

Studies in Colossians

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Introduction to Colossians

Colossians is one of the four prison epistles; the other three were Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon.

Paul had never visited Colossae. Ch. 1:7, 2:1

There are some who believe that the church at Colosse was founded by Epaphras. Ch. 1:7, 4:12

Colosse was one of the tri-cities of the Lycus Valley, situated one hundred miles inland from Ephesus. The other cities are Laodicea and Hierapolis.

The church assembled in the house of Philemon, who apparently was one of its active members.

Tychicus was the messenger who took the epistle to the various churches and also to Philemon.

Occasion for Writing

There was heresy or heresies presented in the church.

These heresies were being propagated by false teachers.

Among these heresies were:

1. Judaistic legalism – circumcision 2:11; 3:11.
2. Ordinances – food, holy days 2:14.
3. Severe asceticism 2:16, 20-23.
4. Worship of angels 2:18. Gnosticism
5. Glorification of human knowledge 2:8.

These heresies were a direct attack on the deity of Christ. They also rejected the completeness of Christ's atoning work.

For all these errors Paul had one remedy, a full knowledge of the fullness of God in Jesus Christ.

His devastating answer to the Gnostics was that in Christ the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell. Ch 1:19, 2:9.

Also, the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are embodied in Him. Ch. 2:3.

Paul's message throughout the epistle is in support of the deity of Christ, the efficacy of His atoning blood, His sovereignty and supreme Lordship, and His continuing mediator-ship.

In other words, Paul sets forth the eternal glory of the pre-existent, omnipotent, exalted and eternal Son of God.

No passage in the N.T. more fully sets these cardinal truths forth.

Colossians and Ephesians have been called twin epistles because of their many similarities.

Paul associates himself with Timothy.

Timothy found Christ in Lystra under Paul's ministry.

The brethren there commended him to the work as he manifested the spiritual graces that gave evidence of spiritual gifts.

Paul took Timothy with him in the work after the brethren had solemnly laid their hands on him for special service.

Chapter 1

v. 1 Paul was an "apostle" by the will of God.

God had commissioned him to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ among the Gentiles.

Paul also graciously links himself with the young man called Timothy.

v. 2 The epistle is addressed “to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ.”

The word “saints” means consecrated ones.

“Faithful brethren” means those who are consecrated live holy, devoted lives.

They are loyal, steadfast, dependable, devoted, conscientious.

Note the terms “in Christ” and “at Colosse”. The two spheres of Christian life, the heavenly and the earthly.

Grace and peace are again linked in the salutation.

Grace is God’s undeserved favor which we experienced in our salvation.

The thought here is that grace which is connected with our service, Romans 12:6, and with our growth in the Lord. 2 Peter 3:18.

“Peace” is the outcome as we experience that “grace” in our lives.

It garrisons our heart in the day of evil and supports us in disquieting circumstances.

v. 3 Note Paul’s thanksgiving.

With one exception, the epistle to the Galatians, Paul’s letters always begin with thanksgiving. This thanksgiving was to God and Christ.

“Praying always for you” – we constantly pray for you.

Paul knew, as few men have ever known, the great need for thanksgiving and for intercessory prayer for the people of God.

v. 4-5 There are three reasons given for this thanksgiving and prayer.

1. "Their faith in Christ Jesus."
2. Their love for all saints—fellow believers.
3. The hope that is laid up for you in heaven.

We begin our spiritual life by faith, we end it in hope, and the two are linked together in love.

Faith lays hold on the Christ of the Cross. Hope looks on to the glory. Love is the power that binds and secures the believers in view of both.

This faith, love, and hope are an evidence of the new nature imparted at the new birth.

It is also an evidence of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Hope also looks forward to the rapture, to the realization of the hope laid up in heaven.

This is the consummation of the believer's life of faith, love, and hope.

These truths and more are all revealed in the gospel when it is preached in its fullness.

v. 7a Stress the importance of preaching a full gospel and telling it to the nations The gospel revealed – it came unto you.

The gospel received – since the day you believed it.

The gospel reproduced – and bringeth forth much fruit.

v. 7 At this point we are introduced to Epaphras.

This man probably founded the church at Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

He was a man of God. To Paul he was a dear fellow-servant, a faithful minister. He also was a man of prayer. Ch. 4:12.

He visited Paul in prison and it was his report of conditions at Colosse that moved Paul to write this letter and asked that it should be read in Laodicea.

Who declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

This is the only reference to the Spirit in the epistle.

This is a precious testimony to the happy state of the young believers.

So recently converted from paganism, now called unto Jesus Christ, they were characterized by that love which the Spirit shed abroad in the hearts of believers.

Paul's prayers and thanksgiving for the Colossians v. 9-14

This section is divided into two parts.

1. In v. 9-11 Paul prays that certain blessings would come upon them.

2. He gives thanks for other blessings which are ours in Christ. v. 12-14.

There are some blessings which we have in Christ from the moment we believe and which we can never lose.

There are: 1. Our inheritance v.12; 2. Our deliverance v. 13; 3. Our redemption v.14.

Then there are supplementary blessings for which Paul prays and for which we need to pray constantly, lest we miss them and lose the enjoyment of them.

In the context these blessings are:

1. That we might be filled with a deeper knowledge of God's will which comes from true spiritual insight and understanding v.9.
2. That as our knowledge of God increases, our walk may become God-like and Christ-like. v. 10.
3. That we might experience that same spiritual dynamic and power that raised Christ from the dead, so that no matter our circumstances we can endure with patience, perseverance, and joy. v. 11.

Paul's thanksgiving centers around three things: our inheritance, our deliverance, and our redemption.

What an inheritance the believer has – an inheritance among them which are sanctified; it is eternal, it is incorruptible, and undefiled, and fadeth not away. We are heirs of God and joint-heirs of Jesus Christ.

What a deliverance the believer has – we have been delivered from the powers of darkness, from the course of this world, from the prince of the power of the air, from error, from impurity, from the unrestrained and tyrannical power of Satan.

We not only have been delivered, but we have been transferred into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

This kingdom is already in existence as a spiritual reality.

This would be the invisible church.

In the next age this kingdom will be visibly manifested.

What a redemption the believer has – it is through the blood of Christ, one of the accompanying blessings is the forgiveness of sins.

Notice the three “haths”, and the one “have”. These speak of present possession.

The Person and Work of Christ v. 15-22

The majesty of the incomparable Christ.

The pre-eminent glories of Christ.

Note the similarity of truth in John 1 and Hebrews 1.

Note the seven-fold superiorities of Christ in this passage.

Compare the seven-fold, self-humbling of Christ in Philippians 2.

Christ Preeminent

v. 15 “Who is the image of the invisible God.”

Christ is the visible expression, the representation and manifestation of God.

Christ is the exact likeness of the unseen God.

John 1:18 No man hath seen God at anytime, the only begotten Son, He hath declared Him, He hath perfectly told him forth.

God has existed from eternity as three persons, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, but never became visible to angels or men until Christ was born in Bethlehem.

John 14:9 “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.”

Hebrews 1:3 “Christ is the brightness of God’s glory” i.e. the outshining radiance.

He also was “the express image of God” i.e. He is the flawless expression of God.

“Oh fix our earnest gaze, so wholly Lord on Thee; That with Thy beauty occupied, we elsewhere none may see.”

The first expression here describes Christ’s relation to God the Father.

The second expression: “the firstborn of all creation,” describes His relation to creation.

This term refers to priority of position rather than of origin.

The meaning is clear in Psalm 89:27

“I will make Him My firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.”

The Lord is the principle and cause of creation. He is far above all creation. He is the Head as well as the Source.

Paul declares that Christ, as the eternal Son, holds the precedence over all creation for He is eternally preexistent and sovereign.

v. 16 Note Christ’s absolute supremacy over creation.

“In Him were all things created.” Note the prepositions, v. 16.

“All things have been created ‘through’ Him.”

“Creation has been created ‘for’ Him.”

Things visible and invisible were created by, in, and through Him.

Thrones, dominions, principalities, or powers were created for His glory.

He is superior to all of these, for He brought them into being.

v. 17 “He is before all things.”

As the Eternal Word, He existed before them all. See John 1:1, quote.

The authoritative statements of v. 16 and 17 express the priority, sovereignty, and continuity of Christ in relation to all creation.

He it is Who sustains the universe, for by Him all things hold together.

He holds the stars in their courses, directs the planets in their orbit, controls the laws of the universe.

“He is over all, God blessed forever.”

v. 18 Christ’s relation to the Church, the new creation.

“He is the head of the body, the church.”

The thought of Christ as the head of the body implies three great principles, life, unity, and sovereignty.

The Lord, in His relationship to the church, is the source of our spiritual life. He is the Guarantor of our spiritual unity. He is the supreme spiritual authority.

As the head, He bestows all life, controls all believers, they in turn should render to Him love and loyalty.

Chris then described as “the beginning.”

He is the originating power, the great energizing origin in connection with the church, His body.

Then follows a further statement: He is “the firstborn from the dead.”

This is in relation to time and is associated with His resurrection.

How important to the believers is the resurrection of Christ.

Our salvation and justification depend upon it. 1 Cor. 15.

Before the resurrection He was the Eternal Son of God.

In Romans 1:4 in the resurrection He was declared to be the “Son of God with power.”

By His resurrection, Christ became the Source of all spiritual power to all who receive Him.

Then finally God has made His Son head over creation, head over the church which is His body.

“That in all things He might have the preeminence.”

The Lord is above all others. He excels in all others. He is foremost among angels and men. He is supreme. He is first in everything.

He is first in the universe. He made it.

He is first in the church. He is the foundation and its head.

God has given Him this place in His economy. Let us give Him His place in the church and in our lives.

Christ’s relation to Redemption v. 19-20

“It pleases the Father that in Him should all fullness permanently dwell.”

This “fullness” encompassed all the attributes of deity.

All the divine perfections, the full nature of God, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit dwell in Him in full measure.

Deity in all of its perfection was manifested in Jesus our adorable Lord.

Here is divine truth that should stir the soul to thanksgiving and worship.

As we gaze upon His blessed face may we say: "Gazing on it we adore then, Blessed, precious, holy Lord; Thou the Lamb and ever worthy; This be earth's and heaven's accord."

Note at this point the ascendancy in Paul's spiritual exercise.

1. We see him at prayer v. 9-11.
 2. He engages his soul in thanksgiving v. 12-14.
 3. He ascends to the highest of spiritual activities, he loses himself in worship.
- v. 20-23 In the previous verses the Lord is presented as: The head of all creation and the head of the church, His body.

Christ as the mediator.

In the following verses He is presented as the mediator through whom reconciliation to God is brought to man and also to the universe.

There are two words in this verse which are very important, made peace and to reconcile.

Peace comes "through the blood of His cross."

This "peace" is the result of reconciliation with God.

The Scripture presents this peace in a twofold way.

1. Peace with God Romans 5:1.

2. Peace of God Philippians 4:9.

Both have their source in the God of peace Philippians 4:9.

The acceptance of Christ's atoning sacrifice through faith brings peace to the soul.

The truth of reconciliation is an important one.

It takes place in two spheres.

1. There is the present aspect.

2. There is the future aspect.

The present aspect is that the believer is reconciled to God at conversion.

The Lord brought about this reconciliation to God and the resultant praise through the blood of His cross.

This is amazing for v. 21 tells us that we were alienated and enemies by wicked works. Yet now we are reconciled through the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. V. 22. See Ephesians 2:12 "Made right by the blood of Christ."

In the second part of v. 22 we have the purpose of the redeeming work of Christ, that He might present you Holy - inward and outward, without blemish - absence of disfigurement, unreprouvable - the impossibility of any accusation against him.

The future aspect of this reconciliation is interesting.

"Reconcile all things unto Himself." V. 20

This statement has in view the new heaven and new earth, where redeemed man and elect angels will dwell in absolute harmony with God.

Sin broke this harmony, but the death of Christ will bring back reconciliation again.

Notice here that it is all things “in earth” and “in heaven” that are reconciled. V. 20

In Philippians 3 there are those spheres mentioned, heaven, earth, and under the earth.

The thought here is “subjugation,” not “reconciliation.”

There will be a total submission to Christ, willingly or unwillingly, in order that He may be acknowledged by all as Lord. Philippians 2:11.

v. 23 The first phrase of this verse has disturbed many.
“If ye continue in the faith.”

This has nothing to do with “eternal security.”

A paraphrase of the verse would be “As you continue in the faith, grounded in Christ, and settled in your own minds.”

The object here was that of testing profession.

There were some in fellowship who were grounded and settled in the faith and who had not been moved away from the hope of the gospel.

There were others, mere professors, who had accepted the heresies of the false teachers.

In doing so they had divorced themselves from all the blessings the gospel brought.

Note also the progress of the gospel. It had prospered throughout the Roman world, and had spilled over into other cultures, all within one generation.

v. 26 Paul rejoices in his suffering. He was in prison at the time of writing.

I rejoice in my sufferings for you for in these I am helping to complete the remainder of the sufferings of Christ for you, His body, the church.

As the servants of God endure suffering for the Church of God, they do so on behalf of Christ.

He suffers with them for the perfecting of the saints, for the body's sake which is the church.

v. 25 Paul was primarily a bond-slave of Jesus Christ.

He also was the servant of the church.

In the capacity of his God-given commission or stewardship, he made known the whole counsel of God, which was given to him by direct revelation.

This mystery was to past generations a "sacred secret."

God had not disclosed it to angels or men.

But now God had revealed it through Paul, now the sacred secret was an open secret.

The full wonder and splendor of God's plan for the Gentiles is that Christ is in them without degree or reservation.

Believing Jews and Gentiles are united by the baptism of the Holy Spirit into one Body.

Racial barriers have been swept away. The middle wall of partition has been removed.

The riches of the glory of this mystery is "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

v. 28 “Whom we preach.” We tell all who will listen about Christ.

Christ, the divine person, the anointed Savior, the revelation of god, the atonement for sin, the guide, satisfaction, and completion of life. He is the refuge of the past, the stay of the present, the hope of the future.

In reaching out to men with the Word, Paul warned them. “Warning every man.”

Warning the sinner of the wrath to come, warning the indifferent and careless, the presumptuous and willful.

Warning the delinquent believers, the Corinthian church.

“Teaching all men.”

Teaching is needed at every stage of the believer’s earthly pilgrimage.

The young believers need the milk of the Word.

Some others who have progressed need instruction proportionate to their capacity.

The fathers, the veterans, must have the strong meat of divine truth.

The warming and the teaching has to be done in all wisdom.

The ultimate aim/goal of this ministry is “that we might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”

Paul had a pastor’s heart and it was his ambition to bring every believer to full maturity in Christ. “Perfect.”

Stress the though of sanctification.

This is God’s will even your sanctification.

All true Spirit-given ministry is Christocentric = Christ centered.

It lifts up the Lord Jesus before the admiring gaze of His people who become so occupied with Him, that they lose sight of all else, and are transformed into His likeness.

v. 29 These truths expressed Paul's ardent desire for the people of God.

He strove to this end = He labored to the point of fatigue. Earnestly, contending.

Striving with superhuman energy as he was energized by Christ's almighty power.

Colossians 2

v. 1 “For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you” etc.

The thought here is “intense agony.”

This is a description of Paul at prayer.

The Colossian and Laodicean churches were being harassed by false teachers.

Paul was in prison and could not go to them and help, so “he agonized in prayer for them.”

One can sense the intensity of Paul’s feelings regarding (1) the preservation of the purity of the truth of God, and (2) the guarding of the people of God from heresies.

Paul’s soul was tortured when Christ was dishonored by those who profess His name.

v. 2 It was Paul’s burning desire that their hearts should be:

1. “Comforted.” United and strengthened, encouraged.

2. “Being knit together in love.” Bound and welded together in love. Unity is strength. The Lord commands the blessing where believers dwell together in unity. Psalm 133.

3. Paul also prayed that they should attain to the spiritual wealth that comes from a full understanding of the mystery of God, and of the Father and of Christ, who is God manifested in flesh, the embodiment of God’s wisdom and knowledge, the redeemer, mediator, and reconciler of men.

v. 3 “In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

In Christ is hidden the treasures of wisdom, the comprehensive insight into the ways and purposes of God.

Also hidden in Him is all knowledge, all the riches of spiritual enlightenment.

As we know Christ better and apprehend the truth concerning Him, every question is answered, every perplexity resolved, and every doubt dissolved.

Wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

God has spoken in His Son, and given us His holy Word. He also gave us the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth.

If our eyes are on Christ, if we are occupied with Him alone, we will not be led away by persuasive talk or enticing words.

To counteract the intellectualism of Gnosticism, Paul emphatically declares that all wisdom and knowledge is in Christ.

Because He is the image of God, ch. 1:15; He is the head of the church, ch. 1:18; He is the one in whom all fullness dwells, ch. 1:19; He is the redeemer from sin, ch. 1:20; He is the hope of glory, ch. 1:27; now he speaks of Christ as the one in whom is found complete divine revelation. “In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

v. 4 In the rest of this chapter Paul shows us that Christ is the antidote for human philosophy, Jewish legality, oriental mysticism, and fleshly asceticism.

What he had written of Christ in the previous verses was enough to keep them from being misled by the enticing words and plausible arguments of false teachers.

v. 5 Though there was evil rampant in the church, yet there was much to make him glad.

Paul was encouraged and rejoiced as he beheld their “orders” and “steadfastness” of their faith in Christ.

The terms mean “orderly array” and unyielding battle line.

Despite the error of the Gnostics and the persuasive arguments of the teachers, their faith in Christ remained unmovable. Be ye steadfast, unmovable, etc.

v. 6 As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.

As they had received Christ gladly for salvation, they were to continue to walk in Him for their sanctification. The Christian walk. Walk in good works Ephesians 2:10; Walk worthy of our vocation Ephesians 4:1; Walk circumspectly Ephesians 5:15.

v. 7 Paul reminds them that they are rooted in Christ. Abide in me, etc., just like a tree. John 15, see Psalm 1.

They are also built up in Christ. They were built upon a rock. Psalm 40, firm, strong, unmovable.

They were “established in the faith.” Epaphras had taught them the truth.

Their faith was being availed, but they were rooted and built up in Christ.

They were established in the faith which kept them from being diverted by speculative theories which deprive

Christ of His deity, His headship, or His creatorial power or His redemptive attributes.

v. 8 “Beware lest any man spoil you” – deceive you and carry you off body and soul through philosophy, intellectualism, delusive speculations.

Vain deceit – make believe, empty fantasies.

Tradition of men – instructions of men, ideas built on men’s thoughts, teachings in opposition to Christ’s teachings, legality.

The rudiments of the world – in the context, these would be Jewish ceremonialism and pagan practices, the speculative theories of Gnostics.

Today it would be the innovative notions of the world and the flesh. Consider.

The Gnostics with whom they were having trouble, made a great show of learning.

Their theories were the product of man’s philosophy.

They looked down from their imagined superior intellectual heights with contempt on all who believed the gospel and who accepted the Scriptures as being inspired.

Paul said “beware of such” and avoid their teachings, they are not of Christ.

v. 9 “For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.”

“In Him dwells permanently the entire fullness of deity in a bodily form.”

God in His fullness and the Spirit in His fullness dwell in the Lord.

God is no longer afar off, no longer just an idea, but He now is a blessed fact through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The word "Godhead" is found only here and is indicative of absolute deity.

The word "fullness" was a favorite one with the Gnostics. To them it represented absolute Deity.

In their reckoning Christ was but one of many intermediaries leading up to this fullness.

Paul by divine revelation and inspiration declares that Christ is the absolute fullness of God.

God is fully revealed in Christ; all God's glory shines on the face of Jesus Christ. God is fully told out in Christ. God is exactly like the Lord Jesus and Jesus is exactly like God. See 1 Timothy 3:16.

v. 10 "And ye are complete in Him."

You are filled full in Him. You have everything when you have Christ.

In the past there is the fullness of redemption in Him. Christ for yesterday.

In the present there is the fullness of life in Him. Christ for today.

In the future there is the fullness of glory in Him. Christ for tomorrow.

In Christ dwells all the fullness of God and we have our fullness in Christ.

This revelation should fill our heart with rapture, and our cup with joy, and satisfy every demand of the intellect.

Please note that this is not only a future state, but a present condition. "Ye are complete in Him."

"Who is the head of all principalities and power."

The Lord Jesus Christ is the highest authority and the supreme power over all authority and power.

The Gnostics put the Lord at the bottom of the line of angelic beings from God to earth.

But the awesome truth is that Christ is supreme over all spiritual beings, good or evil.

He is the Head over all angelic beings as well as human beings.

No place too high for Him is found. No place too high in heaven.

Christ is over all, God blessed forever.

v. 11 The Jewish ordinance of circumcision meant separation from evil and dedication to God. It was a cutting off of the flesh, a rolling away of the reproach of Egypt.

The circumcision of Christ is not a physical thing, it is a spiritual thing.

It speaks of the purification of the believer and involves his consecration to God.

This would include the ears, the lips, and the heart. The priests.

It is a putting off of the old nature, the sins of the flesh and a putting on of the new nature, withdrawing, yielding our members.

v. 12 Buried with Him in baptism.

In baptism the believer confesses to the world his identification with the rejected Christ.

He confesses the death of the flesh, the old man.

In baptism he confesses that he has died with Christ, that the old man is crucified. He also confesses that he is buried with Christ in baptism. This is typified in our submersion. Dead to the world, out of the world's sight.

Then Paul reminds us that we are also risen with Him.

This would remind us of our "emersion" from the water.

In this we confess to a new life in Christ, apart from the flesh, through faith in the power of God who raised Christ from the dead.

This new man in Christ is above all man-made regulations and rules.

v. 13 This verse reminds us that we were dead to God because of our sins; we were under the domination of the flesh, the old man.

Now in Christ we have been made alive, raised and seated with Him in the heavenlies.

All our sins and trespasses have been forgiven and eternally put away.

Truly the believer is complete in Christ.

v. 14 "The handwriting of ordinances that were against us."

This would refer to the Ten Commandments, these are the handwriting of God.

These commandments were against us and were contrary to us. They condemned us.

But in Christ the Law is satisfied, fulfilled (Romans 8:2) and done away with (Galatians 3:25; Hebrews 7:11).

Through His death on the cross He paid the debt, nailing them to His cross, and we believers are free.

“Jesus for thee a body takes, Thy guilt assumes, thy fetters break, Discharging all thy dreadful debt, And canst thou e’er such love forget?” by Henry Sweetser Burrage v. 14 reminds us of Christ’s death on the cross for us.

v. 15 reminds us of His resurrection and complete victory.

He has conquered all demonic powers. He has ascended to heaven in glorious triumph. He has made a spectacle of His foes, triumphing over them.

v. 16 Therefore an account of our freedom in Christ, we should not allow ourselves to be drawn back under the Law or legalism or man’s philosophy or man’s tradition.

The food, the drink, the holy days, the new moons, the Sabbaths were all kept by obedient Jews, and they were blessed for their obedience.

v. 17 Their rituals were but a shadow of things to come.

The substance or the body is found in Christ.

Once a person finds Christ, the substance, he no longer need to follow shadows.

v.18-19 Warning against mysticism v. 18 “Let no man beguile you of your reward.”

Let no man con you of your reward in Christ.

Let no one draw you with a false humility and the worship of angels.

Do not be deceived by artificial godliness. Forms but no power.

The false teachers made pretensions of knowing supernatural things by means of visions.

Introducing into those things they had not seen.

Paul says that despite what they say, the Incarnate Lord, crucified, buried, risen, ascended, is the only mediator between God and man. 1 Timothy 2:5.

v. 19 Those persons in their blind pursuit of mysticism reject Christ whom God has appointed the head of the church. The Headship of Christ.

From Him comes all spiritual growth, just like the vine and the branches (John 15).

Body life.

This life and growth then comes to the joints and bands, ligaments, they in turn minister to each other, thereby growing unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Consider the gifts given to the church for this purpose, Ephesians 4; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12.

Spiritual growth comes from vital union with the head, and grows according to God's design.

v.20-23 Warning against asceticism.

v. 20 In the last four verses the apostle has warned against seeking holiness through the traditions of men or false mysticism. Charismatics.

Now he warns them against asceticism. At this point he challenges believers as those who have died with Christ and are now new creatures.

“Wherefore, since ye have died with Christ, from the elements of the world, why do you behave as though you were still living in the world, subject to the ordinances and commandments of men?” Separation.

Those who have died in Christ to the world, the flesh, and the devil, should not submit to the yoke of ordinances which were meant for another dispensation. v. 21 v. 22 The believer is now reminded that that which spring from the commandments and doctrines of men will perish, inferring that the precepts of the Lord are all important and permanent.

v. 23 That which comes from man and is the product of the flesh, human wisdom, will-worship, false humility, asceticism, only satisfies the flesh and not God.

The believer should walk in the Spirit, he should be occupied with Christ, and should dwell in the Word.

This is the way to holiness which will become apparent as Christ lives out His life in us.

As one ceases from following man’s theories and looks by faith to Christ, he will be transformed into Christ’s glorious image.

This is God’s will for every believer.

Colossians 3

This section is the turning point in the epistle.

The first two chapters are doctrinal. The last two are practical, applying the truth.

v. 1 "Since ye have been risen with Christ."

After a lengthy digression in verse 13-23 of chapter 2, the apostle resumes the truth he had been teaching in v. 12. "We are risen in Him."

The believer is risen with Christ, glorious truth.

Resurrection power is at our disposal; we are not of the earth, we are of heaven.

As such we should "seek those things which are above."

Set our minds on the things which are above. A.S.V.

This means the whole personality, our whole being and life should be geared to heavenly things.

"Where Christ sits at the right hand of God."

v. 2 Reminds us that we should be a heavenly people.

Our affections, our mind, our thoughts, should be on things above.

We should seek the eternal, not the temporal.

As spiritual believers we should set our affections and concentrate our faculties on things above.

v. 3 "For ye are dead"

As far as the world is concerned we are dead.

Romans 6:2 Shall we continue in sin? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer in it?

Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ, etc. See also Galatians 6:14.

The believer is dead to the flesh, the world, i.e. the sin nature.

“Your life is hid with Christ in God.”

The believer’s life is now concealed and secured with Christ in God.

Our life in Christ is hidden in the sense that it is incapable of being touched or hurt by any evil power.

We have perfect security in this union with Christ.

v. 4 “When Christ our life shall appear, then ye shall also appear with Him in glory.”

Note first of all that Christ is our life.

Christ is all in all to believers.

We live by Him—the means. We live in Him—the union. We live to Him—the incentive. We live with Him—the fellowship.

When Christ shall appear brings to mind the two aspects of the Lord’s coming.

The Rapture for His Saints. The Appearance with His Saints.

Most believers love to contemplate the rapture. Describe.

Very often we consider this to be the end of the race.

We think of it as the time of resurrection and change, when those who have died in Jesus will be raised, when those alive will be changed, when this body of

humiliation will be changed into a body of glory like Christ's.

We rejoice that mortality will put on immortality, the corruptible body will put on incorruption, and we shall be transferred with the image of Christ.

This will be the fulfillment of the Lord's promise in John 14.

We will be received into the Father's house.

All of this beloved, blessed though it may be, it is but the introduction to the glories yet to be revealed in the Millennium and Everlasting Kingdoms.

When our Lord Jesus appears, then shall we also appear with Him.

v. 5 At this point we reach the practical teaching of the epistle.

This particular section extends from v. 5 to v. 17, and can be broken into two parts.

v. 5 - 11 The truths expressed here relate to ourselves and should be our personal judgment of our old ways.

v. 12 - 17 The truths expressed here depict our relationship to others, in particular to our fellow believers.

In Chapter 2 we have learned of our identification with Christ in His death.

v. 5 "Therefore" we are to put to death our lower nature.

We must deal unsparingly with the sins that are common in the world today.

We must learn to abhor all uncleanness.

Paul lists five sins in this verse that are to be avoided like a plague.

We should be dead to the following sins: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed which is a form of idolatry.

These sins had been practiced by the Colossians before conversion.

Now they were to be dead to them.

v. 6 These same sins brought down the wrath of God on the antediluvian world. They also caused God to rain fire upon the cities of the plain. For a believer to practice these sins today would certainly bring down the chastisement of God.

v. 7 Many of the Colossians had lived in these sins before they knew Christ, not knowing the heinousness of them. Now that they knew how dishonoring to God they were, they should be put to death.

v. 8 Then there are other sins which are less vile and abominable that are to be put off.

These are classified as the sins of the old man.

They are described as following: anger, passionate outbursts, ill-will, evil speaking, foul-mouthed abuse, anger, wrath, malice, slander, filthy communication.

v. 9 Lie not to one another—this was a common sin in those days.

The believer must put off the old man and his deeds.

v. 10 - 11 In the next two verses we are reminded that we have cast off the old man and have put on the new.

The new man is the man in Christ; the old man is the man in Adam.

The new man alone is capable of receiving instructions from God.

“Who is being renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him who created Him.”

As we receive divine truth, through the Spirit and apply it to our life, we come into a deep personal knowledge of Christ.

We also become more like the Lord through the Spirit’s sanctifying work.

This spiritual condition brings us into the sphere where there is no natural distinctions.

All barriers are destroyed in Christ.

The cultured Greek, the religious Jew, the barbarian, the Scythian (wild people outside the pale of normal civilization), whether slaves or free citizens, there is no distinction in Christ.

Christ is all and in all. Christ is all that matters; Christ is in them all.

Now we come to the second section of our passage.

Practical holiness by conformity to Christ in relation to others v. 12 - 17

We are now going to look at the believer’s new clothes.

Put on therefore as “the elect of God”—wonderful thought, chosen by God, foreknown from eternity past and made manifest in time.

“Holy and beloved”—set apart by God and dearly loved by Him.

These described should put on “compassion” – tender sympathy.

“Kindness” – showing the kindness of God to others.

These two garments are the inner garments.

The next one is a covering for the head, “Humbleness of mind.”

The natural inclination is to be proud.

The Lord was clothed with humility – a lovely attitude toward God.

“Meekness” – gentleness, “Longsuffering” – patience, the readiness to endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

The Lord is our perfect example here – A lowly attitude toward men.

v. 13 “Forbearing one another,” we must put up with one another.

We must also forgive one another, just as the Lord has freely forgiven us.

v. 14 Above all these spiritual attitudes, put on love.

Love is the girdle that binds all these new garments together.

Love never fails; but the greatest of these is love.

Love is the bond of perfectness, it binds the whole together in perfect unity.

v. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts.

Let this peace rule or umpire in your heart.

The thought here is that we should abide in constant communion with the Lord, so that our heart may be kept in peace, despite our circumstances.

v. 16 “Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

There are three admonitions in this verse.

These are seen if we put the punctuation after richly, after another, and after Lord.

We are urged to “let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly.”

This is the only time the Word of Christ is used in the New Testament.

The Word of Christ, the teaching of Christ given on earth and applied by the Holy Spirit is to dwell in full measure in our hearts.

Thus equipped and controlled by the Word of Christ we will be able to bless others also.

“In all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another.”

This should be the believer’s goal, teaching and helping one another.

We should share Christ with others.

Then, thirdly, as we are controlled by the Word of Christ, and as we share Christ with others, our heart will break into singing.

Expressed in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Psalms – songs from the book of Psalms.

Hymns – other songs of praise.

Spiritual songs – in contrast to secular songs.

“Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.”

This would imply thankfulness, gratitude, praise.

Holiness and happiness go together.

Nehemiah: “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Judah won a great victory when Jehoshaphat put the singers in the forefront of the army.

When a believer loses his praise, there is something spiritually wrong with him.

v. 17 In this verse the life of the believer is summed up. It is in subjection to God.

Whatever the believer does, whatever he says, he must do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, through whom he gives thanks unto God His Father.

Family Relations

In these verses, the Holy Spirit, who is not mentioned in the epistle, except incidentally in chapter 1:8, gives instructions regarding the earthly relationships of the new man.

This is a very important subject.

Both Paul in Ephesians and Peter in his first epistle mention the subject in greater detail.

There is no relationship in which believers filled with Spirit and Word can more blessedly manifest the divine union between Christ and the church than in the marriage bond.

Some marriages at best are difficult.

They are not what they were expected to be.

That sweet, loving, kind, submissive young lady develops into a self-assertive, uncooperative, merciless critic.

Though she professes her love for her husband, it is evident that she has lost respect for him.

Then there is that kindly, considerate, sacrificing, reasonable gentleman who becomes unreasonable, domineering, and selfish, and who develops other interests.

Circumstances arise in conditions like these that are hard for the flesh to take.

Will that marriage ever be the same again?

Can sanctity and compatibility be restored?

Can such a marriage be saved?

At this time Paul gives directives which should be accepted by every believer, thus ensuring a happy marriage and a blessed union.

v. 18 "Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands."

Be in subjection to your own husband.

Submission or subordination does not mean inferiority. It means that the husband, not the wife, is the head of the home.

Where the husband and wife have put off the old man and put on the new man there is unanimity, and happiness unparalleled in the world.

May I remind you at this time that marriage is divinely ordained and "is not to be entered into lightly."

Remember also according to the Word of God, it is not easily terminated.

“For better or for worse, until death do us part.”

There are only two things that can scripturally dissolve the marriage bond.

The first is death, 1 Corinthians 7; Romans 7. The second is adultery.

1 Corinthians 7 suggests that there may arise circumstances of unbearable cruelty and abominable conduct which can go beyond the limits of human endurance.

The wife or husband may choose to separate.

“As if in the Lord.”

In her submission to her husband, the wife should act as Christ acted while here on earth, submissive to His Father.

Was Christ a slave or inferior in any way to the other members of the Godhead. No!

Neither is the godly wife who is in submission to her husband.

v. 19 “Husbands love your wives, and be not bitter against them.”

This is where many husbands fail. They expect submission from their wives but give no Christ-like love in return.

To be the head of a household is a sacred responsibility given by God.

In exercising his authority the husband should have in mind the blessing, tranquility, and harmony of his home in the love of Christ.

“Be not bitter against them.”

The husband must love his wife and show her the care and consideration as unto the weaker vessel.

Sometimes this is a task that requires the help of all the garments provided for the new man.

Husbands love your wives and be not bitter against them.

Never treat them harshly “or with resentment.”

v. 20 Now we come to some instruction for children.

Note first of all how Paul deals first with the weaker and then the stronger.

He deals with the one in submission, then the one in authority.

First we have wives and then the husbands.

Then children and fathers.

Then servants and masters.

“Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord.”

In a child’s life, parents should be unto them what God is in relation to the parent.

Children who do not obey their parents when they are young will not obey God when they are older.

The natural heart is rebellious against authority.

Believers’ children should be examples of godly submission to their parents.

Submitting to and obeying one’s parents is well-pleasing to God.

It is the best way that any child or young person can show their love for the Lord.

v. 21 “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, lest they be discouraged.”

Lest they become sullen or morose, grow up with a feeling of inferiority.

Do not harass your children, do not irritate them by over-correction.

Parental rule and authority should never cause a child to be filled with indignation and contempt.

Parental discipline should draw the tender heart in love and obedience.

Despite our manhood, we must never forget the feelings of our child.

With this in mind, our discipline should be in love, and should stir tender affection and not resentment.

The Christian father should act toward his child in the same way that his Father, God, acts toward him.

v. 22-25 “Servants, obey your master in all things.”

When Paul addresses the servants, he goes into great detail.

In those days servants were slaves, not freemen who worked for wages.

They had no protection from cruel masters and did not have the privilege of changing masters at will.

v. 22 Note the exhortation, “Servants obey... in all things.”

This may have been hard and difficult, but the command was “to obey in all things.”

Not only to obey when they were being watched, as most men do, but to serve them at all times with ungrudging service.

v. 23 Their secular service was to be done heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men.

This must have been encouraging to the slaves who faithfully toiled day after day with no recognition from their masters.

v. 24 They were encouraged by Paul to continue in their faithfulness to their master.

Eventually the Lord would reward them accordingly by giving them an eternal inheritance.

He reminds them again, “Ye serve the Lord Christ.”

v. 25 The faithful servant is urged to keep on giving diligent service because the unfaithful servant will be paid back in due course.

The judgment seat of Christ.

God will show no partiality. He is not a respecter of persons.

Chapter 4:1

“Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal.” Right and fair.

In every instance Paul speaks to the new man in Christ, he is not speaking to the unbeliever.

The believing master is to treat his servants in the same way as the Lord would treat them.

He has to be fair and just, knowing that he has a Master in heaven to whom he will give account.

What marvelous principles these were and are for the days in which we live.

Colossians 4

v. 2 “Continue in prayer.” Continue steadfastly in prayer, persevere in prayer, devote yourself to prayer.

One of the most common sins among Christians today is prayer-less-ness.

We are exhorted to pray by many of the Biblical writers.

“Men ought always to pray and not to faint.”

“Pray without ceasing.” Evening, morning, and noon will I pray.

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit.

Praying in the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is the Christian’s vital breath, it is the life of the new man. One cannot live a victorious life apart from prayer.

One’s service cannot be faithful apart from prayer.

The soul flourishes in the atmosphere of prayer.

Prayer is communion with God.

Our Lord retired to the desert mountain or garden to commune with God.

From such seasons of fellowship He returned to do some of His mightiest deeds.

Our testimony and service will be fruitless without it.

We cannot pray effectively if we are not communing with God each day.

“Watch in prayer with thanksgiving.”

Be alert in prayer, be wide awake in prayer, give your whole mind to prayer. Watch for the answers.

“With thanksgiving.”

Thanksgiving for past blessing should accompany prayer for present and future blessing.

We ought to be grateful to God and lavishly express our thanks to Him for His blessing, small and great. Describe the human aspect.

God loves to give, but He delights to hear us say “Thank you.”

v. 3 Paul is the greatest preacher and teacher of this dispensation.

He, above all, realized the power of prayer in his ministry, and so he requested the prayer of God’s people for his work.

“Praying also for us that God would open a door of utterance unto us.”

He asks the Colossians to include him in their prayers.

He asks them to pray particularly that God would open doors for the preaching of Christ, for whom I am in chains.

Paul at this time was a Roman prisoner. This was his first imprisonment.

Many in like circumstances had given up in despair as they languished in prison.

Not so Paul. His spirit was restless; the evangelist within him cried out for new opportunities for service.

He asked for prayer that new doors of utterance would be opened.

God heard these prevailing prayers and answered.

From the gloom of the cell came the revelation of God, The Prison Epistles. At a later day then came The Pastoral Epistles.

These letters have brought countless blessings to many millions throughout the centuries.

Prison guards were also reached, many in Caesar's palace heard the gospel and believed.

The lesson here is this: do not let circumstances get you down, but use them, through prayer, to turn defeat into victory.

The prayers of God's people opened up doors of utterances to preach Christ in a special and powerful way.

v. 5 "Walk in wisdom, toward them that are without, redeeming the time."

Show tact in your behavior to the outside world, making the most of every opportunity to share Christ.

We should always be alert to tell people of Christ, we must seize every opportunity in the light of the Judgment Seat of Christ.

As we witness we must use wisdom, tact, and our life must be commensurate with our witnessing.

v. 6 "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how you ought to answer every man."

Be kindly, make your message attractive, study to find the best way to talk to each person.

Closing Salutation v. 7-18

This last portion is mainly a study of personalities.

We do not know much about Tychicus.

He is mentioned twice in this epistle and also in Ephesians 6:21-22.

Paul speaks of him in both passages as a “beloved brother” and a “faithful minister.”

Tychicus was a much loved brother and fellow-worker.

He adds a third expression in this passage “a fellow servant in the Lord.”

Quite a commendation from Paul to Tychicus.

In Tychicus we see a combination of the shepherd’s heart and the prophet’s spirit.

Men of such caliber are rare today.

Paul sent this beloved fellow-servant and Onesimus to Colosse to tell them of his present circumstances so that they may be encouraged.

v. 9 Onesimus.

This brother is described as being “faithful and beloved.”

Being young in the faith, he was not so mature as Tychicus, but he was faithful and much-loved.

We know more about him than most of the others mentioned.

The short letter to Philemon tells us a lot about him.

He was Philemon’s slave. He had stolen from his master, and then ran away to Rome.

While there he met Paul and was brought to know the Lord.

Paul eventually sent him back to Philemon accompanied by Tychicus who carried the personal letter from Paul to Philemon.

The letters to Ephesians and Colossians were carried at the same time.

v. 10 Aristarchus.

This brother was also a prisoner.

In Acts 19 we see that he was a Macedonian traveling with Paul.

He endangered his life for the sake of the gospel at Ephesus.

He is also mentioned as a fellow-laborer with Paul.
Philemon 24

His name would imply that he belonged to the upper class.

He had renounced all earthly prestige to become a servant of Jesus Christ and ultimately a prisoner.

Mark

Mark was the nephew of Barnabas.

Years before he had been the cause of serious contention between Paul and Barnabas, these two men of God.

John Mark had left the first missionary team at a crucial time and returned to his mother in Jerusalem. Paul had lost confidence in him.

On the second missionary journey Barnabas wanted to take Mark with them, but Paul adamantly refused. The controversy ended in separation.

Over the years Mark had proved his recovery and restoration, and Paul says to allay any apprehension, welcome him when he visits you.

Paul mentions him as his fellow-laborer in Christ in Philemon 24.

Finally he urges Timothy to bring Mark with him when he comes to see Paul.

v. 11 Jesus or Joshua called Justus.

This brother's recommendation was that he was just. He was a man of integrity.

The aforementioned were all converted Jews.

They worked with Paul for the extension of Christ's kingdom, they were also a great comfort to Paul in his present circumstances.

v. 12-13 Epaphras.

This man was one of their own assembly. He was a servant or slave of Christ. He was always wrestling fervently in prayer for his brothers in Christ, laboring constantly in the work-Gospel.

The burden of his prayers was that they would stand firm despite the teaching of the false teachers. He prayed that their faith would mature, and that they would understand God's perfect will.

This brother was a man of prayer. He was a man who cared for the well-being of the saints.

He was the one who in his concern for the spiritual state of the Colossian church, acquainted Paul of the conditions, which, in turn, drew forth this letter.

He had considerable ability as a preacher and teacher.

It was probably through him that the assembly was formed at Colosse.

Many had found Christ through his preaching.

He also taught the believers God's word.

Then he prayed that they would enter into the truth, in all its fullness.

This earnest apostle of prayer had not confined his efforts to Colosse, but he had an intense interest in the Laodicean and Hierapolis assemblies.

v. 14 "Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you."
Luke our dear doctor.

Luke was one of Paul's most devoted associates.

He joined Paul's company in Acts 16.

Thereafter in Acts the pronoun "they" was changed to "we".

Faithful, beloved Luke stayed with Paul to the end and possibly saw him martyred.

Demas

For a time he was faithful in the work, he was a devoted helper of Paul.

But Demas failed miserably. 2 Timothy 4:10-11

"Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and hath departed into Thessalonica."

During Paul's second imprisonment, somehow he fell in love with the world, and he left him at a crucial time.

He thought the itinerant preacher's task too hard and dangerous with no monetary rewards.

In Paul's greatest time of need he left him.

There is no record of him falling into open sin.

He went back to Thessalonica, possibly went into some kind of business, and became a nominal member of the assembly.

He loved the present world, he chose the easy path.

v. 15 At this point salutations are sent to the Laodicean brethren.

Nymphas

He was probably the leading brother among them.

The local church also met in his home.

v. 16 This verse would suggest that Paul's letters were circulated among the early churches.

This epistle to the Colossians was to be read in Laodicea.

Then a letter which had been sent to Laodicea was to be read in Colosse.

This may have been the letter to the Ephesians.

v. 17 And say to Archippus, "Take heed to the ministry," etc.

This is a special message to this brother. He was a servant of the Lord.

He may have been slackening off in his work.

So Paul exhorts him to attend to the work that God had given him, and discharge it completely.

v. 18 Paul wrote this parting greeting.

I, Paul, add this greeting in my own handwriting.

Pray for me in my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen.

Paul ends each of his letters with a message about grace.

He was the apostle of grace.

We began our Christian life by grace, we are kept by grace, it is grace that will lead us home.