a share of the inheritance of the saints (who dwell) in the light (of God);

13. (Also we thank the father, for it is he) who drew us to himself out of the authority (and power) of (Satan's kingdom of) darkness, and transferred (us) into the kingdom of his beloved son (which is the church).

Notes

1. The final, and probably climactic, part of walking worthily is to be giving thanks unto God the Father. God certainly deserves our thanks because: (1) he qualified us to be sharers in the inheritance of the saints; (2) he delivered us out of Satan's power into the kingdom of his son.
2. Giving thanks must be a continual process. I Thess. 5:18; Eph. 5:20. Gratitude is the foundation of Christian character. We should not have one day each year for thanksgiving and 364 for complaining. It would be better to have 364 for giving thanks, and one (or none!) for our gripes, grumbles, grunts, and groans.
3. The Father has made us *meet* to be partakers of the inheritance. *Meet* means fit for, or qualified, or good enough for, or adequate, or sufficient for. We are God's workmanship. Eph. 2:10. He makes us meet for the inheritance.

4. We rejoice to share in the inheritance from God with the saints in light. See Acts 20:32.

The "saints in light" are those both living and dead who have come to have fellowship with God, for God is light. (I John 1:5; II Cor. 4:16). "Light" refers to holiness (Acts 26:18), to divine revelation and truth (II Cor. 4:4, 6), to love (I John 2:9, 10), and glory (Isaiah 60:1-3).

5. God *delivered* us from the power of darkness. "Delivered" is in the Greek aorist tense, indicating an action at one point, as opposed to a continuous action. Thus our deliverance is a once-for-all deliverance.
6. God has *translated* us into the kingdom of his son. *Translated* here means transferred. The Gr. is *ruomai*, which means to draw to oneself, to rescue, to deliver. In ancient times conquering generals oftentimes transported conquered peoples from their homelands to other lands. Similarly God, having defeated Satan in our lives, has transferred us to a new realm.
7. Note that Paul speaks of "us" and not of "you." Paul himself was a partaker in the work of God, so that he could not write of salvation abstractly.
8. The "power of darkness" or the "dominion of darkness" refers to the world, or Satan's kingdom. (Acts 26:18; Matt. 4:16; John 8:12; 12:35, 46; I John 1:5-6). The fact that the darkness has *power* (Gr. *exousia*, authority) shows that there is a personal quality about it; a personal devil has the power in the domain of darkness.
9. We are transferred into the *kingdom* of God's beloved son. This is one of numerous verses in the New Testament that teach that Christ's kingdom already exists, that it is practically synonymous with the church, and that we do not have to wait unto Christ comes back for the establishment of His kingdom. See Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:9; Mark 9:1.

Study and Review

Questions Over Colossians 1:1-13

1. What title does Paul use for himself as he begins Colossians? (1:1)
2. Whose will was it that Paul be an apostle?
3. Who was co-sender of the epistle with Paul?

4. How is the co-sender described?
5. What two terms does Paul use to describe the Colossians? (1:2)
6. What does grace *mean*?
7. In what two places, or realms, were the Colossians?
8. What two things did Paul wish for the Colossians?
9. When did Paul give thanks for the Colossians? (1:3)
10. How did he express his thanks?
11. What two things about the Colossians had Paul heard? (1:4)
12. What caused the faith and love of the Colossians? (1:4-5)
13. Where was their hope laid up?
14. Where had the Colossians heard about their hope?
15. What is referred to as "the word of the truth"?
16. To where had the gospel come (two areas)? (1:6)
17. What two things did the gospel do when it came to any place?
18. From whom had the Colossians learned the gospel? (1:7)
19. What does the word *minister* in 1:7 mean?
20. What particular thing about the Colossians had been declared to Paul? (1:8)
21. To what cause does Paul refer in 1:9?
22. What did Paul not cease to do after hearing about the Colossians?
23. What two things did Paul pray for and request concerning the Colossians? (1:9-10)
24. What sort of knowledge did Paul want the Colossians to have?
25. What does "to walk" in 1:10 mean?
26. What are the four participles (or participial phrases) in 1:10-12 which describe the worthy walk?
27. In what are we to bear fruit? (1:10)
28. In what are we to increase?
29. With what are Christians strengthened? (1:11)
30. Unto what two things are we to be strengthened?
31. What two facts are told about the father in 1:12-13 that should cause us to give thanks?
32. Define the word *meet* in 1:12.
33. Of what are we made partakers?
34. What is meant by the expression "the saints *in light*"? How are the saints in light?
35. What has God delivered us out of?
36. What is the power of darkness?
37. Give a synonym for the word *translated* in 1:13.

38. Into what are we translated?
 39. What is the kingdom of God's son?

Outline of 1:14-23

- B. CHRIST—His supremacy and work; 1:14-23
1. In Christ we have redemption; 1:14
 2. Christ is the image of God; 1:15
 3. Christ is the firstborn of all creation; 1:15b-16
 - a. Because in him all things were created
 - b. Through him and unto him all were created
 4. Christ is before all things; 1:17a
 5. In Christ all things consist; 1:17b
 6. Christ is head of the body; 1:18a
 7. Christ is the beginning; 1:18b
 8. Christ is the firstborn from the dead; 1:18c
 9. What God's good pleasure decided concerning Christ; 1:19-23
 - a. All the fulness would dwell in him; 1:19
 - b. He would reconcile all things; 1:20-23
 - (1) Who?—Things in heaven and earth; 1:20
 - (2) Need for reconciliation—alienation; 1:21
 - (3) How?—By Christ's death; 1:22
 - (4) Goal of reconciliation—To present men perfect; 1:22-23
 - (a) Condition for presentation: that we continue in the gospel; 1:23
 - [1] The gospel was preached in all creation
 - [2] Paul was made a minister of the gospel

14. in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins:

Translation and Paraphrase

14. (The Son is he) in whom we have redemption, (we are bought back from the slavery of sin; and our redemption is provided to us by) the forgiveness of (our) sins;

Notes

1. Col. 1:14 begins a new section in our outline (1:14-23), which deals with the supremacy and preeminence of Christ. Many things are listed which indicate his supremacy. Some of these involve his work; some involve his nature; some involve

his offices. They all show that in all things he has pre-eminence. (Col. 1:18). Here we see very plainly what was stated in our introductory studies, that Colossians is the most Christ-centered epistle in the New Testament.

2. We have *redemption* in Christ, and from no other source. *Redemption* is the act of buying back something that has been sold. We sold ourselves into condemnation in order to practice sin. (I Kings 21:20). Christ bought us back, not with decaying material wealth like silver and gold, but with his own precious blood. I Peter 1:18-19. He gave his life that we might live with God.
3. All of this Bible teaching about redemption sounds ridiculous to modern modes of thinking. Instead of accepting the truth that we are sold into sin, this generation thinks it owns and controls everything. But our need for redemption is solidly based on the infinite holiness, justice, and love of God. God's holiness cannot tolerate our sin. His justice and law requires that a life be given for a life forfeited by sin. His love caused him to send his only begotten son into the world to suffer the penalty due to sinners, that whosoever believes on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.
4. Our redemption is identified as being "the forgiveness of our sins. Forgiveness of sins stands in apposition to redemption. Redemption and forgiveness of sins are the same work of Christ, viewed from two points. When we speak of redemption, we emphasize our helpless condition and Christ's act of buying us back. When we speak of forgiveness, we emphasize our own guilt in the matter. Eph. 1:7.

15. who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16. for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him;

Translation and Paraphrase

15. (Yea further, the Son) is the (very) likeness (—the picture, the manifestation and representation—) of the invisible God; (and he is) the firstborn of all (the) creation (having authority over all creation as the firstborn in a tribe rules the tribe).

16. (Now Christ occupies this rank of the firstborn, not because he was the first being created by God, but) because all things were created by him, (the things) in the heavens and (the things) upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether (they be) thrones, or lordships, or rulers, or authorities (these being titles and offices among the unseen hosts in our universe), all (these) things have been created through him, and for him.

Notes

1. Christ is so close to God that he is God's very *image* (Gr. *eikon*). *Image* means likeness, or figure. The word has the added suggestion of representation and manifestation. (Thayer). II Cor. 4:4.
2. One ancient letter preserved for us tells how a man sent a artist's small sketch of himself to his family, saying that he was sending them an *eikon* of himself. This illustrates the meaning of the word *image*. Christ is the picture of God, his very likeness.
3. Christ is the image of the invisible God. No one has ever seen God. John 1:18; I Tim. 6:15. Christ has declared and revealed unto us what God is like. (Because no one has ever seen God, no one can make an idol of Him.)
4. The Gnostics regarded Christ as one of the intermediaries between God and men, and as inferior to God. Jesus was to them by no means unique. They further felt that if he was divine, he could not have had a material body, for divinity had no contact with material things. For the same reason Christ could not have had been involved in the creation of the universe. Note how emphatically Paul asserts that Christ was both the creator, and also the very image of God at the same time. (See the Introductory Study on *Gnosticism*.)
5. Note Christ's relationships to creation: (1:16)
 - a. All things were created *in* (or by) him.
 - b. All things were created *through* him.
 - c. All things were created *unto* (or for) him.
6. Christ is the *firstborn* of all creation. This title has little to do with time. It is more a title of rank and honor. See Psalm 89:27 and Ex. 4:22. The firstborn in a nomadic desert tribe is the ruler of the tribe. Rom. 8:29.

Observe carefully that Paul says that Christ is the firstborn of all creation NOT because he was the first thing God created, but because he, Christ, created all things. (John 1:3, 10; Heb. 1:2). If Christ created ALL things, he is therefore not a created being himself. He was himself "in the beginning with God" (John 1:2), and he thought it not robbery to be equal with God (Phil. 2:6).

7. Rev. 3:14 is sometimes set forth as proving that Christ is a created being. There he is called the *beginning* of the creation of God. The word *beginning* in Rev. 3:4 is a translation of the Gr. *arche*, which is the same word used in Luke 20:20, where it is translated "power" (KJV), "rule" (ASV), or "authority" (RSV). (*Arche* is also applied to Christ in Col. 1:18, where it is translated *beginning*.) Thus it appears that both Colossians and Revelation teach that Christ has authority over creation, but that definitely neither indicates that he is a created being.
8. As if to stress the completeness of Christ's part in creation, Paul itemizes the things that Christ created: things in heaven and things on earth; things visible and things invisible; thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. (Compare Eph. 1:10; I Tim. 1:17; II Cor. 4:18). We suppose that the last four terms refer to ranks and offices within the unseen hosts of angels and spirits in the universe.

Observe that Christ's supremacy embraces the entire universe. When astronauts land on the moon and other heavenly bodies, Christ will still be the Lord and creator of those bodies.

Note that Christ's supremacy is particularly opposed to all heretical teachings that degrade him.

9. Paul's remark that all things were created through Christ and for Him recalls the description of Wisdom in Proverbs 8:22-31. There Wisdom speaks as God's master workman in creating the world. Since Christ is God's wisdom (I Cor. 1:30), the passage in Proverbs may well picture Christ's description of His part in the work of creation.
10. Some scholars feel that Col. 1:15-20 is a unit, and was either a hymn written by Paul himself, or one used in the early church. Certainly its thoughts are presented in concise lines (stichs) like poetry, and this contrasts with the more extended paragraph 1:19-23. It has been argued that 1:15-17 is one stanza,

emphasizing Christ's preeminence in creation; and 1:18-20 is a second stanza, emphasizing Christ's preeminence in redemption and the church. The "who is" in 1:15 and 1:18 are alike. Both verses 15 and 18 use the title "firstborn." Verses 16 and 20 both mention the heaven and the earth, though in reverse order. These similarities point to a purposeful pattern of resemblance in the verses.

In spite of these arguments the words of 1:15-20 still must be considerably forced to be made to fit a song or chant. We really do not feel that anyone has proved that this is a song.

11. As supreme creator of the universe and as firstborn of all creation, Christ can deliver us, though we face bombs, space invaders, communism, old age, financial hardship, or the day of judgment!

17. and he is before all things, and in him all things consist. 18. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Translation and Paraphrase

17. (Yea) and he exists before all things, and all things hold together in him (by virtue of his will and power).

18. And he is the head of the body, (that is,) the church. (It is he) who is the beginning (the ruler), the firstborn from the dead (the first to rise never to die again), so that he might have the preeminence (first place) in all things.

Notes

1. Col. 1:17 refers to the *pre-existence* of Christ. By this we mean his eternal existence with God before he emptied himself of much of his divine glory and was conceived in Mary. Many other Bible verses refer to his pre-existence. John 1:1-2, 10; Phil. 2:6-7; Micah 5:2; Heb. 1:8-12.
2. Col. 1:17 says that Christ *is* before all things, not that he *was* before all things. To God and Christ all events of all time are eternally in the present tense. Christ himself said, "Before Abraham was, I *am*." (John 8:58).
3. In Christ all things *consist*, that is, all things hold together. There is a wonderful cohesion in the universe. Atoms resist breaking apart with awesome energy. Gravity and other laws

of physics regulate the heavenly bodies with astounding order. No one really knows why gravity works, except that the supreme power so wills it. There is an interdependence among natural creatures that defies naturalistic explanations as to its origin. Even history and the social order, as chaotic as man's sinfulness has made it, seems rushing on to a foredetermined conclusion—perhaps to self-destruction, Armageddon, and (definitely!) to a new heaven and earth.

4. Christ is supreme to the church. He is its head and it is his body. Compare Eph. 1:22-23. As the head of a human body rules the body, so Christ rules the church.

Note that there is one head and one body, one Christ and one church of Christ. Let us be loyal to HIS church, and not to human churches.

5. Christ is the *beginning*. This term signifies the first in a series of things. Thus of all the sons that God has drawn from among men unto himself, Christ is the beginning, the first, the unique son. He is the firstborn among many brethren. Romans 8:29.

In Luke 20:20 the term *arche* (here translated *beginning*) means *rule* or *authority*. According to this meaning of the word, Christ is the ruler; and truly he is.

6. Christ is the firstborn *from* the dead. He was the first to rise from the dead, never to die again. Christ himself resurrected Lazarus (John 11) and some others; there were a few resurrections in Old Testament times (e.g. II Kings 13:21). But all these died again with no recollection of their former experiences after death. But death has no more power over Christ. Romans 6:9; Rev. 1:5.

In the time to come all the dead shall rise, and shall never face physical death again. (Some, alas, shall face the second death of hell. Rev. 20:14-15). John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; I Cor. 15:22. Even then Christ will always be the firstborn from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep. I Cor. 15:20.

7. The last phrase of 1:18 may also be translated, "That he might have the preeminence among all," referring to Christ's preeminence among the dead as well as the living. Christ has preeminence both among all things and among all people, living and dead alike.

19. For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fulness dwell;

Translation and Paraphrase

19. (Christ has this universal preeminence) because it was well-pleasing (to God for) all the fulness (of God-hood) to dwell in him;

Notes

1. With the beginning of Col. 1:19 a new style of composition appears. The short independent clauses of Col. 1:16-18 cease, and the new section comes as an extended paragraph (through 1:23) relating the things which God's good pleasure decided concerning Christ.
2. Col. 1:19-20 says that it was well pleasing (pleasing presumably to God) for Christ to have two honors:
 - (1) All the divine fulness would dwell in him.
 - (2) All things would be reconciled through him.
3. Those using modern translations like the R.S.V. will quickly notice a difference in translation of 1:19 between the newer versions and the older King James and American Standard versions.

King James: "For it pleased *the Father* that in him should all the fulness dwell." (The A.S.V. is similar)

Revised Standard: "For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell."

The difference in translation does not indicate any variation in the ancient manuscript readings. The difficulty lies in the fact that Col. 1:19 in Greek has no subject clearly stated, unless the term *fulness* is taken as the subject, which is done in the R.S.V. But the word *fulness* seems to be the subject of the infinitive "to dwell," and it further seems a bit incongruous as a subject for "was pleased." The Gnostics used the word *fulness* as a title for God, and the Colossians were probably familiar with this usage. But its basic meaning is abstract, signifying a full quantity, the full character, the full measure, an abundance. There is no indication that Paul used the word in any sense other than its usual meaning. Fulness is a quality rather than a person. How can a quality "be pleased"? The R.S.V. reading makes it sound as if the quality

of divine fulness is to be thought of as apart from God himself. The R.S.V. reading, while grammatically unobjectionable, leaves us somewhat unsatisfied with the meaning.

To get around this difficulty the K.J.V. and A.S.V. supplied the words *the Father* as a subject for "was pleased." This was done because it apparently is the father who, according to 1:20, is reconciling all things through Christ. The same subject seems to go with "was pleased" in 1:19 that goes with "to reconcile" in 1:20.

It probably would be simpler and safer just to render the verb in 1:19 as having an impersonal subject: "It was well-pleasing for (for) all the fulness to dwell in him." This is quite literally the way the Greek text has it. Also the particular verb here (*eudokeo*) often is used with an impersonal subject.

4. It was well-pleasing (presumably to God and everyone else involved) that in Christ should all the fulness dwell. All the qualities of God-hood dwell in Christ to a fulness. There is no jealousy or rivalry in heaven.

20. and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens. 21. And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works, 22. yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish and unreprouable before him:

Translation and Paraphrase

20. And (it was also well-pleasing) to reconcile all (the alienated things in our universe) to (God) himself through him (that is, through Christ; and Christ does this work of reconciliation as a result of his) having made peace (between God and man) through the blood of (his sacrifice upon) his cross; (Yea, this reconciliation is made) through him (between God and all beings,) whether (they be) the things upon the earth or the things in the heavens.

21. And you (yourselves), though you were formerly alienated (and estranged) and enemies (toward God) in (your) mind by the evil works (which you did),

22. (Yet) he has now reconciled (you) by (offering) his fleshly body through death (upon the cross), to present you holy and without blemish and blameless before him.

Notes

1. God's good pleasure decided that the alienated things in our universe should be reconciled to God through Christ. No other means is provided for this reconciliation.
2. Sin has ruined and alienated our universe. Romans 8:21. The natural world is full of suffering and disorder. Men on earth and the things in the heavens are alike out of harmony with God because of sin. We do not know what (or who) those things are that are in the heavens which need to be reconciled to God, but Col. 1:20 indicates that there are such alienated celestial things. Compare Phil. 2:10.
3. The teaching of Col. 1:20 that God desires to reconcile all things unto himself could be used as an argument that God will ultimately take everybody and everything to heaven. This notion is called universalism. Some theologians have even argued that Satan himself will ultimately be reconciled. But this teaching so utterly contradicts many other Scriptures concerning eternal punishment that it simply cannot be true. Mark 9:43-48; Matt. 25:46; Rev. 14:11; 20:10, 15.

Apparently, while it is God's good pleasure that all things be reconciled, many people simply will not cooperate with God that it be so. God has never forced anyone to accept His blessings, although we cannot escape the consequences of refusing to accept the blessings.

4. Our evil works alienated us from God in times past and made us enemies in our minds toward God. But this enmity was one-sided, and existed only in *our* minds. God *loved* the world. The world because of its sins hated Him. Any time someone wrongs someone else (a child its parent, a pupil his teacher, a workman his employer, a criminal society, a husband his wife, etc.) hostility and estrangement grow up within the one who has done the wrong. This seems so backward; it seems that the one who has been wronged should be offended. But human nature works the other way. The one doing the wrong is alienated, even if the one wronged has forgiven him.

God himself was confronted with this situation. In order to convince man's alienated heart that God truly loved him, God made the supreme sacrifice. He gave up his own son. If the sacrifice of God's own son cannot bring our hearts to

love God, nothing can. See II Cor. 5:19; Eph. 2:13-17. God has made peace between man and himself through the blood of Christ's cross. Eph. 3:16, 14.

5. When once we have been reconciled to God by the message of Christ's death, then it is God's further goal to present us holy, and without blemish, and blameless before Him. There should be a constant process of growth, and self-purification, and service following our conversion until our death (or the Lord's return).

On the day of judgment Christ will deliver those on his right hand unto the father. (Matt. 25:34; I Cor. 15:24). Let us labor to be ready for that day, so that we may be presented holy, without blemish, and unprovable. (The word *unprovable* is Gr. *anegkletos*, a word which is often translated as *blameless*, and means "that cannot be called to account." I Tim. 3:10.)

23. if so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard, which was preached in all creation under heaven; whereof I Paul was made a minister.

Translation and Paraphrase

23. (While Christ has reconciled you and designs to present you faultless before God, this will happen only) if you preserve in the faith, builded upon the foundation, and firm, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which you heard about (and which has been) preached in all (the) creation under heaven, (and) of which I Paul was made a minister, (that is, a minister of the gospel).

Notes

1. If we desire to be in that number "when the saints go marching in" and to be presented before God holy and without blemish, there is a condition that we must meet: we must continue in the faith. Compare Heb. 4:14.
2. The necessity of continuing in the faith is the theme of the whole book of Hebrews. It is stated briefly here in Col. 1:23. If we shrink back from the faith, we shrink back unto perdition (destruction). Heb. 10:39.

3. The aim and obligation of reconciliation:
 - (1) Aim—holiness.
 - (2) Obligation—steadfastness.
4. Paul describes the condition of those who continue in the faith as "grounded" (which literally means "built upon a foundation"), and "steadfast" (immoveable), and not moved away from the hope of the gospel (the hope presented in gospel). I Cor. 15:58. Concerning the hope in the gospel, see notes on Col. 1:5.
5. Paul's allusion to the hope of the gospel caused him to make two observations about the gospel:
 - (1) It was preached in all creation under heaven.
 - (2) Paul himself had been made a minister of the gospel. (Paul's reference here to his ministry led into the following section, 1:24—2:5.)
6. The fact that the gospel was preached "in all creation under heaven" in the first century alone, shows that the gospel can be spread over the world in one generation. We seem to lack the faith or the courage to attempt to do this. Compare notes on 1:6.

In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come." In view of the fact that Paul said that in his generation alone the gospel had been preached in all creation, we cannot say that the end cannot come yet because the gospel has not been preached in all nations.

Study and Review

Questions Over Colossians 1:14-23

1. What is the topic of 1:14-23 that is given in our outline?
2. In whom do we have our redemption? (1:14)
3. Define the word *redemption*. From what are we redeemed?
4. What is the relation of redemption to forgiveness of sins?
5. What does the word *image* mean? (1:15)
6. Why is it impossible to make an idol of God?
7. What rank does a *firstborn* have?
8. According to Col. 1:15-16, why is Christ the firstborn of all creation?
9. Explain the phrase "the firstborn of all creation."

10. Where are the things which Christ created located? (1:16)
11. To what do "thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers" refer?
12. What is the difference in meaning between the assertions that all things have been created *through* Christ, and created *unto* him?
13. How far back did Christ exist? (1:17)
14. What do we mean by the *pre-existence* of Christ?
15. What is the tense of the verbs in 1:17? What significance can be attached to this?
16. What does *consist* mean in the clause "in him all things consist"?
17. What is Christ's relation to the church? (1:18)
18. What does the assertion "who is the *beginning*" indicate about Christ?
19. Why is Christ called the firstborn from the dead? Were not others resurrected before Christ arose?
20. What is Christ to have in all things? (1:18)
21. Is Christ preeminent just over those things now living? Give the Scriptural statements that prove the answers to this question.
22. Define the word *fulness* in 1:19. What did the Gnostics mean by this word?
23. In whom does all the fulness dwell? Is this a grudgingly granted concession to him? How do you know?
24. Through whom are all things to be reconciled?
25. Does 1:20 teach that ultimately everybody and everything will be reconciled to God and saved? Give a reason for your answer.
26. Through what has Christ made peace.
27. Where do those who are to be reconciled live? (2 answers)
28. What was our mental attitude in the times before we received Christ? (1:21)
29. What had caused us to be in this frame of mind? (1:21)
30. Where was this alienation and enmity that formerly existed? Was it in God's heart?
31. To what event does the phrase "in the body of his flesh through death" refer? (1:22)
32. What does Christ intend (or hope) to do with us, now that we are reconciled?
33. What is our condition to be when we are presented unto God?

34. What condition must we meet if we are to be presented as holy unto God? (1:23)
35. Explain the term "grounded." (1:23)
36. From what must we not be moved away?
37. Where did we learn of our hope?
38. Where had the gospel been preached within Paul's lifetime?
39. To what does the *whereof* in 1:23 refer? (Or, to put it in another way, Of what had Paul been made a minister?)

PAUL'S MINISTRY

(1:24—2:5)

1. *Attitudes in Paul's ministry; (1:24)*
 - a. Joy
 - b. Dedication to suffering
2. *Source of Paul's ministry; (1:25)*

(It was a stewardship from God given to him.)
3. *The new message in Paul's ministry; (1:26-27)*
 - a. It had been hidden for ages; 1:26a
 - b. It was now manifested to the saints; 1:26b-27a
 - c. The message is Christ in you; 1:27b
4. *Activities in Paul's ministry; (1:28a)*
 - a. Proclaiming Christ
 - b. Admonishing and teaching
5. *The effort in Paul's ministry; (1:29—2:1)*

(It was a striving, according to Christ's working within him.)
6. *Goals in Paul's ministry; (1:28b; 2:2-3)*
 - a. To present every man perfect in Christ; 1:28b
 - b. That their hearts be comforted; 2:2
 - c. That they be knit together;
 - (1) Knit in love.
 - (2) Knit unto the riches of full understanding.
 - d. That they know God's mystery, which is Christ; 1:3
(In him are all treasures hidden.)
7. *Paul's personal involvement in his ministry; (2:4-5)*
 - a. He desired that they be not deceived; 2:4
 - b. He was present with them in spirit; 2:5

Outline of 1:24—2:5

C. CHRIST—The goal of Paul's ministry; Col. 1:24—2:5

Observe in this section how every facet of Paul's ministry was related to Christ:

- (1) Paul sought to fill up the afflictions of CHRIST in his flesh. 1:24.
- (2) The message which Paul was given to preach was, in brief, CHRIST in you, the hope of glory. 1:27.
- (3) Paul labored to present every man perfect in CHRIST. 1:28.
- (4) In CHRIST are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, about which Paul worked to tell people. 2:3.
- (5) Paul rejoiced to see the steadfastness of people's faith in CHRIST. 2:5.

This section (1:24—2:5) is impossible to outline in twentieth century outline forms, if a purely grammatical analysis is used as a basis for the outline. Therefore we give only the expository outline on page 160.

24. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church;

Translation and Paraphrase

24. Now I rejoice in the sufferings (I endure) in behalf of you; and (by my sufferings) I fill up the things that are lacking of the sufferings of Christ (which he appointed unto me, that I may repay in turn the benefits which Christ conferred on me by filling up the measure of the sufferings appointed unto him. These sufferings I fill up) in my flesh for the sake of his (Christ's) body, which is the church.

Notes

1. Col. 1:24 begins a new section, in which Paul discusses his ministry of the gospel. In this Paul discusses his privilege (the privilege of suffering for Christ) and his task (the task of making known the mystery of God among the Gentiles).
2. Paul characterizes his ministry first of all as a work of joyful sufferings for the sake of the Colossians. When we are experiencing the joy of serving others, we scarcely notice the exertions and strains that are often required. Thus Paul rejoiced in his sufferings. Eph. 3:13; II Tim. 2:10.

3. Paul considered his various sufferings as part of a necessary and welcome process of filling up the quota of the afflictions of Christ that had been appointed unto him.

Col. 1:24 does not indicate that Paul felt that he had to endure as much suffering as Christ himself endured. This is so obviously beyond human attainment (even for Paul!) that the very idea smacks of mental imbalance.

Rather Paul indicates that he knew that Christ had appointed unto him to endure certain things in his flesh, and he joyfully sought to fill up his cup of sufferings. Jesus once said of Saul (Paul), "I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:16). Thus the expression "the afflictions of Christ" means "the afflictions appointed to me by Christ."

Paul felt that he yet lacked some in filling up the sufferings that he ought to bear, and he joyfully faced any difficulty for the sake of Christ's body the church. Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:18.

4. Paul describes his own sufferings as the afflictions of Christ. While this phrase refers to Paul's own sufferings that Christ had appointed for him, it also has a deeper meaning. That which hurts Christ's body the church (of which Paul was a member) also hurts Christ. Christ is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Acts 22:7; Heb. 4:15. When Paul suffered, Christ suffered; when we suffer, Christ is afflicted.
5. The verb *fill up* (*antanapleroo*) means "to fill up in turn." Paul speaks here of suffering as if it were measured out in cupfuls. Christ by his life filled up his cup of suffering; he endured all that was required of him, so that we might be saved. Now we in turn fill up our cup of service and suffering for the sake of Christ and his church to repay (in a small degree) what Christ did for us.

25. whereof I was made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which was given me to youward, to fulfill the word of God,

Translation and Paraphrase

25. I was made a servant (or minister of the church) in accordance with the (gracious terms of the) stewardship (entrusted to me) of God, (which was) given to me for your sake, to make fully known the word of God.

Notes

1. Paul indicates in 1:25 that his ministry was a gift to him. He was *made* a minister. He did not choose the office himself.

Furthermore the nature of the work that God laid out for Paul was chosen not according to what Paul might have thought best, but it was rather a dispensation, or stewardship, from God.

2. The word *dispensation* here means "that which is dispensed by God." It is a translation of the Gr. *oikonomia*, which is often translated *stewardship*. Stewardship is the managing of the goods or property of someone else. A steward might operate a farm or a vineyard for the owner.

God gave Paul a particular stewardship, or dispensation, a special privilege and responsibility. Paul's ministry then consisted of that which GOD had given him to do. It was a challenging stewardship and occupied every bit of the time and talent Paul could give to it, but it was still God's choice for Paul, not Paul's choice for himself. Eph. 3:2, 7-9.

3. Paul's stewardship was given him "for you." It was designed to help others. Our service to the Lord should always be done to help others, rather than to make ourselves appear outstanding.
4. Paul's ministry was given to him "to fulfill the word of God," that is, to cause the word of God to abound, to carry it into effect, to carry it through to the fullest.

26. *even the mystery which hath been hid for ages and generations: but now hath it been manifested to his saints*, 27. *to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:*

Translation and Paraphrase

26. (For the word of God is) the mystery (the revealed secret) which has been hidden from the ages (past) and from the generations (past), but has now been made manifest to his (God's saints;

27. To them (the saints) God was well pleased to make known that which (makes up) the riches of the glory of this mystery (which is now being spread) among the nations—(and that mystery, simply and marvelously stated, is this:) Christ in you, the hope of glory (glory now, and glory hereafter)!

Notes

1. Paul had been chosen by God to reveal to many nations the marvelous mystery that God had held back from human knowledge in preceding ages. That revealed mystery was the very secret of glory. It is, simply stated, CHRIST IN YOU, the hope of glory! Compare Col. 2:2.

Paul in Eph. 3:6 adds the further explanation about the mystery, that it consisted in the revelation of the fact that the Gentiles could now be fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus, through the gospel.

HISTORY'S
MOST GLORIOUS SECRET
NOW REVEALED!

CHRIST IN YOU,
the hope of glory!

(Colossians 1:27)

1. Glorious power to live a godly life.
2. Glorious power to work victoriously.
3. Glorious joy available.
4. Glorious peace for your soul.
5. Glorious comfort in troubles.
6. Glorious victory over death.
7. Glorious eternal life with God.

2. Paul declares that the word of God which he was sent to fulfill (1:25) was a *mystery* which God had hidden from previous ages and generations. Rom. 16:25-26; I Cor. 2:7-8; Eph. 3:2-5.

The term *mystery* in New Testament usage means a *revealed secret*. The mysteries of a lodge are the secrets that are revealed when one is initiated into it. The gospel was a

mystery in that it once was not revealed, but is now made known. The term *mystery* does not carry the ideas of incomprehensibility, or obscurity, or mysteriousness, or profundity. It is just about the absolute opposite of all of these.

3. Why should God have hidden his glorious mystery from preceding ages and generations when there was so much sin and suffering in the world during those times? We cannot know all of God's reasons for doing what he does. But we believe that God knows best, even when we do not know why He does as He does. As for God's choice of time for revealing His grand secret of the ages, we can only state this: by the time the gospel was revealed, man had had full opportunity to learn by hard experience that he could not save himself nor his world by laws, by philosophy, by military might, by economic progress, by any inherent goodness within man, by idolatry, by magic, by great architecture and culture, or by any other means imaginable to man.

It is a fact that at the time when Christ came that many people felt an intense longing for God to send a savior, and were looking for his coming. See Luke 3:15; Matt. 2:1-2; John 12:20-21. Perhaps this was the reason God waited as long as He did to send Christ and reveal the gospel.

4. Now finally God has revealed his glorious mystery unto his saints. God has not revealed it to the philosophers, the emperors, the theologians, the professors, the generals, the economic executives, the lawmakers. He revealed it to his saints—to shepherds, to fishermen, to tax collectors, to tentmakers, to slaves, to the lowly, to babes!! Luke 10:21; I Cor. 1:26-29.

There have been a few learned, wealthy, and powerful in every generation who have opened their hearts to God's revealed mystery. But even today most people in these categories do not comprehend the truth, riches, and importance of the gospel.

5. God sent the news of His revealed mystery out into all nations, among the *Gentiles*. God has always planned to do this, even though many of the Jews in ages past wrongly came to feel that they were the exclusive people of God. See Isaiah 49:6; 42:6; Luke 2:30-32; Acts 14:46-47.
6. Paul's ministry among the Gentiles, along with the ministries of others since then, has been the most wonderful thing that has ever happened among the Gentiles in human history.

Christian doctrines have changed the world, its music, its laws, the attitudes of its peoples, its customs, its architecture, its morals, and all changes have been for the better. All men now have the benefits of divine wisdom freely available. Most people are not wise, but Christ is wisdom for all. The laws and prophetic messages which made the Jews a devout people are now equally available and significant to the Gentiles; and to these laws are added the even greater words of God's own son and the power of the Holy Spirit.

7. God was *pleased* to make known among the Gentiles the divine mystery. God is utterly good, gracious, and generous.
8. God made known the *riches* of the glory of the divine mystery. God did not grant us a small sampling of his blessings, but the riches of them. Rom. 9:23; Eph. 1:18.
9. The hope of glory in God's mystery is primarily the hope of glory in the life to come. See Rom. 8:18; I Cor. 15:42-43; Rev. 21:23. However, there is glory in the mystery that is available to us NOW also. See I Peter 1:8; II Cor. 3:18.
10. There have been various arguments advanced that supposedly prove and guarantee to us glorious things from God. But all such arguments break down when confronted with the realities of life. There is only one hope of glory that is certain to deliver the glory: Christ in you.

It has been argued, for example, that God never creates within men basic desires without providing fulfillments for those desires. Since we have a desire for everlasting life, this indicates that we should obtain it. While it is true that God has granted many fulfillments of our desires, life still overflows with unfulfilled desires. There is only one guarantee of glory: Christ in you.

28. whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ; 29. whereunto I labor also, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Translation and Paraphrase

28. (Yes, God's mystery is Christ,) whom we are proclaiming (by) admonishing every man and teaching every man with all (the) wisdom (we can muster), so that we may present every man perfect in Christ (Jesus).

29. Toward this (goal of presenting every man perfect in Christ) I toil, contending (against all obstacles in a manner) according to his (Christ's divine) working, which works in me with (great) power.

Notes

1. In Col. 1:28-29 Paul assured the Colossians that he taught and labored with much effort to tell every man about God's glorious mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
2. Paul's proclamation of Christ consisted both of admonitions (warnings) and teachings.
3. Paul admonished and taught *in all wisdom*. He recognized that people come from many backgrounds, and have many different prejudices. He became all things to all men that he might by all means save some. (I Cor. 9:19-22)
4. The goal of Paul's teaching was that he might present every man *perfect* in Christ. This is the goal also of Christ Jesus himself. Col. 1:22. It is a goal too huge for human power. Our generation with its immortality, its selfishness, its violence, and lack of moral principles needs to be converted, and transformed, and presented perfect in Christ. This was what Paul set out to do for his generation. Will we attempt it for our generation?
5. Three times in 1:28 Paul repeats "every man," as if to emphasize the universal appeal of the gospel, the free offer of salvation for all, and the need of all humanity for the gospel.
6. Paul *labored* (Gr. *kopiaio*) to present every man perfect in Christ. This word means to grow weary and exhausted; to labor with wearisome effort; to toil. I Tim. 4:10; I Cor. 4:12; 15:10.
7. Paul describes his toil as "striving". "Striving" (Gr. *agonizomai*) refers to contests, contending against adversaries, struggling with difficulties and dangers. The point is that there are opponents to be subdued.
8. Paul was able to strive as he did against all obstacles because Christ helped him. Paul was striving "according to his (Christ's) working, which worketh in me mightily." He could do all things in Christ who strengthened him. Phil 4:13. Compare Col. 1:11; Eph. 1:19; 3:7. For examples of how Christ helped Paul see Rom. 15:18-19; Acts 23:11; 27:23-24.

COLOSSIANS CHAPTER TWO VAIN DOCTRINES VS. THE VICTORIOUS CHRIST

Paul's Ministry; (1:24—2:5)

1. *Walk in Christ as you received Christ;*
(2:6-7)
2. *Vain doctrines Opposed to Christ; (2:8-23)*
 - a. Philosophy; 2:8-10
 - (1) It makes spoil of you; 2:8a
 - (2) It is after the traditions of men; 2:8b
 - (3) Christ has the fulness of God-hood; 2:9
 - (4) Christ makes us complete; 2:10a
 - (5) Christ is head over all; 2:10b
 - b. Judaism; 2:11-17
 - (1) Christ gives us perfect circumcision; 2:11-12a
 - (2) Christ gives us perfect life; 2:12b-13a
 - (3) Christ gives forgiveness; 2:13b
 - (4) Christ has nailed the ordinances to the cross; 2:14
 - (5) Christ made a complete triumph; 2:15
 - (6) Let no man judge you over Judaistic ceremonies;
2:16-17
 - (a) Ceremonies are a shadow
 - (b) Christ is the body
 - c. Angel worship; 2:18-19
 - (1) It robs you of your prize; 2:18a
 - (2) Its devotees are puffed up; 2:18b
 - (3) It does not hold fast the Head; 2:19
 - d. Ordinances about self-denial (Asceticism); 2:20-23
 - (1) You died with Christ from such ordinances;
2:20-21
 - (2) The ordinances deal with perishing things; 2:22
 - (3) The ordinances have no value against fleshly indulgence; 2:23

2:1. For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

Translation and Paraphrase

2:1 (My striving against all the obstacles to the gospel concerns you Colossians in particular;) for I want you to know how great is the striving which I have (in my heart) for YOU, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen my face in the flesh.

Notes

1. Paul wanted the Colossians to know how much intense striving he endured in his spirit for their sake. It is so easy to hurt those who love us, and often we do this simply because we do not sense how much they care about us. Paul hoped that they would hold fast their faith more zealously if they knew how much he cared about them.
2. Paul's strivings for the Colossians has been called "Love's struggle". "Strife" (Gr. *agon*; KJV, "conflict") means intense solicitude and anxiety.
3. The wording of 2:1 relates back to 1:29. In 1:29 Paul declared that he was striving (Gr. *agonizomenos*) according to God's working. In 2:1 he asserts that they should know what great strife (*agona*) he had for them.
4. Paul's struggle was for people he had never seen, for such as the Colossians, and the Laodiceans, and for all who had not seen his face in the flesh. The uncertainty about the actual condition of such people would add to Paul's anxiety over them.

In 1:28 Paul spoke of teaching and admonishing every man. He did this even for those he had not seen.

Concerning Laodicea, see Introductory Study C, *Facts about Colossae and the Lycus valley*. The Laodiceans appear to have been infected with the same heresy that disturbed the Colossians.

5. Paul's struggle was probably first of all a struggle in prayer. Fervent prayer is a struggle, as anyone who has tried it will know—a struggle with self, and sin, and Satan. Compare Col. 4:12. We can struggle in prayer as painfully as Jacob prayed and struggled with the angel. Hosea 12:4; Gen. 32:24-28.
6. Also Paul's struggle involved his own efforts to be holy and faithful and steadfast in his difficult circumstances. If he had

lost heart and compromised his life, he would have discouraged the brethren everywhere.

7. Paul's striving indicates that he considered the Colossian heresy to be dangerous, and was striving to do something about it. False doctrines are always dangerous.
8. Ministerial anguish; Col. 2:1-4.
 - (1) Intense; 2:1.
 - (2) Impartial; applies to all.
 - (3) Holy;
 - Desires their comfort;
 - Desires their unity;
 - Desires their comprehension of truth.
 - (4) Expressed in warnings; 2:4.

2. that their hearts may be comforted, they being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, that they may know the mystery of God, even Christ,

Translation and Paraphrase

2. (I agonize) that their hearts may be comforted (and exhorted), being knit together in love, and (knit together in such a way that they will come) unto all the riches of full assurance in (their) understanding. (Yea, further I agonize that they may be so knit together that they come) unto a precise knowledge of the mystery of God, (which is, stated very simply,) Christ (alone).

Notes

1. What were the goals which Paul sought in his striving? He sought: (1) that the Colossians might be comforted; (2) that they might be knit together in love; (3) that they might be knit together unto all riches of understanding, that is, knit together so they could come unto the full riches of understanding.
2. The verb *comfort* (*parakaleo*) has the double meaning 'of comfort and also to exhort, or urge. Our comfort in Christ should be an exhortation to us to serve Him better. Tychicus was sent to the Ephesians and the Colossians to comfort their hearts. Eph. 6:22; Col. 4:8.
3. The Colossians were to be *knit* together in love. The word *knit* means "to cause to coalesce, to join together, to put together, to unite." (Thayer). We think of broken bones being

knit back together until the pieces are one again. In this manner Christians should be knit together in love. Col. 2:19. Without love a church is not a true church.

4. The goal for which Christians are knit together is that they may come unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding.

Our pleasant association together as Christians is a marvelous teacher. Better than any words it reveals to us the riches of our faith and gives us assurance.

5. The expression "unto the riches of the full assurance of understanding" is a bit complicated.

Paul frequently used the word *riches* to describe the blessings of Christians. Eph. 1:18. The abundance of God's grace is also spoken of as the riches of his grace. Eph. 1:7. Compare Eph. 3:16.

The term *full assurance* (Gr. *plerophoria*) means fulness, abundance, most certain confidence. I Thess. 1:5: "Our gospel came unto you in much assurance." (Compare Luke 1:1 in Gr.)

"Understanding" (Gr. *sunesis*) refers to the mind insofar as it understands things. The term indicates an understanding of the bearing of things on one another.

Using the definitions of the words as given above, it appears that Paul desired that the understanding of the Colossians should develop until it was aware of the great riches that lie in full assurance.

When we reach the point where we have utterly no doubts about the truths of the Bible, no doubts about our salvation, and no hesitation in trusting God fully at all times, we feel good! We have riches!

6. Paul gives a summary or climax of his desires for the Colossians at the close of 2:2: "That they may know the mystery of God, (which is) Christ. John 17:3.
7. In 2:2 we again have a reference to God's mystery that is now revealed. That mystery, simply stated, is that Christ Jesus is now the unfailing hope of all nations for glory from God. See notes on 1:26.
8. There is considerable variation in the ancient Greek manuscripts on the phrase "the mystery of God, *even* Christ." Even the King James text follows a slightly different reading than the American Standard. The King James use of Father after God

is obviously unnecessary. The reading of the American Standard version exactly translates the wording of the best current editions of the Greek N.T., those of Nestle-Aland (1956) and the United Bible Societies (1966).

3. in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden.

Translation and Paraphrase

3. (For) in him (that is, in Christ) are all the treasures of (divine) wisdom and knowledge hidden (though they are not hidden to any who seek them in Christ; they are wholly hidden from those who seek elsewhere.)

Notes

1. We all desire to know the ultimate and unchangeable truths of the universe. We crave reliable information. We want to know the right way to live, the way that will really help us. In Christ all of these treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.
2. Col. 2:3 is a sharp dig at the Gnostics. Their very name indicates that they thought they were the knowing ones. In their self-assumed wisdom they shunted Christ to a lower place. Paul asserts that the true wisdom they were seeking is to be found in the one they thrust aside. (See Introductory study on *Gnosticism*.)

Also Paul's remark about all wisdom being hidden in Christ would be contrary to those who loved the human philosophy, mentioned in 2:8.

3. Wisdom is *hidden* in Christ. Perhaps it would be more accurate to state simply that it is found only in Christ. The wisdom in Christ is not hidden from anyone, except those who are too proud to seek it in Christ. Those who seek it in him find it readily.

4. This I say, that no one may delude you with persuasiveness of speech.

Translation and Paraphrase

4. I speak this (way about my agony of soul for you) so that no one may deceive you by persuasiveness of speech. (I hope my extreme emotion over you will stir you to be on your guard.)

Notes

1. Paul was deeply concerned that the Colossians not be deluded by the persuasive speaking of false teachers. There are glib tongues advocating every imaginable religious idea. Many people are easily misled by eloquent speech. See Eph. 4:14.
2. Paul hoped that by telling the Colossians about the striving in his soul that he could put them on their guard against false teaching, against any teaching which differed from that which he had received by revelation from God and taught to them. Eph. 3:3-5.

5. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

Translation and Paraphrase

5. (Please do not think that my absence from you makes me indifferent about your Christian life,) for (even) if I am absent from you in the flesh, yet I am with you in the spirit, rejoicing (in your faith and love), and beholding your (good) order (in organization, worship and association together), and the firmness of your faith toward Christ.

Notes

1. When the Colossians were confronted with persuasive speaking by someone with "new light" on religion, they could very wisely in their imaginations picture Paul as being in their midst, perhaps shaking his head in disapproval at the doctrines that downgraded Christ and upgraded human knowledge.
2. Paul though physically absent from the Colossians, was always with them in spirit—in desire and in remembrance. The truth of his teachings was always with them.
3. When Paul imagined himself as being with the Colossians, he found himself rejoicing, and visualizing in his mind their good order and the steadfastness of their faith in Christ.
4. A good church needs order—order in organization, in their public meetings, and other dealings together. There is no inflexible pattern in the New Testament that constitutes good order for all the churches. What is good in one church might

not work in another. "Let all things be done decently and in order." I Cor. 14:40. Order in a church is as necessary as order in an army. A good church needs soldierly discipline.

5. Unpretended stedfast faith in Christ is one of the grand goals of our labors for Christ. I Tim. 1:5.
6. Features of a faithful church:
 - (1) Comforted, courageous hearts; (2:2)
 - (2) Unity (knit together).
 - (3) Love.
 - (4) Full assurance.
 - (5) Understanding.
 - (6) Power to resist alluring teaching; (2:4)
 - (7) Good order; (2:5)
 - (8) Stedfast faith; (2:5-6)
 - (9) Thanksgiving; (2:7)

Study and Review

Questions Over Colossians 1:24—2:5

1. What attitude did Paul have in his sufferings? (1:24)
2. For whom did Paul Suffer?
3. What did Paul seek to fill up?
4. Does Paul say in 1:24 that he was trying to suffer as much as Christ suffered? If not, what does he mean by "fill up . . . that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh"?
5. What does the "whereof" in 1:25 refer back to?
6. According to what was Paul made a minister: (1:25)
7. What was it that was given to Paul? (1:25)
8. Define the word *dispensation*. What word is a synonym for it?
9. For what purpose was the dispensation given to Paul?
10. The "word of God" in 1:25 is identified in 1:26 as being what?
11. Define the term mystery. (1:26)
12. When had the mystery been hidden?
13. How did God feel about making the mystery manifest? (1:27)
14. Among what people is the mystery made known?
15. What is the mystery said to be? (1:27)
16. What hope does the mystery bring?
17. Who is the *whom* referred to at the beginning of 1:28?
18. Paul says that his proclaiming was accompanied by two types of speaking. What are they? (1:28)

20. In what way did Paul teach every man?
21. What was the goal of Paul's teaching?
22. To what does the *whereunto* of 1:29 refer?
23. According to what did Paul strive? (1:29)
24. What worked within Paul?
25. From information given in 1:29, where would you say Paul obtained the ability to do the great labors he did?
26. What did Paul want the Colossians to know about his work? (2:1)
27. How could Paul strive for the Colossians when he was nowhere near them?
28. For people in what places besides Colossae did Paul strive?
29. Had Paul seen the Colossians face to face? How do you know?
30. What did Paul desire about the hearts of those he had not seen personally? (2:2)
31. In what were these people to be knit together?
32. Explain the term *knit*.
33. Unto what were these brethren to be knit together?
34. What does 2:2 indicate about the value of a full understanding?
35. What did Paul want these brethren to know?
36. What does 2:2 say the mystery of God is? (Please use American Standard version wording here.)
37. Who is referred to by the *whom* in 2:3?
38. What is hid in Christ?
39. How did 2:3 specially apply to the Gnostics?
40. Why did Paul speak to these people as he did about his strivings? (2:4)
41. What may delude us?
42. What connection can you make between 2:4 and 2:5?
43. In what way was Paul with them? (1:5)
44. What were Paul's feelings as he imagined himself being with the Colossians?
45. What two things about the Colossians did Paul behold with joy?
46. In what respects (possibly) did the Colossians have order?

Outline of 2:6-23

- D. CHRIST—The antidote for false doctrine; 2:6-23
1. Walk in Christ as you received him; 2:6-7
 - a. Rooted and builded up.
 - b. Established in your faith.
 - c. Abounding in thanksgiving.
 2. Reasons to beware of men's traditions and hold to Christ; 2:8-15
 - a. Philosophy is vain; 2:8
 - (1) After the traditions of men.
 - (2) After the rudiments of the world.
 - b. Christ has perfect God-hood; 2:9
 - c. Christ gives perfect completeness; 2:10a
 - d. Christ has perfect authority; 2:10b
 - e. Christ gives perfect circumcision; 2:11-12
 - (1) A circumcision not done by hands; 2:11
 - (2) Done in baptism; 2:12
 - f. Christ gives perfect life; 2:13-14
 - (1) Done in forgiving our trespasses; 2:13
 - (2) Done by blotting out the written ordinances; 2:14
 - g. Christ has perfectly triumphed; 2:15
 3. Things to let no one do to you; 2:16-19
 - a. Judge you concerning rituals; 2:16-17
 - (1) Rituals are shadows.
 - (2) The body is Christ's.
 - b. Rob you of your prize; 2:18-19
 - (1) By voluntary humility and angel-worship; 2:18
 - (2) By not holding to Christ the Head; 2:19
 4. Reasons for rejecting ordinances of men; 2:20-23
 - a. Ye died with Christ from worldly rudiments; 2:20
 - b. All ordinances are to perish; 2:21-22
 - c. Ordinances have no value against fleshly indulgences; 2:23

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6. As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.
 7. rooted and builded up in him, and established in your faith, even as ye were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Translation and Paraphrase

6. In the same manner as you (pl.) received Christ Jesus (as) the Lord, be (thus) walking in him,

7. (being) rooted (like a tree), and (constantly being) builded up in him (as a building under construction), and (being) made (more and more) firm in the faith (of Christ), just as you were taught; and (be) overflowing in thanksgiving.

Notes

1. Col. 2:6-7 is a bridge which leads us from the discussion of Paul's ministry into the discussion of false doctrines that are opposed to Christ. These verses may be construed either as a close to the preceding discussion of Paul's ministry, or as the opening words of the discussion of Christ vs. false doctrines. In our outline we treat them as the opening words of the new section.
2. As children of God we all once received Christ as our Lord and savior. This is necessary and glorious. But having done this, we must then walk in Christ in the same sincere obedient manner as we once received Christ. A faithful walk is as necessary as a good beginning. Eph. 4:17.
3. Christ Jesus is LORD. If he is not the Lord of our lives, he is probably not the savior of our souls.
4. The walk, or daily conduct, of the Christian must be deep-rooted and builded up. Eph. 3:17. Trees grow well only when they have a good root system. Transplanted pine trees with their close-trimmed roots do not thrive until a new root system has developed. How deeply is your life rooted in Christ? How much do you love him and think about him? How much have you studied the gospels to learn about Christ's words and deeds? These are necessary things if we are to be rooted in Christ.

Being built up (Gr. *epoikodomeo*) describes us as if we were buildings. A big building has piles driven deeply in the ground beneath it, or strong footings. It rises solidly with strong walls. Our Christian walk is grounded upon unchanging principles in God's word, and is built up by solid deeds of goodness, that never have to be removed as undesirable stones. Jude 20; Eph. 2:20-22.

5. "Rooted" is a perfect participle, indicating a past action with present effects. "Build up" and "established" (or "stablished") are present participles, indicating continuous action.

6. We are built up not *upon* Christ, but *in* Christ. It is not a physical act of building, but a spiritual development. We are established (or made firm) *in our faith* (or *by* our faith.)
7. The increasing firmness that we should gain as we are established in the faith, must match up with the way we were *taught* at the beginning of our Christian experience. We dare not abandon the basic truths by which we were saved as we increase in knowledge. Too many in our generation have left their earlier child-like faith when they went to some seminary or university for advanced learning. This is a curse to a man's soul. We cannot outgrow the true faith; we may, however, be deceived into departing from it.
8. One mark of a faithful church is that it is abounding in thanksgiving. To *abound* is to have overmuch, to overflow, to have excess. Does your thanksgiving overflow?
9. All of these thoughts about walking *in Christ* and being rooted *in him* are a necessary consideration as we go into the discussion about false doctrines that immediately follows. If we do not have the solid foundation of Christ to stand on, we have no criterion for judging false doctrine, nor any alternative to it.

8. Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ:

Translation and Paraphrase

8. Watch (carefully) lest anyone (deceive you and) be carrying you off like (conquerors carry off) spoils (of war), through (their) propagandizing of (human philosophy and) wisdom, and (their) vain (fruitless) deceit, (all of which is) according to the traditions of men, (and) according to the rudimentary principles of (this) world, and not according to Christ.

Notes

1. In 2:6-7 Paul laid down a true positive foundation for life. Now in 2:8 he begins to speak of the negative, undesirable, worldly, false doctrines that are opposed to Christ.
2. As we read Col. 2:8ff, we are confronted with many allusions to the heresy at Colossae. Many of the allusions are obscure to us, but to the Colossians Paul's words struck home plainly.

The Colossian heresy was basically a group of additions to Christ. They wanted to add philosophy (2:8), perhaps also circumcision (2:11), rules about Jewish ceremonies (2:16), worship of angels (2:17), and rules about self-denial of the body (2:20).

3. Paul warned, "Take heed lest anyone be carrying you off, like conquerors carry off the spoil of war." All of the additions to Christ were endangering the Colossians. By these human ideas, men were about to deceive the Colossians, and when that happened it would be just as if some conqueror made spoil of them.

As we think of *spoil*, we think of captives of war being carried away, and paraded before crowds in victory processions. The conquered peoples were treated as spoils of war and led away into slavery.

The teachers of human philosophy and human religious ideas around Colossae would boast whenever they made a convert and deceived someone into accepting their ideas, like conquering generals gloried over their vanquished opponents.

4. The *philosophy* which Paul warned against is not exactly what we ordinarily mean by philosophy. The word *philosophy* literally means "love of wisdom." It was used by the Greek writers for either zeal for or skill in any art or science, or any branch of knowledge. (Thayer). Philosophy refers to any moral system. We could speak of the philosophy of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, the Greeks, etc. Here is Colossians *philosophy* seems to refer to the theology (or theosophy) which concerned itself with Jewish rituals, and honoring angels, and rules about self-denial of the body. Paul calls all of these things vain deceit (or empty, fruitless deceit). Eph. 5:6.
5. Paul describes the vain deceit and philosophy of men in three ways:
 - (1) It is after the tradition of men.
 - (2) It is after the rudiments of the world.
 - (3) It is not after Christ.
6. *Traditions* are ideas or teachings handed down from one generation to another. They may be good traditions (II Thess. 2:15; 3:6), or undesirable traditions originated by men alone (Mark 7:8-9; Matt. 15:2).

7. By *rudiments* Paul refers to the basic, first, primary, simple elements of anything. The letters of the alphabet are the rudiments of writing. The elements are the rudiments of the material universe. II Pet. 3:10. Numbers are the rudiments of mathematics.

Paul here refers to the philosophy and vain deceit of men as being rudiments. Compared to the boundless, profound, unsearchable wisdom in God's word, men's ideas are like A-B-C's. They are but the rudiments of truth. Philosophy, though it is usually thought of as very profound, is rudimentary because it is only the teachings and traditions of men.

8. In Gal. 4:3 Paul also refers to the *rudiments* of the world. The reference there is obviously to the law of Moses. It was called *rudiments*, not because it was not given by God, but because it was an imperfect, incomplete, temporary system, given "to bring us unto Christ" (Gal. 3:24).

It is very possible that the rudiments Paul refers to in Col. 2:8 may be the same as, or similar to, those in Gal. 4:3, the reference being to the law of Moses in both places. The reference in Colossians does seem to apply to other things as well, however.

9. Many interpreters have understood the rudiments referred to in Colossians to be the stars and planets and signs of the zodiac. They feel that the Colossian heresy included astrological ideas, perhaps even a worship of the heavenly bodies. The Revised Standard version sets forth this idea in its translation: "the elemental spirits of the universe."

Certainly Christians should shun astrology as a guide for their lives. The Old Testament prophets thundered the message that God's children should not worship the host of heaven nor seek guidance from them. (Jer. 8:2; Zeph. 1:5; II Chron. 33:3, 5). Why should we seek the heavenly bodies rather than the God who made them? Usually the people who follow the Bible the least are the people who look to things like astrology for guidance the most. When men reject the word of God, they turn to superstition.

As true as all of this is, there is no real indication that Paul was referring to the heavenly bodies by his references to *rudiments*. Even those who think that Paul was referring to

heavenly bodies differ widely in unfolding the meaning of this passage.

10. How tragic that men's ideas are "not after Christ." But that is utterly true. No man has ever thought up out of his own intellect and knowledge the truth about God, His will, and promises. These things are things which we have either learned from God's revelation of Himself, or we do not know them. I Cor. 2:9-12.

9. for in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,
10. and in him ye are made full, who is the head of all principality and power:

Translation and Paraphrase

9. (It is essential that you follow Christ only,) because in him dwells all the fullness of God-hood in a bodily manner. (It dwelt in his body on earth, and is now in his present glorious heavenly body.)

10. (Also) in him (Christ) you are made complete in every particular; (this is possible only in Christ, the one) who is head over every rule and authority (in heaven and on earth).

Notes

1. Col. 2:9-10 continues a list of reasons why we should beware of men's traditions and hold only to Christ. (See outline.) The reasons given here are that Christ has perfect God-hood (2:9); Christ gives perfect completeness; Christ has perfect authority. Why should we turn away from Christ or add anything to what he has said when his nature and works are so perfect? All things that are necessary for life and godliness have been given in Christ. II Peter 1:3.
2. Christ has perfect Godhead, or God-hood. The Greek word (*theotes*) translated Godhead refers to essential God-quality. A similar word (*theiotes*) is used in Romans 1:20; it refers to divinity as reflected in various ways. All the fulness—the abundance, the full measure—of God-hood dwells in Christ. The verb *dwelt* here is from the Gr. *katoikeo*, meaning to settle or dwell, as opposed to *paroikeo*, to sojourn or dwell temporarily. God-hood is a permanent quality in Christ.
3. God-hood dwells in Christ bodily, that is, in a bodily manner. Col. 1:19. This reference to a bodily manner probably refers

both to Christ's body that he had while on earth, and his present exalted and spiritual body in heaven, visible only to the inhabitants of heaven. John 1:14.

No matter what body is referred to, the teaching of Paul that divine fulness dwelt in a *body* specially struck at the Gnostic doctrines. They did not think that spiritual and material things could be in contact.

This idea is not some remote historical curiosity. Some scholars today are arguing that we can hold to spiritual truths from Christ, while we at the same time deny the reality of the historical Jesus who is portrayed in the gospel. This is nothing but a modern version of Gnosticism.

4. There is no more glorious declaration in all the Bible than the statement that "in him ye are made full (or complete)."

This is an echo of John 1:16: "And of his fullness have we all received."

We all long for a full life. We want to be a complete person with nothing lacking that is of real worth. Contrary to the feelings of most of us fullness of life comes altogether from our association with Christ, and not from any *things* we may acquire. Luke 12:15.

5. Christ has perfect authority. He the head over all principality and power. The terms *principality* (Gr. *arche*, beginning or rule) and *power* (Gr. *exousia*, authority) apparently refer to high ranking angelic beings, both good and bad. Col. 2:15; Eph. 1:21-22; 3:10; 6:12. The terms may also include all authority among both angels and men.

The Gnostics emphasized angels; but Christ is head over all angelic forces. Heb. 1:4-8; Col. 2:18.

11. in whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; 12. having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Translation and Paraphrase

11. And (to show you why we must hold only to Christ and reject the traditions of men,) in him you were circumcised by a circumcision not done by hands, (but brought about) by putting off

the (deeds of your sinful) body of flesh; (and all this made possible for you) by (your participation in) the circumcision of Christ.

12. (Your putting off the body of flesh, and participating in the circumcision of Christ took place in your) being buried with him by baptism, in which (act) you also were raised up (to a newness of life) through (the means of your) faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Notes

1. Col. 2:11-12 teaches us that Christ gives us perfect circumcision, and that this is accomplished in baptism.
2. The rather unexpected reference here to circumcision suggests that among the Colossians circumcision had been discussed, if not absolutely demanded.
3. Among the Jews there had always been two conflicting views of circumcision: (1) Circumcision by itself made a man good; (2) Circumcision was a sign of the good already in a man. When circumcision was first introduced among the Hebrews, it was a sign of the righteousness a man possessed before the circumcision was done. Thus Abraham, the father of the Hebrew people, was first declared righteous (Gen. 15:6), and much later circumcised (Gen. 17:10-11) as a token of God's covenant with him. (Rom. 4:9-11).

However, after the time of Abraham Jewish infants were circumcised when eight days old. Therefore their circumcision could not have been a sign of their righteousness prior to circumcision, but only of their relationship to God through Abraham. Nonetheless if these circumcised individuals did not live righteously as they grew up, their circumcision alone did not make them acceptable to God. The Old Testament and the New alike speak of uncircumcised hearts, and ears and lips: hearts, ears, and lips that were not acceptable to God, even though the individual was circumcised. (Acts 7:51; Rom. 2:25, 29; Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4.)

To sum this up, we observe that circumcision was an essential act to be in covenant relationship with God, but the act was rendered worthless if the person's life was ungodly.

4. The Jewish-Gnostic-pagan-Christian heretics at Colossae were saying, "You must be circumcised." Paul says that in Christ we already have this honor. We are circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands.

As circumcision in former times marked a child as being in covenant relationship with God through Abraham, in a like manner Christians are circumcised and marked as being in covenant relation with God through Christ.

5. The question that comes to our minds as we think about this circumcision not made with hands is this: How can we obtain this wonderful circumcision? Three answers are given by Paul to this question:

(1) *By putting off the body of the flesh.* (Rom. 6:6). This seems to refer to our putting away the sinful deeds done by our bodies. (This is a figure of speech in which the body doing the sinful acts stands for the acts themselves.) We must repent of our sins done in the body. Paul in Romans 8:4-7 warns us that we cannot do the sins of the flesh and please God. So also in Gal. 5:17, 19, 23.

(2) *In the circumcision of Christ.* When Christians enter into their union with Christ, His death becomes their death; His resurrection becomes their resurrection; His circumcision becomes their circumcision; His righteousness becomes our righteousness. We are circumcised in that He was circumcised. (Luke 2:21).

(3) *By baptism.* Baptism is the third factor that causes us to experience the circumcision not made with hands. (I Pet. 3:21).

As a result of these three things, Christians become the true circumcision, the people who are in covenant with God. See notes on Philippians 3:2-3.

6. The expression at the start of 2:12 "buried with him in baptism," refers back to "circumcision" in 2:11. Baptism takes the place of circumcision for us. Circumcision could be said to be a type of baptism. (By *type* we refer to some Old Testament person, event, or thing which foreshadowed some similar New Testament person, event or thing. The N.T. thing which was foreshadowed is called the *antitype*.)
7. The comparison between circumcision and baptism follows the same pattern as the comparisons between all the O.T. types and their N.T. counterparts: in some respects the types are like the antitypes, and in some other respects they differed.

The failure to recognize the differences between baptism and circumcision as well as their similarities has led to a grievous error: many interpreters argue that as infants were

circumcised, so infants should now be baptized. As infants were brought into God's covenant by circumcision, so now infants are brought into God's covenant by baptism. This argument is used by almost every advocate of infant baptism. (For an example of it see Wm. Hendrickson's commentary on *Colossians and Philemon* p. 116, footnote.)

This argument cannot be true. Note the plain statement in Col. 2:12 that in baptism we are raised with Christ through FAITH in the working of God. Obviously then those who are baptized (and thereby circumcised) are those who have faith. This eliminates infants.

Also Col. 1:11 says that we are circumcised by the putting off of the body of flesh. No eight-day old infant is capable of fleshly sins, nor of repenting and putting off the body of flesh.

We wonder why those who insist that baptism is for infants because circumcision was for infants, do not insist that baptism be done on the eighth day of a child's life, since circumcision was to be done on that day. Even Wm. Barclay affirms that baptism in New Testament times was for adults only. (Wm. Barclay, *Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, pp. 167-168.)

8.

CIRCUMCISION

BAPTISM

(Col. 2:11-13)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. For the O.T. age. | 1. For the N.T. age. |
| 2. Related men to Abraham and God's covenant; Gen. 17:9-10. | 2. Relates us to Abraham and God's promise; Gal. 3:27, 29. |
| 3. A physical putting away of flesh. | 3. A putting away of sinful deeds of the flesh. |
| 4. A sign (token) of God's covenant; Gen. 17:11. | 4. Not called a sign of anything. It is not "an outward sign of an inward grace." |
| 5. Righteousness required of those circumcised; Deut 10:16. | 5. Righteousness required of those baptized; Romans 6:4, 6. |
| 6. For infants; Gen. 17:11. | 6. For those who have faith; Col. 2:12. |
| 7. For males; Gen. 17:12. | 7. For all; Gal. 3:27-28. |
| 8. Essential; Gen. 17:14. | 8. Essential; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4. |

9. Col. 2:12 tells us that we are *buried* with Christ and *raised* with him by baptism. This thought is discussed at length in Romans 6:1-11. This thought seems to be introduced here in Colossians as an explanation of how we share the circumcision of Christ. In 2:11 Paul said that we are circumcised . . . in the circumcision of Christ. Then in 2:12 he indicates that this is brought about by our having been buried and raised with Christ in baptism. In being raised with Christ we share all the triumphs of the risen Christ, including the privileges that came in the O.T. age to those circumcised. These included all the promises to Abraham concerning how his seed would bless the world. (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:17-18).
10. The allusion to *burial* by baptism recalls to our minds that in the primitive church baptism was done by the act of immersion, or completely dipping the body of the one baptized under water for an instant. We are buried in the water as he was buried in the tomb. Many old baptistries designed for immersion still remain in the Holy Land and surrounding countries; examples can be seen in Capernaum, Nazareth, and dozens of other places.
- However, the burial Paul alludes to in Col. 2:12 is a spiritual burial. Our old man, our old nature, is buried, done away with, and disposed of as we are united with Christ. His death and burial becomes our death and burial. We are released from sins by death. (Rom. 7:7).
11. Baptism alone has no magic, no power. It **MUST** be accompanied and preceded by faith in the working of God. Note that it is not enough to believe that God exists. We must believe that he works, and works for us. (Phil. 2:13). Do you believe that God works in our world and in your life? God has always required faith of his people, faith that he will work for them and save them. The great failure of the Israelites in the desert under Moses was that their knowledge of God was not accompanied by faith that God would use His power for them (Heb. 4:2).
12. Paul reminds us that God raised Christ from the dead. We must believe this fact to be saved. (Rom. 10:9). Christ's resurrection is a historical fact, but it is also a part of our experience. When we receive Christ, his resurrection becomes

our resurrection unto a new life. Note that Col. 2:12 refers to two resurrections: Christ's and ours. The same God accomplished both resurrections.

13. In summary, Col. 2:11-12 teaches us that Christ gives us perfect circumcision, and that this is accomplished in baptism, in which we are both buried and raised with Christ, if we have faith in God's working.

13. And you; being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, I say, did he make alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses;

Translation and Paraphrase

13. And (to make clear what I refer to by your being raised up by baptism,) when you were (spiritually) dead because of the trespasses (you had once) and (because of) the uncircumcision of your flesh (you being outside of the covenant), he (God) made you alive together with him (Christ; and this he did by) graciously forgiving you all your misdeeds.

Notes

1. Col. 2:13 gives us a word picture of Christ making dead people alive. It grows out of the remarks in 2:12 about our being raised with Christ. The resurrection Paul speaks of is not the resurrection of the body from the grave, although it is plainly taught in numerous places in the scripture. The resurrection under discussion is the new life we live following our baptism.
2. Two things are mentioned by Paul as having caused us to be dead spiritually:
 - (1) Our trespasses (or sins, or misdeeds); Eph. 2:1, 5.
 - (2) The uncircumcision of our flesh. In O.T. times uncircumcised people were cut off from God's covenant with Abraham. (Gen. 17:14). Thus the Gentiles, who were uncircumcised, were outside of God's covenant, and in this sense DEAD. Death in the scripture never implies an end to existence, or unconsciousness, or annihilation. To be cut off from God, who is life, is to be dead, whether we are in sin in this world, or in the lake of fire to come. (Rev. 20:14-15.)
3. Paul identifies our being made alive with Christ as being caused by, or synonymous with, or simultaneous to, God's having for-

given us our trespasses. Too few people sense the DEAD-liness of sin, or the resurrection-reality in salvation. Compare notes on Col. 1:11.

14. having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross;

Translation and Paraphrase

14. (Christ could make us alive as a result of his) having obliterated the handwriting consisting of decrees (meaning the law of Moses!), which was against us (because it condemned us without providing a way of justification), (and) which was contrary to us (not being of such nature that it could help us); and he took it away from (our) midst when he nailed it to the cross.

Notes

1. Col. 2:13-14 discusses how Christ gives us perfect life when once we were dead. This He did by: (1) forgiving us our trespasses, and by (2) blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us.
2. To *blot out* (Gr. *exaleipho*) means to obliterate, erase, wipe out, blot out. God delights in wiping dirty slates clean.
3. What was it that Christ blotted out? Admittedly He blots out our sins (Acts 3:19). But the reference here is to something else. It is called the "handwriting of ordinances." This cannot refer to the later pagan Gnostic ordinances that the Colossians were observing (2:20-21). The ordinances that Christ blotted out were blotted out when he died on the cross. Obviously the thing blotted out was the law of Moses. It was handwriting on stones, and consisted of ordinances. (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 12:1; II Cor. 3:7; Eph. 2:15).
4. The law of Moses, handwritten and composed of ordinances, was against us, because it listed very many acts that were sinful, and then pronounced judgment on all who disobeyed it, while offering no certain way of escape from this condemnation. See Gal. 3:10-12.

The law was also contrary to us. Its nature was such as to condemn us rather than help us. It promised no Holy Spirit to all believers. It set the standard high, as high as God's

holiness. We sinners could not live up to it. The apostle Peter declared that the law was a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear. (Acts 15:10). Paul in Romans the seventh chapter gives an agonized monologue of how he found himself unable to live up to the law. (Rom. 7:14-24).

5. Because of careless study of the Bible, and the grip of habit in our thinking, many well-intentioned people have never grasped that we do not live under the law and covenant given through Moses, but live under the new covenant enacted by Christ. The old Mosaic covenant is done away. Large portions of the books of Romans, Galatians, II Corinthians, and Hebrews are devoted to expounding the fact that we are not under the law. Note Romans 6:14; II Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:19, 24-25; Heb. 8:6-7, 13; 9:15; 10:1; etc.

Certainly the Bible teaches that the law was holy (Rom. 7:12), and that it was given by God. But it was only designed to be in force until Christ came, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made. See Gal. 3:19, 24.

6. The statement that Christ nailed it (the law) to the cross adds a new dimension to Christ's statement upon the cross: "It is finished." (John 19:30). Many things were finished: his sufferings, our sins, the Old Testament predictions concerning him; and (as we learn here in Colossians) the handwritten ordinances of the law of Moses. (Rom. 7:4).
7. The point Paul makes here in Colossians by referring to the blotting out of the written ordinances of the law of Moses, is that Christ made us alive by doing this. The law condemned us without really helping us. Christ took the law out of the way. We are thereby released from condemnation, and given needed help. In that sense we are made alive. (I Peter 2:24)

15. having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Translation and Paraphrase

15. (And then) having (wholly defeated, disarmed, and) despoiled those beings in first rank and the authorities (those Satanic and angelic powers that oppose us), he exhibited them openly (every spiritual being in the universe perceiving His victory), having triumphed over them by it (that is, by the cross).

Notes

1. Col. 2:15 is a difficult verse, probably because we know almost nothing about the events to which Paul alludes. Also it is hard to decide exactly what the participle "having spoiled" at the beginning of the verse refers back to. It can refer to Christ's having made us alive (2:13), and thus be another explanation as to how Christ made us alive. Certainly Christ could not have made us alive unless He had triumphed over Satan and his principalities and powers; for these held rule over our souls. See Mark 3:27.

The "having spoiled" at the start of 2:15 may refer clear back to 2:8, to the warning to beware of men's traditions. In our outline we have treated it as so referring. (The verse fits well either way, and may well apply to both points.)

We should beware of men's traditions and hold to Christ, because Christ has perfectly triumphed over the principalities and powers.

2. "Spoiled" (or "despoiled") here means (as it did in 1:8) "to lead away captive, to parade in triumph as a conqueror exhibiting victims and spoils of war, to lead captives into slavery, to disarm."
3. We are told that Christ despoiled the principalities and powers. These beings (as stated in the notes on 2:10) are angelic rulers and authorities, evidently strictly evil ones in the reference here. We are told that Christ made a show (or exhibit) of them openly, and "led them as captives in his triumphal procession." (New English Bible).

We are further told that Christ made this triumphal exhibit of them in it (that is, in the cross.) This could also be translated "by it."

4. We believe everything this verse says although we do not understand it all. We do not know when, where (or if) Christ made any open spectacle of defeated angelic opponents. Any such exhibition would of necessity have followed his crucifixion, burial, and ascension. See Luke 11:22.
5. In view of the fact that Christ made his triumphal exhibition over enemies *in it* (the cross), and in view of the fact that a Julius Caesar-type victory parade exhibiting conquered captives seems to us out-of-character for our savior, we prefer to think