

ROOTED



*Having been firmly **rooted** and now being built up in Him
and established in your faith.
Colossians 2:7*

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

Lesson Seven

(1:1-20)

Salutation (1:1-2)

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

V. 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus By The Will Of God – Unlike the close partnership Paul knew with the Philippians, Paul was known to the people of Colossae only by reputation. Paul was careful to identify himself, then, with the most important fact about himself—he was the Lord’s apostle. The word “apostle” means “one sent forth.” Paul was writing this epistle as the special emissary of Christ, and every indication of this epistle is that the people of Colossae acknowledged Paul as such. (For other historical background on Paul, see comments on Phil. 1:1.)

And Timothy Our Brother – Timothy was with Paul in Rome at the writing of this epistle. Like Philippians, this was written during the time of Paul’s imprisonment (Col. 4:10, 18). There is no indication whether the Colossian Christians knew Timothy personally.

V. 2 To The Saints And Faithful Brethren In Christ – Saints are simply “holy people” who are “set apart” for God’s own ownership and use. The word “faithful” would describe those who are loyal to Christ and believe the Gospel. Paul did not usually use the word “faithful” in addressing his readers. He may have done so here in recognition of the fact that not all people in Colossae were “faithful”—some were guilty of a dangerous new heresy. So it is to the “faithful” among them that this epistle is addressed.

At Colossae – Colossae (pronounced “kah LOSS ee”) was a city of Phrygia in southwest Asia Minor. The main road from Ephesus across Asia Minor to the Euphrates River passed through it. Travel along this road had brought Greek philosophy from the west and mystery religions from the east. In addition, there was a sizeable settlement of Jews who had come from Babylon—not orthodox Jerusalem—in the second century B.C. These diverse elements help to explain the rise of the “Colossian heresy.”

Paul had evangelized this area indirectly (Acts 19:10) during his stay in Ephesus. Paul taught men such as

Epaphras who then carried the gospel back to their own cities (1:7).

The epistle to the Colossians is closely tied to both Ephesians and Philemon. It is tied to Ephesians by having the same person deliver it (Tychicus) and by having a remarkable similarity of contents. Of the 155 verses in Ephesians, 73 are said to have direct parallels in Colossians. It is tied to Philemon because Onesimus accompanied both epistles, Archippus received messages in both, and the same associates (Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke) sent greetings in both. It seems likely that all three epistles were written closely together and delivered at the same time.

Grace To You And Peace From God Our Father – See the comments on this standard Pauline greeting at Phil. 1:2.

Prayer For The Colossians (1:3-14)

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—so among yourselves, from the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

9 And so, from the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with you, 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

V. 3 We Always Thank God, The Father Of Our Lord Jesus Christ, When We Pray For You – No one has the right to go around straightening out people for whom he does not pray. Paul had earned the right to correct their heresy—not just by virtue of his apostleship, but by virtue of his genuine concern and thankfulness for these brethren.

V. 4 Because We Have Heard Of Your Faith In Christ Jesus – Paul has heard of the progress of the gospel

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

among the Colossians from Epaphras, who was now in Rome with him (4:12; Philemon 23). Their “faith” in Christ was not only belief, but also “trust” in him and “loyalty” to him. All this is included in the Greek word for faith.

Epaphras was apparently also Paul’s source of information about the heresy. Paul had heard both good and bad, but he preferred to begin with emphasis on the good.

And Of The Love Which You Have For All The Saints – This word for “love” (*agape*) was used exclusively for the Christian kind of love. It was more than feeling; it was commitment. It never counted the cost, it never calculated the profit. It was the identifying mark of Jesus' disciples (John 13:35).

V. 5 Because Of The Hope Laid Up For You In Heaven – It is the hope of every Christian to join the Lord and dwell with him in heaven’s glory. (See 1:27; 3:4 and Eph. 1:18.)

Of This You Have Heard Before In The Word Of The Truth, The Gospel – This was no new message. There is only one gospel (Gal. 1:6-9), they had heard it; and it is true. Anything different being taught by the teachers of this new heresy (2:8-23) was not true.

V. 6 As Indeed In The Whole World It Is Bearing Fruit And Growing – Paul wanted them to know that the Colossian heresy was a local and inferior doctrine. Those false teachers did not have an exclusive franchise in merchandising truth—the truth was already spreading worldwide! (See 1:23.)

So Among Yourselves, From The Day You Heard And Understood The Grace Of God In Truth – The gospel, as received by them, was the truth. It did not need to be supplemented by the philosophical speculations of the false teachers. Any attempt to improve the gospel would only negate God’s grace.

V. 7 As You Learned It From Epaphras Our Beloved Fellow Servant – Epaphras was originally from Colossae (4:12). When he accepted Christ, he became Paul’s co-worker, soon returning to Colossae with the gospel. Now he was a fellow prisoner (Philemon 23) with Paul in Rome. When Paul called him a fellow “servant” here, he used the word meaning “slave.” (See comments on Phil. 1:1.)

He Is A Faithful Minister Of Christ On Our Behalf – The word “minister” has nothing to do with the modern concept of a minister as a clergyman. It meant simple “one who serves.”

V. 8 And Has Made Known To Us Your Love In The Spirit – Thus Paul had first-hand information from Epaphras about their love (v. 4).

V. 9 We Have Not Ceased To Pray For You – Obviously Paul did not spend every waking moment in prayer just for these people. Rather, he made them a regular and permanent part of his prayer list.

Filled With The Knowledge Of His Will In All Spiritual Wisdom And Understanding – It is not just knowledge of God, but the knowledge of God’s will that the Christian should seek. This knowledge takes two forms: wisdom, the practical application; and understanding, the clear insight into each situation. Both operate under the description “spiritual.”

V. 10 To Lead A Life Worthy Of The Lord, Fully Pleasing To Him – Right knowledge must lead to right behavior. Knowledge is never an end in itself. The purpose of gaining knowledge—and the purpose for which Paul prayed—was that the Colossians might live (“walk”) their lives in such a way as to please God.

The worthy kind of life is identified by a string of participles which follow: bearing fruit, growing in knowledge, being strengthened, and giving thanks.

Bearing Fruit In Every Good Work – To “bear fruit” is to be productive, to accomplish the intended aim. Notice that good works are not the basis of our right standing with God; but the fruit which results from it.

Increasing In The Knowledge Of God – In the first century, there were the beginnings of what emerged in the second century as Gnosticism, the major heresy of the early church. Gnostics (from the Greek *gnosis*, “knowledge”) claimed to have the secret knowledge which alone could give a man access to God. Their teachings were a blend of Greek philosophy, eastern mysticism, Jewish legalism, and a smattering of orthodox Christianity.

It is not possible to determine the extent to which Paul was writing against an early form of this Gnosticism. It is clear, however, that Paul is careful to keep knowledge in proper perspective, and to keep Christ as the source of real knowledge.

V. 11 May You Be Strengthened With All Power, According To His Glorious Might – It is true in both religion and physics that all energy comes from God. Man never creates power; he only learns to harness it. (Compare Eph. 1:18-20; 3:20-21.)

For All Endurance And Patience With Joy – Endurance is the ability to “bear up under” difficult situations. Patience is the “long-tempered” ability to put up with difficult people. While both these virtues were admired by Greek philosophers, Paul added a quality quite foreign to their thinking: with joy!

V. 12 Giving Thanks To The Father, Who Has Qualified Us – Despite the fact that God had “made sufficient” all his children, certain false teachers in Colossae were pronouncing them disqualified (2:18). Let

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

no man attempt to undo, improve, or otherwise change what God had done!

To Share In The Inheritance Of The Saints In Light – Those whom God has qualified will finally join him and live with him in heaven. He who dwells in “unapproachable light” (I Tim. 6:16) will open his eternal tents to his children.

V. 13 He Has Delivered Us From The Dominion Of Darkness – Literally, “rescued us.” The dominion of darkness (Luke 22:53) refers to the present earthly state as opposed to God’s eternal kingdom. We are no longer subject to the “world rulers of this present darkness” (Eph. 6:12), for God has called us “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (I Pet. 2:9).

And Transferred Us To The Kingdom Of His Beloved Son – When ancient kings won a military victory, they would often carry out a mass deportation of the conquered people. The Old Testament tells how Israel was transferred to Assyria and how Judah was transferred to Babylon. Christians have thus been transferred into Jesus’ kingdom—but not in defeat. They will reign with him! (See II Tim. 2:12.)

V. 14 In Whom We Have Redemption – Redemption means “paying the ransom price.” The debt was our own sin, and the price was Jesus’ blood (Eph. 1:7; I Pet. 1:18-19).

The Forgiveness Of Sins – Sin is the guilty act of “missing the mark.” Forgiveness is the act of “sending away” or dismissing sins, as made possible by the substitutionary death of Christ.

Lord Of Creation And Lord Of The Church (1:15-20)

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation, 16 for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 He is therefore all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. 19 For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

V. 15 He Is The Image Of The Invisible God – In order to appreciate properly the importance of these verses, it will be necessary to understand something of first century thinking. Many of the ancient philosophers understood the universe in terms of “dualism.” This meant that God = spirit = good, while physical material = evil. The Gnostics later developed this line of thinking with

these results: God is absolutely good and absolutely separate from contact with the blemished universe; Jesus was spiritual and did not possess flesh and blood; man is a good spirit inhabiting an evil body. Either he must free himself from fleshly contamination by seeking knowledge (*gnosis*) and denying all physical desires, or he can turn his body loose to do every base desire, knowing it is only his body—not his spirit—which does the evil.

The heart of the Colossian heresy was a failure to understand who Jesus is, so Paul began here. Jesus is the “making visible” of the invisible God. As the “image” of God, Jesus is not just a feeble copy of the original, but the illumination of God’s very core and essence. While no man had ever seen God (John 1:18), Jesus could say in fullest truth, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). The scriptures further state, “He is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature” (Heb. 1:3). (See John 12:45 and II Cor. 4:4, 6.)

The First-Born Of All Creation – The emphasis of the word “first-born” is supreme rank or authority. While the word originally referred to the fact that the eldest son had been “born first,” it later came to refer to his special rank. This emphasis on rank, not time of birth, may be clearly seen in Ex. 4:22 and Psalm 89:27.

Jesus is never spoken of in the scriptures as “created.” His relationship with the Father is not that of a manufactured object, but that of a begotten Son. The heresy that God first existed alone and later “created” Jesus was taught by Arius in the fourth century and is promoted by Jehovah’s Witnesses today. (Compare Gen. 1:1; John 1:1; and Heb. 13:8.)

V. 16 For In Him All Things Were Created – The Jehovah’s Witnesses have changed their Bible to read “all other things were created,” in order to make room for Jesus as a created thing himself. God’s Word, on the other hand, clearly teaches that all created things were made through the Son, who already existed in the beginning (John 1:1-3).

In Heaven And On Earth, Visible And Invisible – To counter the Colossian heresy that angels should be worshipped (2:18), Paul affirmed that all beings—even angels—were created through and for the Son. Paul even used terminology from current Jewish speculations to refer to whatever ranks of angels there may be: thrones, dominions, principalities, authorities. (See also Col. 2:15; Eph. 3:10, 6:12; and Rom. 3:38.)

V. 17 He is Before All Things – As F. F. Bruce has said, “No matter how far back we may press in our imagination, we can never reach a point of which we may say, with Arius, ‘There was once when He was not.’”

In Him All Things Hold Together – The scriptures clearly teach that Jesus was not only the effective agent

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

through whom the universe was created; he is also the sustaining power that holds it together (Heb. 1:2-3). Contrary to the teaching of ancient dualism, God is very much involved in the physical world—in and through his Son Jesus Christ.

V. 18 He Is The Head Of The Body, The Church – The description of Christ and his church as head and body is not found in Paul’s writings before Ephesians and Colossians. It is a key concept here, allowing the Christian to get a proper perspective of himself and his Lord. The head exercises control and direction; the body obeys and performs the work. The church (*ekklesia*, “called out ones”) is a collective body of believers. There was no provision for a separate and elite group of “knowers of secret knowledge” within the body. (See Col. 2:19.)

He Is The Beginning, The First-Born From The Dead – The “beginning” was a favorite word among philosophers for that origin, source, or first cause from which all things resulted. Jesus was this, and more. He was also raised from the dead, and shall have supreme rank (“first-born”) over all those who pass through death into life everlasting. In all things, Jesus shall be “pre-eminent,” taking first place.

V. 19 For In Him All The Fulness Of God Was Pleased To Dwell – It was the ultimate Gnostic aim to divide the “fulness” of God into many levels, each represented by a rank of angels slightly less divine than the rank above. To forewarn us against any such deception, Paul made it plain: all the fulness was found in Jesus Christ—bodily (2:9).

V. 20 And Through Him To Reconcile To Himself All Things – God’s eternal purpose has always been the reconciliation of men to himself. The avenue of reconciliation for men is not meritorious achievement or secret knowledge, but Christ. He alone is the way to the Father (John 14:6). (See also Rom. 5:10; II Cor. 5:18-20; and Eph. 2:16.)

Whether On Earth Or In Heaven – No one anywhere, not even the angels, can hope to secure reconciliation to God through any other means.

Making Peace By The Blood Of His Cross – Jesus indeed took on himself a body of flesh and blood; and with this body, he paid the price of sin. He forever excluded Jewish reliance on animal sacrifice; he forever destroyed Gnostic contempt for the flesh. (See Eph. 2:13-17.)

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What was the background of Colossae? Had Paul ever been there? What diverse religious and philosophical elements were present?

2. What two words are always found at the opening of Paul’s epistles? What particular relevance would they have had for the Colossians? (Note 1:12; 2:16, 18.)
3. What did the Colossians have which marked them as real Christians? (V. 4-5)
4. What is known about Epaphras?
5. What is the purpose of knowledge?
6. What constitutes living a life pleasing to the Lord?
7. Can we qualify and disqualify one another in the family of God?
8. What is the relationship of Jesus to God the Father? What is his relationship to the created universe?
9. Is there any provision for an elite body of “super-saints” within the body of Christ? Are there people today who try to promote this kind of division?
10. How was God “in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (II Cor. 5:19)?

Lesson Eight

(1:21 – 2:5)

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

Christ In You, The Hope Of Glory (1:21-29)

21 And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22 he has not reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, 23 provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, 25 of which I became a minister according to the divine office which was given to me for you, to make the words of God fully known, 26 the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to his saints. 27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. 29 For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me.

V. 21 And You, Who Once Were Estranged – The word for “estranged” was used to describe what was alienated, separated, and even in medical language for what had been surgically removed. Sin had caused this alienation from God, which is graphically described in Eph. 2:1-3, 11-12.

And Hostile In Mind – The word for “hostile” was the standard word for an “enemy” in the Greek language. Sin had produced separation from God, and separation had produced hostility. Whether consciously or subconsciously, the guilty sinner harbors a suspicious resentment toward God.

Doing Evil Deeds – As it seems plain also in Eph. 2:1-3, this separation and hostility are not God's doing. The sinner himself is guilty of “doing evil deeds,” and this is what separates him from God.

V. 22 He Has Now Reconciled – The work of salvation was initiated by God, not man, while man was still dead in his sins (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:5). The great gulf of separation was crossed by God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Why was Paul reviewing these obvious facts about God's plan of salvation? Answer: He was building the basis for an attack against the teaching of the Colossian heretics. They were teaching salvation by the attainment of special knowledge and the achievement of rigorous self-denial (2:8-23). Paul wanted to remind them that salvation

was a gift of God's grace, not a reward for man's goodness.

In His Body Of Flesh By His Death – Paul's continuing emphasis on blood and death (1:20, 22, 24; 2:9, 12, 14) seems to indicate that the false teachers of Colossae were trying to minimize the truth of the incarnation. Perhaps they were beginning to teach, with the fully-developed Gnostics of the second century, that Jesus could not have really died on the cross. He was actually laughing at the soldiers from the clouds while they crucified a phantom.

Modern theology also tries to preach a “bloodless” Christianity. It remains the true core of the gospel, however, that Jesus historically lived, died, and rose again.

In Order To Present You Holy And Blameless And Irreproachable Before Him – When men lose sight of the truth about God, they also lose sight of the truth about themselves. Even in the midst of outward righteousness (2:16-23), the Colossians still needed a strong exhortation toward right ethical behavior (3:1-4:6). God's purpose in saving them was to make them holy (“set apart”), blameless (“without blemish”), and irreproachable (“not liable to accusation, not able to be charged with fault”).

V. 23 Provided That You Continue In The Faith – God's plan for salvation is dependent upon the continuing cooperation of the saved. They must persevere in their commitment to Christ.

Stable And Steadfast, Not Shifting – Paul wanted the Colossians to be stable (“built on a foundation”), steadfast (“firmly seated”), and not shifting (“moving around from place to place”). Otherwise they would be “tossed by the waves and blown around by the winds” of false doctrine (Eph. 4:14).

From The Hope Of The Gospel Which You Heard – Just as in Gal. 1:9, the Christians were considered competent to judge for themselves the teachings they heard. Is the teaching in line with the gospel as originally preached? If not, it is false. The original gospel message is true.

Which Has Been Preached To Every Creature Under Heaven – Paul again pointed to the test of universality. (See Col. 1:6 and Rom. 1:8.) The teaching of certain Colossian digressives was a local, inferior heresy.

And Of Which I, Paul, Became A Minister – Paul was a “servant” (1:7) of the gospel. Paul was not in charge of the gospel; the gospel was in charge of him.

V. 24 Now I Rejoice In My Sufferings For Your Sake – Mention of the gospel and his own service gave Paul occasion to speak briefly of his own toiling and suffering (1:24 – 2:5). Refer back to Phil. 1:12-30; 2:17-

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

18; 4:4, 11-19 for Paul's attitude toward this imprisonment.

In My Flesh I Complete What Is Lacking In Christ's Afflictions For The Sake Of His Body – What was lacking in Christ's afflictions? Was his atoning death inadequate? What more was needed? Only this: someone had to tell men of Christ's death for them (Rom. 10:14) or—for them, at least—Christ would have died in vain. Christ suffered to pay, Paul suffered to tell.

For The Sake Of His Body, That Is, The Church – Paul could make an easy transition from the Lord's flesh body to his church body. He also saw the church body as continuing in the role of suffering servant, just as the flesh body did. Paul's own part in this suffering was gladly accepted.

V. 25 Of Which I Became A Minister – Just as Paul was a servant of the gospel (v. 23), he was also a “servant” of the church.

According To The Divine Office Which Was Given To Me For You – “Divine office” is an unfortunate translation for the “stewardship of God” which was given to Paul. Just as a trusted servant who is put in charge of a house responsibility. Paul became an entrusted carrier of the gospel. Paul was not magnifying himself or his job responsibility (“office”); the opposite was true. He minimized himself and glorified the Lord.

To Make The Word Of God Fully Known – This was Paul's job responsibility. This was what he did to “complete what was lacking in Christ's afflictions.”

V. 26 The Mystery For Ages And Generations – In the Bible, the word “mystery” does not mean something that will always be difficult to understand. The word simply means a secret—something one would never know until told (I Cor. 2:9). Through all the centuries of time, until the very day at Calvary, no man knew that God would sacrifice his own Son for the sins of the world.

But Now Made Manifest To His Saints – Now the secret has been told; the plan has been exposed. All God's people can now see how God worked from the very beginning of creation to accomplish salvation through his Son.

V. 27 To Them God Chose To Make Known – God kept secret his gospel plan, not even allowing angels to look into it (I Pet. 1:12). Then at the point in history chosen by God (Gal. 4:2-4), he brought his plan out into the open.

How Great Among The Gentiles Are The Riches Of The Glory Of This Mystery – The real beauty of God's plan was that unlike the covenant made with Abraham and his descendants, the gospel plan included the Gentiles! Thus, as Paul said in the next verse, every man is warned and taught and intended to stand before Christ.

Which Is Christ In You, The Hope Of Glory – This is the precious core of the mystery: Jesus died for us to live in us. Our only hope of participating in the glory of God—here or in heaven—is by Christ dwelling in our hearts (Eph. 3:17). As William Temple put it:

“It is not good giving me a play like Hamlet or King Lear and telling me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it; I can't. And it is no good showing me a life like that of Jesus and telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it; I can't. But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me then I could write plays like that. And if the Spirit of Jesus could come and live in me, then I could live a life like that.”

Christ in you is the same as the Holy Spirit. (See John 14:21, 23; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; Rom. 8:9).

In the final analysis, the “hope of glory” is the hope of the Christian to join the Lord in heaven and dwell there with him in his glory (Col. 1:5; 3:4; Eph. 1:14).

V. 28 Him We Proclaim, Warning Every Man And Teaching Every Man In All Wisdom – The proclaiming of Christ is done in two stages. The word for “warning” has to do with the will and feelings of a man, and leads toward a commitment of that man's will to Christ. The word for “teaching” has to do with the development and guidance of the intellect. These two words rightly belong together if the man is ever to be presented “complete” in Christ.

That We May Present Every Man Mature In Christ – Notice that Paul has said “every man” three times in this verse. He was not interested in developing an elite group of super-saints, as the Gnostics later tried to do. It was Paul's goal that every convert should “grow up to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

V. 29 For This I Toil – This is a strong word, implying toil to the point of weariness or exhaustion (Phil. 2:16).

Striving With All The Energy Which He Mightily Inspires With Me – “Striving” was a common athletic term for participating in a great contest. The intensity of the word (*agonizomai*) can be seen in the English derivative “agonize.” Paul was not toiling and striving on his own, however. His strength came from God's “energy which was being energized in him with power” (*dynamis*). This same inner strength was available to the Colossians (1:11) and to us (Eph. 3:20-21).

Christ, The Mystery Of God (2:1-5)

I For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you, and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

seen my face, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged as they are knit together in love, to have all the riches of assured understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, of Christ, 3 in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with beguiling speech. 5 For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

V. 1 For I Want You To Know How Greatly I Strive For You – “The same Greek word for “strive” is used both here and in the preceding verse.) Paul’s whole ministry was devoted to the spiritual progress of all his converts. This also included all the new Christians converted through the agency of his helpers, as in the case of the Colossians. Paul also continued to strive for these people in his prayers (1:9). Perhaps this verse speaks of both his ministry and his prayers.

And For Those At Laodicea – Laodicea was a neighboring city which lay about ten miles to the northwest of Colossae. The city is important in New Testament study because of the mention of “the epistle out of Leodicea” (4:16) and the message given to the church there in Rev. 3:14-22.

And For All Who Have Not Seen My Face – In many nearby cities, such as Hierapolis (4:13), there were Christians who knew Paul only through his assistants. Paul’s toil and prayers were extended in their behalf as well.

V. 2 That Their Hearts May Be Encouraged – To comfort and encourage (*parakaleo*) is especially the work of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter (*parakletos*). There is perhaps a connection between this verse and the phrase “Christ in you, the hope of glory” which was just four verses prior.

As They Are Knit Together In Love – The word for “knit together” originally meant “to cause to stride together; to walk in step.” The word meant to bring together diverse parts and fit them together in perfect harmony. (See the same word in Eph. 4:16 and Col. 2:19.) Love is the secret bond which makes this kind of unity possible (3:14).

To Have All The Riches Of Assured Understanding And The Knowledge Of God’s Mystery – To have all this understanding and knowledge would mean that the Colossians would no longer feel the need to turn to other teachers, who promised secret insights into heaven through philosophy, visions, and asceticism.

“Assured understanding” meant complete confidence or full conviction, even in the face of opposition. (See Heb. 6:11 and 10:22.) God’s “mystery,” as in 1:26, was simply God’s “secret plan” for the salvation of mankind.

Of Christ – Christ was God’s secret plan. He himself was the mystery. He was the only “secret” the Colossians ever needed to learn. (See I Cor. 1:30.)

V. 3 In Whom Are Hid All The Treasures Of Wisdom And Knowledge – The precious “knowledge” offered by the heretics of Colossae and by the later Gnostics was counterfeit. The only real treasures are found in Christ. The Colossians did not need to turn elsewhere to obtain wisdom (1:9, 28; 3:16) or knowledge (1:9, 10; 3:10).

The later Gnostics are known to have made much use of the same word “hid” when they promised access to secret knowledge. It seems there have always been those who prey upon God’s innocent children, promising them a taste of the “forbidden fruit” of the “tree of knowledge.”

V. 4 I Say This In Order That No One May Delude You – Paul was using no clever subtlety. He knew that clear arguments and frank honesty were the best weapons against false teachers.

To “delude” meant to defraud; to reason falsely; to mislead with fallacious reasoning; to “disguise” one’s words.

With Beguiling Speech – This word meant the use of persuasive, plausible arguments. If it had not been used in context with the word “delude,” this word would have been virtuous and admirable.

V. 5 For Though I Am Absent In Body, Yet I Am With You In Spirit – If not restrained by the chains of imprisonment, Paul would have been with them in person. As it was, he was with them in the only manner possible to him—in his spirit. Notice the parallel in I Cor. 5:3-5.

Rejoicing To See Your Good Order And The Firmness Of Your Faith In Christ – As in the epistle to the Philippians, Paul found reason for rejoicing even in imprisonment (Col. 1:24). He rejoiced in their “good order,” a word used to describe either a well-arranged army or a carefully organized household. He also rejoiced in their “firmness” of faith, a word denoting firm structure and solidity.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. In what way had the Colossians been “estranged” from God? What had caused this estrangement?
2. Why the emphasis on Jesus’ “body of flesh” in his work of reconciliation?

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

3. List the words which describe the mature Christian in 1:23, 28; 2:2 and 5.
4. What was lacking in the afflictions of Christ? How did Paul complete what was lacking?
5. What was Paul's "divine office"?
6. What is the "mystery" of God said to be in 1:27 and 2:2?
7. Was Paul interested in developing an elite group of super-saints?
8. If "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are hid in Christ, where does modern knowledge about medicine, physics, etc. fit in?
9. Are there people today who try to delude God's family with beguiling speech? What makes them so appealing?
10. How could Paul rejoice in the good order and firmness of the Colossian church when it was surrounded with heresy?

Lesson Nine

(2:6-23)

Steadfast Life In Christ (2:6-15)

6 As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established

in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

8 See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have come to fulness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. 11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; 12 and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. 13 And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

V. 6 As Therefore You Received Christ Jesus The Lord – The unchanging standard of truth for all Christians is Jesus Christ and the gospel as originally preached. The Colossians could test for themselves to determine whether a new teaching was in line with the original truth or not (Col. 1:23; Gal. 1:9).

So Live In Him – Literally, "walk in him." The picture of the Christian life as a "walk" is common in Paul's letters (1:10), showing that the Christian life has movement, direction, and purpose.

When the Colossians originally heard the simple truth of the gospel, they gave their allegiance to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Now Paul called for them to live their lives in a manner that was consistent with that beginning.

As Paul was about to explain in detail, to "live in him" includes both right doctrine (2:8-23) and right conduct (3:1-4:6).

V. 7 Rooted And Built Up In Him – Paul blended two pictures here to describe the desired firmness of life in Christ. "Rooted" as a tree and "built upon a foundation" as a house, the Christian will have the strength and endurance to stand against the onslaught of evil.

Notice how often "in him," "in Christ," and "with him" occur in these verses. It has been well said that the best summary of the message of Colossians is simply the phrase, "in him."

And Established In The Faith – "Established" had become primarily a legal term in the Greek language. It referred to things that were legal and valid; hence, certain and reliable. If Christian faith is "rooted and built up" in Christ, it will be unshakable and durable. (See Eph. 4:14.)

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

Just As You Were Taught – Again the test of originality was applied. Was their faith and conduct in line with the original teaching? The emphasis was on the finality and sufficiency of “the faith once for all delivered.”

Abounding In Thanksgiving – If they would learn to be properly grateful for life in Christ, they would be much less vulnerable to the appeal of false teaching.

V. 8 See To It That No One Makes A Prey Of You – The present tense of the command “see to it” meant that the Colossians must “watch and keep on watching” against false teaching. If they were not vigilant, the false teachers would “rob” them and “carry them off as booty.”

By Philosophy And Empty Deceit – Everything that had to do with theories about God and the world and the meaning of human life was called “philosophy” (literally, “love of wisdom”). This was true not only among the Greeks, but even among the Jews. Philosophy is not in itself a bad thing. Everyone has an understanding of what life is all about, and this is his philosophy. It is when philosophy becomes divorced from God and married to “empty deceit” that it is dangerous.

According To Human Tradition – Sometimes the theories of men are perpetuated in opposition to the revealed truth of God. As they are handed down from generation to generation, they acquire the dignity of “tradition.”

According To The Elemental Spirits Of The Universe – The word “spirits” is not in the Greek text and should not have been added to our translation here. (It is true that the word “elemental” was used in connection with spirit beings in the 4th century A.D., but this usage was unknown when Paul wrote Colossians.) Just as in the parallel uses of “elemental” in Gal. 4:3, 9 and Heb. 5:12, it was “elemental principles” of legalism that Paul meant. This brings the phrase into harmony with the preceding line (“according to human tradition”) and with the usage of the same word in 2:20. When they died to the “elemental things” in 2:20, they no longer belonged to the world and its regulations.

And Not According To Christ – This is what made the philosophy, traditions, and elementary principles wrong: they were not according to Christ.

V. 9 For In Him The Whole Fulness Of Deity Dwells Bodily – The Colossians did not need empty theories and speculation; they had everything in Christ. The totality of divine attributes and nature dwelt in him. Paul went beyond the similar statement of 1:19 to add a crucial word: “bodily.” Contrary to the teachings of the philosophy of “dualism” (1:15). God was not totally withdrawn from physical reality. He had entered time and space in a human body, in the person of Jesus Christ.

V. 10 You Have Come To Fulness Of Life In Him – Our only hope of fulness of life lies in him who possessed the whole fulness of deity. Compare Eph. 1:23 and 3:19.

Who Is The Head Of All Rule And Authority – Christ is not only the head of the church (1:18); he is the head over everything (Eph. 1:22). Even the angelic ranks (“rule” and “authority”) are in subjection to him (1:16).

V. 11 In Him Also You Were Circumcised – Circumcision was the mark of belonging to the old covenant (Gen. 17:10). It was performed on male babies on the eighth day, without their understanding or consent. The Colossians needed to understand that the old inferior ritual had been superseded by something far superior.

With A Circumcision Made Without Hands, By Putting Off The Body Of Flesh In The Circumcision Of Christ – The badge of belonging to the new covenant was not an external cutting of the flesh, but a spiritual circumcision of the heart (Heb. 8:7-13). Only the voluntary surrender of one’s own heart could bring him into the covenant. No one else could do it to him or for him; he must himself choose to put off the ways of the flesh and put on Christ.

V. 12 And You Were Buried With Him In Baptism – Notice how closely connected are the “circumcision of Christ” and the burial in baptism. Both are a putting off of the old flesh (Rom. 6:1-6) and are an initiation into Christ (Gal. 3:27). The baptismal water holds no mystic cleansing power, but initiation into Christ does have that power. Baptism is an integral part of that initiation (Acts 2:38; Eph. 4:5).

In Which You Were Also Raised With Him Through Faith In The Working Of God – It is only through faith that baptism takes on any significance. As an act of faith, it is man’s way of saying “yes” to the gospel. Baptism is simply the response of faith—the response specified by God.

Paul’s main emphasis here lies in the fact that Christians are also “raised with him” (Rom. 6:4-11). This fact provides the ethical basis for the Christian life (3:1) and the foundation of thought for most of the rest of the epistle.

Who Raised Him From The Dead – As in Eph. 1:19-21, the supreme demonstration of the “working of God” is the resurrection.

V. 13 And You, Who Were Dead In Trespasses – Their “mis-steps” had produced separation from God (1:21), which is spiritual death (Eph. 2:5).

And The Uncircumcision Of Your Flesh – They had not “put off the body of flesh” by surrender to Christ.

God Made Alive Together With Him, Having Forgiven Us All Our Trespasses – God “freely forgave”

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

(*charizomai*) our sins when we were hopelessly dead in them (Eph. 2:4-8). Just as he raised Jesus from the tomb, he gave us new spiritual life.

V. 14 Having Canceled The Bond Which Stood Against Us – There was a “bond” against us, an enormous “handwritten acknowledgement of debt.” God “canceled” this by “erasing or wiping it out.”

With Its Legal Demands – The great debt was our failure to live up to all the ordinances and requirements of the law. Neither by the Law of Moses nor by any human set of laws could human behavior be successfully regulated.

This He Set Aside, Nailing It To The Cross – Christ paid our enormous I.O.U. when he died on the cross. He abolished the law of commandments (Eph. 2:15) forever abolishing law as the means of salvation.

Christ did not die at Calvary, nailing the law to the cross, only to bind his followers with another set of legal requirements just like the old. The New Testament must not be perverted into a legal code-book containing hundreds of written (or implied) requirements for salvation.

V. 15 He Disarmed The Principalities And Powers – Satan and his hosts (1:16; 2:10) had only one real weapon against God’s children: accusation. (The name “Devil” means “accuser.”) God “stripped” our foes of this weapon by satisfying all claims against us with the sacrifice of his sinless Son.

And Made A Public Example Of Them, Triumphant Over Them In Him – The picture is that of a victory parade with the enemies driven in humiliation and defeat before the chariot of the Conqueror. The Colossians should not worship angels (v. 18), but the One to whom all angels (even “principalities and powers”) are subject.

Let No One Disqualify You (2:16-23)

16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or what regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. 17 These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. 18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22 (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to

human precepts and doctrines? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.

V. 16 Therefore Let No One Pass Judgment On You – It is one thing to voluntarily give up “eating meat or drinking wine or anything that makes your brother stumble” (Rom. 14:21). It is quite a different thing to allow anyone to put you into subjection to their legalistic judgments. The Christian must give up his rights for the good of a weaker brother; but he must staunchly refuse to give up his rights to a would-be religious dictator.

Questions Of Food Or Drink Or With Regard To A Festival Or A New Moon Or A Sabbath – These were typical Jewish concerns, revealing the Jewish flavor of the Colossian heresy. Certain foods were forbidden to all Jews (Lev. 11), and wine was forbidden to Nazarites (Num. 6:3). Special sacrifices and other observances were made at the yearly feasts (“festivals”), the beginning of each month (“new moon”), and on the Sabbath. The Christian must not become subject to these (Gal. 4:10-11).

V. 17 These Are Only A Shadow Of What Is To Come; But The Substance Belongs To Christ. – The rituals and sacrifices of the old law were predictive in nature. They were the shadow (Heb. 8:5; 10:1) which appeared before the substance (“body”) could be seen. Like a shadow, they had no independent reality or purpose apart from the body.

V. 18 Let No One Disqualify You – This was an athletic term for the decision of the umpire to disqualify a runner and thus deprive him of the prize. Since it was God who “qualified” (1:12) the Colossians for their share in the glory, they should not think any man had the right to disqualify them.

Insisting On Self-Abasement – What follows is a list of some specific teachings of the Colossian heresy. “Self-abasement” was elaborate “humility,” especially as expressed in fasting. Fasting may be beneficial to special seasons of prayer, but it can never be urged on Christians as a requirement of God.

Worship Of Angels – Following the close of the Old Testament, there was much Jewish speculation about angels; but the actual worship of angels was foreign to the Jews. This part of the heresy was a pagan contribution.

Taking His Stand On Visions – This phrase is difficult to translate, as may be seen by the variety of renderings in English versions. Perhaps it had to do with the “mystery religions” of the ancient East. A key part of this phrase was used in these cults for “entering the sanctuary and seeing the secret.” Whatever it was, the Colossian heretics were trying to promote some kind of special knowledge or experience known only to the elite.

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

Puffed Up Without Reason By His Sensuous Mind – “Knowledge puffs up” (I Cor. 8:1), especially when that knowledge is a product of “the mind of his flesh.”

V. 19 Not Holding Fast To The Head – Parts of the body in Colossae had detached themselves from the head, taking inflated pride in their private religious experiences. This was the fundamental problem of the Colossian heresy.

From Whom The Whole Body, Nourished And Knit Together – As long as the body holds fast to the head, it is nourished (“abundantly supplied” as in Phil. 1:19) and knit together (“diverse parts brought into harmony” as in Col. 2:2). The body is tightly united with joints and ligaments (Eph. 4:16), so that the parts must not separate from one another.

A Growth That Is From God – Parts that are separated from the Head cannot grow. They may have an appearance of growth by some human perspective, but they will not have the growth that comes from God.

V. 20 If With Christ You Died To The Elemental Spirits Of The Universe – As in verse 8, the word “spirits” is wrong. The “elemental things” to which the Christian has died are the rudimentary principles of law. No longer should the Christian submit to the legal demands (2:14) of self-earned righteousness. Because of Calvary, he is dead to legal decrees.

Why Do You Live As If You Still Belonged To The World? – They would belong to the world by trying to invent their own religion and by working their way to heaven. Thus, they would have denied that they belonged to God and that he had freely given (2:13) them salvation in Christ.

Why Do You Submit To Regulations – Literally, “why do you allow yourselves to be dogmatized?” Regulations and restrictions may be a necessary evil in other parts of society, but they are intolerable as the basis of right standing with God.

“Do Not Handle, Do Not Taste, Do Not Touch” – This was the three-point sermon of the Colossian false teacher. This was the secret route to heaven, the escape from the depravity of the flesh. Stifle yourself and leash your desires!

The Christian, to the contrary, gets a new self and puts to death the old desires. Inward renewal makes outward restraint unnecessary.

V. 22 (Referring To Things Which All Perish As They Are Used) – Holy diet is not the essence of righteousness. Jesus dealt with those who taught human “precepts and doctrines” (same words here as in Mark 7:7) by teaching that food merely passes on through and out of the body (Mark 7:15-19). Defilement is not a matter of the diet, but of the heart.

V. 23 These Have Indeed An Appearance Of Wisdom – The acts of asceticism may seem very holy and may carry the “repute of wisdom.”

In Promoting Rigor Of Devotion – This could also be translated “voluntary will-worship.” It refers to a self-imposed asceticism in which one’s own will power is exalted as worthy of admiration.

The Christian ascetics of the fourth and fifth centuries were the marvels of the ancient world. They could subsist for years on bread and water, voluntarily chained in caves, never uttering a single sound. Their will power was phenomenal, but what was really accomplished?

Self-Abasement – This is the same word as in verse 18, carrying special emphasis on fasting.

Severity To The Body – Being “unsparing” to the body. The body, of course, was evil. Therefore, it deserved to be mercilessly abused.

But They Are Of No Value In Checking The Indulgence Of The Flesh – Asceticism often backfires. Instead of freeing a person from his flesh, it actually focuses his attention all the more on fleshly concerns. He is so busy concentrating his will power against his flesh that he cannot set his mind on things above (3:2).

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is philosophy? Is it always bad?
2. What is the special significance of the word “bodily” in verse 9?
3. What was the purpose of circumcision in the Old Testament?
4. How are baptism and circumcision similar? How are they different?
5. What was nailed to the cross with Jesus?
6. When God “disarmed” the principalities and powers, what did he take away from them?

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

7. What was the Colossian heresy? Make a list of its direct teachings from verses 8, 16, 18, 21, and 23.
8. Where can you find parallels to these false teachings in the world today?
9. What is the picture behind the words “Let no one disqualify you”?
10. What is “rigor of devotion” in verse 23?

Lesson 10

(3:1-17)

Seek The Things Above (3:1-4)

1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

V. 1 If Then You Have Been Raised With Christ – These words parallel the words of 2:20, “if with Christ you died.” The earlier verse emphasized the negative aspects of death; this verse emphasizes the positive aspects of new life. This verse introduces a strong moral exhortation: If you have been raised to a new life, then live like it!

As most commentators note, the imagery of baptism may be seen in these verses. The penitent believer dies to the old life and is raised to the new (Rom. 6:1-7). Baptism vividly pictures this burial and resurrection.

Seek The Things That Are Above – The present tense of this command makes the action continuous: “seek and keep on seeking.” The Christian fixes his eyes on a heavenly goal (Heb. 11:10; 12:2) and presses on toward that goal (Phil. 3:14).

Where Christ Is, Seated At the Right Hand Of God – The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah

would sit at God’s right hand (Ps. 110:1), the supreme position of shared authority. This important concept was central in apostolic preaching (Acts 2:33; 5:33; 7:55, 56) and in the epistles (Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; I Pet. 3:22, Rev. 3:21).

V. 2 Set Your Minds On Things That Are Above – Paul did not want the Colossian Christians to turn from the extreme of asceticism, condemned in 2:21-23, to the extreme of total permissiveness. The Christian who has been set free from the legalistic demands of the law must not think he is exempt from all moral restraints and can indulge himself at will.

Christian morality is the product of adopting a new way of thinking. The Christian has a new “mind” or attitude (as in Phil. 2:5 and 3:15) which sees things from God’s frame of reference. The more the Christian’s mind is attuned with the mind of God, the less the Christian needs external restraints. He is free to do whatever he wants because his “wants” are the “wants” of God.

Not On Things That Are On Earth – The attitudes to be avoided are specified in verses 5 to 11, the attitudes to be adopted are listed in verses 12 to 17.

V. 3 For You Have Died – Conversion from the old life, climaxed in baptism, was already a past reality for them. Therefore, Paul’s exhortation to them was this: “You have died—now live like it!”

And Your Life Is Hid With Christ In God – The Christian has died to the present world; his life belongs to God’s world. The words of a hymn by John Newton aptly comment on this line:

Rejoice, believer, in the Lord,
Who makes your cause His own;
The hope that’s founded on His word
Can ne’er be overthrown.

Though many foes beset your road,
And feeble is your arm,
Your life is hid with Christ in God,
Beyond the reach of harm.

V. 4 When Christ Who Is Our Life Appears – Christ is our life. He is the source, sustainer, and redeemer of our lives. It is no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us (Gal. 2:20). Henceforth, to live is Christ (Phil. 1:21). We live each day in the confident expectation that Christ will suddenly return from heaven and take us to our home in glory (Phil. 3:21; II Cor. 5:1).

Then You Also Will Appear With Him In Glory – When Christ returns, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (I John 3:2). He will transform our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body (Phil. 3:21), and we shall dwell with him in “unapproachable light,” full of glory.

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

Put Off The Old Nature (3:5-11)

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you once walked, when you lived in them. 8 But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices 10 and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

V. 5 Put To Death Therefore – Since the Christian has died to the old life (v. 3), it is inappropriate that he should retain any of the old lifestyle. Step by step he must completely root out the elements of his former life. The old way of life did not immediately cease to exist when new life began. Therefore, it must be put to death.

What Is Earthly In You – Notice that the sins which make up “what is earthly in you” (v. 5-9) are sins which stem from the heart. They are not primarily external sins; most of them are not even illegal in any human court.

Immorality – Immorality, or fornication, includes the whole broad spectrum of sexual sin: adultery, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, etc.

Impurity – Impurity, or uncleanness, is moral defilement. In the Old Testament, it made a person unfit to go before the presence of God at the temple.

Passion – This word expresses an emotion so strong it overwhelms reason. It is closely linked to the next word.

Evil Desire – Also translated “lust,” this kind of evil greed carries sexual overtones.

Covetousness – Literally, “have-more-ness.” In the Old Testament, covetousness was wanting what belonged to someone else (Ex. 20:17). In the New Testament, it is simply greed—wanting more and more and more.

Which Is Idolatry – Greed is idolatry because it becomes Number One in our lives. It is treason against heaven because it bumps God off the throne of our heart.

Barclay points out that personal greed was the real reason ancient people bowed down before images of stone. Most of the gods they worshipped were fertility gods, and the people were trying to tap the gods’ power or good luck for themselves. If they could just make it work, they would have better crops, larger flocks, and many sons.

V. 6 On Account Of These The Truth Of God Is Coming – Defiance of God’s will brings God’s wrath. Despite the fact that the wrath of God is mentioned over thirty times in the New Testament, many people refuse to admit their peril.

The phrase “upon the sons of disobedience” (as in Eph. 5:6) has been omitted in the RSV, although it is found in some of the oldest manuscripts.

V. 7 In These You Once Walked, When You Lived In Them – Their way of life was the way of death. Now, as Christians, they could better appreciate their new life by remembering the old. The words “walked” and “lived” underscore the completeness of sin in their old lives.

V. 8 But Now Put Them All Away – The Christian must “put away” and “put off” (v. 9) the old practices so that he can then “put on” (v. 12) the new.

Anger – This word for sustained anger is the same word usually used for the “wrath of God” (as in v. 6). Man cannot sustain this emotion without sin (James 1:20), but God can. (Consider Rom. 12:19.)

Wrath – This is the sudden outburst of temper. It is no better, or worse, than sustained anger. Both are incompatible with the new life (Eph. 4:31).

Malice – An evil disposition.

Slander – Literally, “blasphemy.” Slander is the verbal expression which betrays one’s contempt for either God or man.

Foul Talk From Your Mouth – Literally, “shameful speech.” This is the same as the filthiness of speech in Eph. 5:4.

V. 9 Do Not Lie To One Another – The construction of the Greek sentence implies, “Stop lying to one another.” The Christian must have total commitment to the truth.

Seeing That You Have Put Off The Old Nature – The Christian has “stripped off” the old nature just as he would a filthy garment.

V. 10 And Have Put On The New Nature – The Christian “clothes” himself with Christ (Gal. 3:27). Specific aspects of this new “clothing” are listed in verses 12-17.

Which Is Being Renewed In Knowledge After The Image Of Its Creator – Adam was created by God “in his own image” (Gen. 1:27) but fell into sin. Christ has ransomed us from sin and has given us the opportunity to be what Adam was meant to be. In the continuing process of renewal, our minds are becoming the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5). (Compare Eph. 4:22-24.)

V. 11 Here There Cannot Be Greek And Jew, Circumcised And Uncircumcised – When the Christian had put on Christ, the old categories become irrelevant (Gal. 3:27-28). It no longer matters whether a person was Jew or Gentile, for circumcision no longer matters (Gal. 5:6; 6:15).

Barbarian, Scythian – Originally, a barbarian was someone so stupid he did not speak your language, a

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

foreigner. A Scythian was the lowest class of barbarian, “differing little from wild beasts” (Josephus). They scalped their enemies and used the hollowed-out skull as a drinking vessel for unmixed wine. Yet even they, as Christians, became equal with the rest.

Slave, Free Man – While slaves were the same as free men in the eyes of God, it should be noted that they still had to behave as obedient slaves to their earthly masters (v. 22).

But Christ Is All, And In All – Any refusal to accept one’s brother because of the old categories is a denial of Christ’s lordship over that category. It is a denial of the Lord’s ability to transcend class distinctions and to live in certain kinds of people.

Put On The New Nature (3:12-17)

12 Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, 13 forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

V. 12 Put On Then, As God’s Chosen Ones, Holy And Beloved – An in v. 10, God’s children should get dressed with the right clothing. Filthy rags are not suitable for children of a King!

What about the expression “chosen ones”? How does one get to be a part of this group? Jesus made it clear in the parable of the marriage feast (Matt. 22:1-14). While the king invited many people to his feast, only those who accepted the invitation were called “chosen” (v. 14).

Compassion – Literally, “bowels of mercies.” See the comments on Phil. 1:8.

Kindness – The excellent and gracious disposition which also stoops to help those in need.

Lowliness – This “humility of mind” should be contrasted with the kind of false humility demanded by the false teachers of Colossae (2:18).

Meekness – Meekness is not weakness; it is strength held under control. The Greeks used this word to describe a quality of gentleness found in a well-trained watch-dog or horse.

Patience – This is the ability to be “long-suffering” with difficult people (1:11).

V. 13 Forbearing One Another – Literally, “putting up with one another.” Since Christians are going to spend eternity together, they may as well learn to get along!

If One Has A Complaint Against Another, Forgiving Each Other – Human relationships inevitably produce some friction. Whenever we want to “blame” someone for something, we should first remember how much the Lord has forgiven us. Then it will be much easier to forgive others (Matt. 18:21-35).

V. 14 And Above All These Put On Love – Love is the crowning glory of the Christian graces. It sums up all God’s commandments (Gal. 5:14) and is the sum total of all the Christian virtues.

Which Binds Everything Together In Perfect Harmony – Love “ties it all together in completeness.” Love is the energizing force which makes unity operative.

V. 15 Let The Peace Of Christ Rule In Your Hearts – The word translated “rule” originally meant “act as umpire.” The Christian must accord to no man the right to disqualify him (2:18), for the umpire in his life is the peace of Christ. This peace should rule over us individually, as well as in the collective body—the church.

To Which Indeed You Were Called In The One Body – God has called us in peace (I Cor. 7:15). It is the intention that Christians should make up one body—not many—and should live in peace with one another.

And Be Thankful – All of Christian behavior is simply the response of gratitude toward God.

V. 16 Let The Word Of Christ Dwell In You Richly – In other words, let the gospel take full root in your heart. Let it live in your life and dominate your conduct.

As You Teach And Admonish One Another In All Wisdom – Paul’s ministry of admonishing and teaching every man (1:28) is also the mutual ministry which Christians exercise toward one another. It seems likely that the following words about singing should be taken as one means by which this teaching is done (Eph. 5:19).

As You Sing Psalms And Hymns And Spiritual Songs With Thankfulness In Your Hearts To God – Christians let the word of Christ dwell in them richly and teach one another when they sing praises to God. “Psalms” were no doubt songs from the O.T. book of Psalms; “hymns” were probably songs of praise composed by the Christians themselves; and “spiritual songs” were perhaps spontaneous songs inspired by the Holy spirit (I Cor. 14:15).

About 200 A.D., Tertullian described the Christian love-feast in this way: “After water for the hands and lights have been brought in, each is invited to sing to God

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

in the presence of the others from what he knows of the holy scriptures or from his own heart.”

V. 17 And Whatever You Do, In Word Or Deed –

The Christian must not divide his life into “Sunday behavior” and “everyday behavior.” Since God is always with him, anything that is out of place on Sunday is always out of place.

This broad commandment made it unnecessary for Paul to list any further “Do’s” and Don’t’s.” The Christian life does not consist of outward conformity with a legal code, but inward renewal of the heart.

Do Everything In The Name Of The Lord Jesus –

This general principle is far better than an exhaustive code of laws. If a certain practice cannot be done in the name of Jesus, don’t do it!

Giving Thanks To God The Father Through Him

– Christian behavior may be summed up as the life lived in gratitude toward God (v. 15). When one is constantly aware of the debt of love he owes to God, it will be hard for him to stray very far from the paths of righteousness.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What things are included in “things that are on earth”?
2. What is the basis of Paul’s exhortation toward moral excellence in verse one?
3. What is meant by the statement “you also will appear with him in glory”?
4. How is idolatry linked with covetousness?
5. What is the difference between anger and wrath? Is the “wrath of God” a defect in God’s character?
6. What was a Scythian? Why did Paul mention them?
7. Explain “God’s chosen ones.” Who does the choosing?
8. Can you think of any virtue that is not included in the concept of love?
9. In what way does “be thankful” (v. 15) relate to the Christian’s behavior?
10. Is verse 16 describing a “church service”? How does this verse relate to verse 17?

Lesson Eleven

(3:18 - 4:1)

Instructions For The Family (3:18-21)

18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

V. 18 Wives – If the new nature in a Christian really reaches into every area of his behavior (v. 17), it will affect his family and his job. Paul was not abruptly changing the subject at this point. He was showing individual Christians specific ways in which they would live the new life.

Ladies, first. . . .

Be Subject To Your Husbands – “Be subject was a military term meaning “to be arranged under the authority of someone.” God set the husband as the head of the family (Eph. 5:23) and commanded the wife to respect his leadership (Eph. 5:33). The command is expressed here as a present imperative, meaning “be subject and keep on being subject” in a continuing way.

A few points need to be made here about the Bible’s teaching on the submission of the wife to the husband (I Cor. 11:3-16; 14:34-36; Eph. 5:21-33; Titus 2:5; I Pet. 3:1-6). First, notice that the wives are told to be subject; the husbands are not told to put them in subjection. The husband’s responsibility is not to get the upper hand over

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

his wife; his duty is to love her (v. 19). Voluntary submission is the wife's responsibility. If she is unwilling to assume that role voluntarily, it is doubtful that forcing the role upon her will achieve God's purposes.

Second, the wife's submission and the husband's love are something they owe the Lord, even more than they owe each other. Even if the husband is a clod, the wife should be subject to him, because the Lord is no clod and He deserves to be obeyed. Even if the wife is unlovely, the husband should love her, because he owes it to the Lord. This principle adds permanency to marriage. The relationship is not based on fickle responses to a fickle spouse, but on steadfast obedience to an unchanging Lord.

Third, God's recipe for happiness in the Christian family cannot be guaranteed if part of the ingredients are left out. If a Christian wife submits, but an un-Christian husband does not love, the results may not be satisfactory. Even so, the best chance a Christian wife has in this unfortunate situation is to submit and try to make it work. (See I Pet. 3:1-2.)

Fourth, the husband has not been appointed to be God. His authority is only a delegated authority and has limitations. Consider the parallel between the family and the government. Just as the wife is to "be subject" (*hupotassethe*) to her husband, the Christian citizen is to "be subject" (*hupotassasthe*) to his government (Rom. 13:1). The Christian submits to his government because God ordained it, and to disobey is to resist God's command (Rom. 13:2). However, if government tries to oppose the clear and specific command of God, the Christian's highest allegiance is to God (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). Likewise, the wife is subject to her husband because God made the husband head (Eph. 5:23). If, however, the husband comes into irreconcilable conflict with the authority of God, the wife's highest allegiance is to God. (Compare Luke 14:26; I Cor. 7:15.)

As Is Fitting In The Lord – The word "fitting" refers to what is "proper, one's duty, the service one owes." It is more than just what is "socially acceptable," for it is one's duty "in the Lord."

V. 19 Husbands – It may have shocked some of the first century readers, but husbands also have a duty toward their wives. Until now, husbands had all the rights and privileges, and wives had all the duties. According to Jewish law, for instance, a husband could divorce his wife, but a wife could not divorce her husband.

In Roman, Greek, and Jewish law, adultery could be committed only against the husband—not against the wife. If a man's wife had a sexual affair with any other man, it was adultery against her husband. If the husband had an affair with an unmarried or foreign woman, it was not adultery. If he had an affair with the wife of his

countryman, it was adultery—but against his countryman, not against his own wife!

Christianity made marriage a joint responsibility.

Love Your Wives – The husband's responsibility is not to dominate his wife, but to love her.

The kind of love God commands from the husband for his wife is *agape* love. This is the divine kind of love, motivated not by self-interest (as *eros*, the sexual love) or even by the attractiveness of the one loved (as *philia*), but by a sincere interest in the well-being of the other. Love based on self-interest will fail whenever the object of love fails to gratify selfish lusts. Love based on attractiveness will fail whenever the object of love grows older, fatter, sicker, or balder. True *agape* love includes sexual desire and appreciation for attractive qualities, but it is based on a permanent concern for the one loved. It is the only love that goes on loving whether circumstances are better or worse, whether richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until death parts the lovers.

In the parallel passage in Eph. 5:21-33, Paul found in Christ the perfect example of a husband's love and a wife's submissiveness. As the church submits to Christ as head, so should the wife submit to her husband. As Christ gave himself up for the church, so should the husband give of himself and be sacrificially concerned for the well-being of his wife.

And Do Not Be Harsh With Them – It seems a strange quirk of human nature that sometimes we treat worst those whom we love most. It is, after all, those who are the closest to us who have the greatest capacity to provoke us.

Sometimes the husband is harsh because he is trying to prove he is the boss. Sometimes he acts out of bitterness to retaliate against the woman responsible for his "loss of freedom." Sometimes he is cross because she has failed him by not living up to his "expectations." All of these are simply the result of the husband's focus of attention on himself instead of on his wife. This is not love.

V. 20 Children, Obey Your Parents In Everything – The word "obey" literally means "to hear under." It means that one must give heed to the person in authority and do what he says. The word "obey" is also directed toward slaves (v. 22), but is never used as a commandment for the wife.

This is one of the few commandments in the Bible given specifically to children. Whatever else the church teaches children, it must not fail to teach them to obey their parents. Obedience to parents is a child's basic training to prepare him for obedience to God.

What about the phrase "in everything"? Must a child always obey his parents no matter how wicked or evil their

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

command might be? First, it is to be assumed that Paul had a Christian family in mind. While the parents may be unwise, they would hardly be evil. In such a situation, the child should always obey. Second, the authority of parents is a delegated authority and is subordinate to the authority of God. If a child is told to steal or kill, for instance, divine law obviously takes precedence.

For This Pleases The Lord – In the original Ten Commandments, the command to honor one’s parents was the only commandment with the promise of a reward (Eph. 6:1-4). The Lord finds great “delight” in obedient children.

V. 21 Fathers – Again, there is a mutual responsibility. Contrary to the Roman law of the first century, fathers owed their children certain duties in return. According to Roman law, a father could do anything he liked with his child. He could reject it at birth, casting it out of the house to die. He could sell the child into slavery, work him in the fields, or even pronounce and execute the legal sentence of death.

Do Not Provoke Your Children – The father must realize that his child has certain sensitivities. Whether in “jest” or in anger, he must not wound the child’s inner being and sense of self-respect. Some of the more obvious ways to provoke (“rouse to fight, irritate, chafe”) a child are:

- a. Ridicule, especially in public
- b. Constant criticism
- c. Impossible proliferation of rules
- d. Unfair punishment

In every child there is a deep-seated sense of what is fair and right. The wise parent will work with this sensitivity, not against it.

Lest They Become Discouraged – A child can only take so much. If he is provoked beyond his limit, he will give up; he will “despair” of ever pleasing his parents. He may resign himself to a life of quiet failure, or he may become totally defiant. It all depends on how much spunk he has. Either way, the parent has failed.

Instructions For Slaves And Masters (3:22 – 4:1)

22 Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord; 23 Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

1 Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

V. 22 Slaves – The practice of slavery was widespread in the first century. As much as one-third of the population of Rome and other great cities was made up of slaves. Slaves were considered inferior by birth, naturally fitted for slavery. Slaves were mere chattel property, completely at the disposal of their masters. Masters had the legal right to torture or kill their slaves. Finally under the emperor Hadrian (117-138 A.D.), masters were required to get permission from the court before killing a slave; and under Constantine (306-337 A.D.), the practice was prohibited altogether. Even Constantine, however, said it was all right if the slave died accidentally as the result of a good flogging.

Obey In Everything Those Who Are Your Earthly Masters – Although a slave was the same as a free man in the eyes of God (v. 11), he still had to live out the role of a slave here on earth. If his master was a Christian, he could not take advantage of his brotherly equality and serve him any less (I Tim. 6:1-2). If his master was not a Christian, he could not treat him with contempt, but must be a model servant for the sake of the gospel (Titus 2:9-10). Whether the master was gentle or overbearing, the slave must be obedient and submissive (I Pet. 2:18).

Why did Paul support the evil practice of slavery? Why didn’t he sound the call to revolt? First of all, it would not have been good for Christianity to tie itself to a slave revolt. The difficult circumstances of the first century were not to be solved by so simple a remedy. Other revolts had been attempted, and they always failed. Christianity had a solution that was slower, but more long lasting—the teaching of brotherhood. Second, Paul knew that a man did not have to be personally and politically free to be a Christian. He could be God’s child whether slave or free. Third, Paul knew that it was more important that a man learn obedience and servanthood—the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5)—than that he enjoy the luxury of liberty. In at least one sense, it was easier for a slave to become Christ-like than for a free man.

Not With Eyeservice, As Men-Pleasers – Paul apparently coined the Greek word for “eyeservice,” since it is found nowhere except here and the parallel passage in Eph. 6:5-9. The picture of the slave who works only when being watched is so clear that it needs no explanation.

But In Singleness Of Heart – The slave must serve his master with “sincere, single-minded purpose.”

Fearing The Lord – It is not the lashes of the overseer’s whip but the fear of the Lord that should goad the slave into action. Three verses in succession carry this same theme: It is the Lord, not men, whom you serve.

V. 23 Whatever Your Task, Work Heartily – Naturally the slaves were given the jobs that were too hard or dirty for a free man to do. Regardless of this, the

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

Christian slave should work with a zealous commitment springing from his heart.

Note: If this principle was valid for the involuntary slave, how much more should it apply to the modern employee who willingly agreed to do his job?

As Serving The Lord And Not Men – The faithful service of a slave would not only bring money to his early master, it would also bring honor and glory to his Master in heaven.

V. 24 Knowing That From The Lord You Will Receive The Inheritance As Your Reward – The slave should not be distressed if he does not receive fair recompense for all his labor. The Lord in heaven is also keeping track of the books, and He will see that the worker gets all his back pay—and more! When he receives his eternal inheritance (1:12), he will be amply repaid for his troubles.

You Are Serving The Lord Christ – For the third time, Paul has repeated this. The slave is not really working for his earthly master, but for the Lord!

V. 25 For The Wrongdoer Will Be Paid Back For The Wrong He Has Done – There will be a great evening of the scales of justice in heaven. The exploited slave will finally receive his due. The exploiting master will also receive his due, when the Lord gives him his inheritance in hell.

And There Is No Partiality – Unlike Roman law, God does not have a separate system of justice for masters. There is no “face-taking” with God, for he treats all men alike. If a man has been cruel and abusive, he will be punished, no matter who he is.

God is not one-sided in his social concerns. He is neither pro-labor nor pro-management. He wants each side to take care of its own responsibilities. The same God who wants soldiers to “be content with your wages”(Luke 3:14) is also outraged when the wages of the laborers are kept back by fraud (James 5:4). If anything, God’s wrath seems to be hottest against those who become wealthy by withholding from their workers. (See James 5:1-6.)

V. 1 Masters, Treat Your Slaves Justly And Fairly – Once again, as in the family, there is mutual obligation. Regardless of legal constraints, the master is obligated before God to “provide what is right and equitable” for his slaves. In practice, this meant the master treated the slave more like an employee than a bondservant, ultimately granting him his freedom.

Knowing That You Also Have A Master In Heaven – This simple reminder was much more effective in bringing an end to slavery than an open revolt would have been. God will treat the master according to the way he treated his slaves! The earthly masters would one day stand before the court of heaven on equal footing with

their slaves. There they would answer for the way they had treated some of God’s children.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. How does the instruction for wives fit into modern society? Should women wear a veil, cover their heads, and walk two paces behind their husbands?
2. Does the husband’s love for his wife mean that he will sometimes subordinate his own wishes to the well-being of the wife? Is he then in “submission” to her?
3. Why should children obey their parents?
4. How can a father provoke his child? Can you add to the list given with verse 21?
5. What was slavery like in the first century? How did people justify such treatment of their fellowmen?
6. Why didn’t Paul call for an abrupt halt to slavery?
7. Notice that twice as many lines were written about slavery as were written about family duties. Could this have anything to do with the mention of Onesimus in 4:9?
8. For what Master were the slaves really working?
9. Whose side was God on—the slaves’ or the masters’?
10. What were the earthly masters to remember?

Lesson Twelve

(4:2-18)

Final Exhortations (4:2-6)

2 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving; 3 and pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, 4 that I may make it clear, as I ought to speak.

5 Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one.

V. 2 Continue Steadfastly In Prayer – The Colossians were to “persist in” and “adhere to” prayer. This kind of persistent prayer was characteristic of the early church (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; etc.). It is the kind of prayer Jesus taught, with the determination not to give up (Luke 11:5-13) or grow weary (Luke 18:1-8).

Being Watchful In It With Thanksgiving – To be “watchful” is to be “fully awake and alert.” Prayer time is not to be a casual rest period producing drowsiness. It is a time for action!

Prayer should always be accompanied with thankfulness and gratitude. (See 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:17.)

V. 3 And Pray For Us Also – Paul has spoken very little about his own predicament in Rome. Now, finally, one expects to hear him appeal for prayers in his behalf. He does make such an appeal, but with a surprising twist!

That God May Open To Us A Door For The Word – Paul asked prayer not so much for himself as for his work. Even though preaching the gospel had caused him this imprisonment, he was eager for God to open the door to more opportunities. It seems possible that the progress of the gospel among the Praetorian Guard (Phil. 1:13) was a direct answer to this prayer.

To Declare The Mystery Of Christ – It was Paul’s privilege to proclaim Christ, the secret plan of God for the salvation of men (1:25-28).

On Account Of Which I Am In Prison – Literally, “I am bound.” As noted in Phil. 1:12, Paul was not actually in a Roman dungeon. He was in a private dwelling (Acts 28:30), constantly chained to a succession of Roman soldiers.

Even now Paul does not ask for their prayers in behalf of himself and his imprisonment.

V. 4 That I May Make It Clear, As I Ought To Speak – Since the power was in the message (Rom. 1:16) and not the messenger, Paul’s only concern was that he present the message in a clear and “openly manifest” way.

V. 5 Conduct Yourselves Wisely Toward Outsiders – The Colossians were to “walk in wisdom” toward people outside the body of Christ. Their Christian conduct was their best answer to those who might revile and accuse them (I Pet. 3:16).

Some of the earliest accusations against Christians were that they were atheists, cannibals, and participants in love orgies! They were atheists because they rejected all known gods and claimed to worship an “invisible God.” They were cannibals because they ate the flesh and drank the blood of their Leader. They had some kind of secret orgy when they assembled together for their “Love Feast.”

Making The Most Of The Time – This is also translated “redeeming” the time and means to “buy up a precious commodity.” In this case, the commodity is time. It is precious because every Christian lives in a critical point in history, where the eternal destiny of souls hangs in the balance. It is also precious because once it is lost, it can never be regained. (See Eph. 5:16.)

V. 6 Let Your Speech Always Be Gracious – Especially in the context of preaching (v. 3) and behavior toward outsiders (v. 5), the Christian must choose his wording carefully so that it will be “acceptable” and gracious. He is not to compromise the truth, but he must not make the truth unnaturally repulsive by his blunt and offensive presentation.

Seasoned With Salt – Neither is the Christian’s speech to be insipid. His words can be tasteful and appealing. (The pagan use of “salt” to mean “wit” may have some application here.)

So That You May Know How You Ought To Answer Every One – Just as Paul wanted to be able to preach clearly as he ought, he wanted the Colossians to know how to speak in defense of the gospel as they ought. (See I Pet. 3:15.)

Personal Greetings (4:7-18)

7 Tychicus will tell you all about my affairs; he is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, 9 and with him Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of yourselves. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, receive him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of yourselves, a servant of Christ, greets you, always remembering you earnestly in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. 14 Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you. 15 Give my greetings to the brethren at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. 16 And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea. 17 And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfil the ministry which you have received in the Lord."

18 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my fetters. Grace be with you.

V. 7 Tychicus Will Tell You – Tychicus was himself an Asian (Acts 20:4), so he was a logical choice among Paul's co-workers to deliver the epistles to Ephesus (Eph. 6:21) and Colossae. He is also named as Paul's messenger in II Tim. 4:12 and Titus 3:12.

Beloved Brother And Faithful Minister And Fellow Servant – The word for "minister" is simply "one who serves," and the word for "servant" is "slave." Tychicus and Epaphras (1:7) are the only ones Paul called "fellow-slaves."

V. 8 I have Sent Him To You For This Very Purpose – If we are correct in connecting Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon as being delivered together (see 1:2), Tychicus was accomplishing a three-fold purpose:

- a. To deliver the three epistles
- b. To encourage the local saints with news about Paul.
- c. To accompany Onesimus, the runaway slave, safely back to his former master.

V. 9 And With Him Onesimus, The Faithful And Beloved Brother, Who Is One Of Yourselves – Onesimus was a runaway slave who had left his master Philemon in Colossae. He had fled to Rome, where he met the imprisoned apostle and was converted (Philemon 10). Now Paul was sending him back, along with Tychicus and a personal note to Philemon.

The phrase "one of yourselves," meaning "he is a Colossian too," is also used of Epaphras in verse 12.

V. 10 Aristarchus My Fellow Prisoner Greet You – Aristarchus was a convert from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4) who joined Paul on the third missionary journey (Acts 19:29). During the riot at Ephesus, he was one of the two associates of Paul dragged by the mob into the public assembly. He was also aboard the ship that took Paul to

Rome as a prisoner (Acts 27:2) and shared the imprisonment with him.

And Mark The Cousin Of Barnabas – Mark was the young man who abruptly went home in the middle of the first missionary journey (Acts 12:25; 13:13). Because of Mark's failure, Paul was unwilling to take him on the second journey (Acts 15:36-38). Notice now, however, how completely Paul has received Mark as a fellow worker and how he is eager to have the Colossians receive him too.

V. 11 Jesus Who Is Called Justus – "Jesus" was not an uncommon name, being the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name Joshua.

The Only Men Of The Circumcision Among My Fellow Workers – These three—Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus—were born and raised as Jews. All of Paul's other associates at this time were of Gentile birth.

V. 12 Epaphras, Who Is One Of Yourselves – Like Onesimus (v. 9), Epaphras was from Solossae. He had played a key role in the planting of the church in that city (1:7).

A Servant Of Christ – Literally, "slave or bondservant."

Always Remembering You Earnestly In His Prayers, That You May Stand Mature And Fully Assured In All The Will Of God – The concern of Epaphras was identical to the concern of Paul. He wanted his brethren to be "full-grown" (as in 1:28) and "completely convinced" (as in 2:2). Epaphras was keenly aware of the dangerous new heresy in Colossae, and his earnest prayer was for the qualities which would enable the Colossian Christians to stand against it.

V. 13 He Has Worked Hard For You And For Those In Laodicea And In Hierapolis – Epaphras had worked hard (a common word for "struggle in battle") to evangelize this important triangle of cities in the Lycus River Valley. Hierapolis (meaning "sacred city") was located 15 miles north of Colossae and was an important center for several pagan cults. Laodicea was mentioned previously (2:1).

V. 14 Luke The Beloved Physician – It is from this reference that we know the profession of Luke. He was apparently a Gentile Christian (v. 11) who joined Paul on the second missionary journey (Acts 16:10, where Paul's team changed from "they" to "we"). He was a loyal companion to Paul, staying with him even when all others had left (II Tim. 4:11). He later authored the Gospel according to Luke and the book of Acts.

And Demas – Demas did not remain loyal. Later he was to forsake Paul in prison, "in love with this present world" (II Tim. 4:10).

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

V. 15 Give My Greetings To The Brethren At Laodicea, And To Nympha And The Church In Her House —There is no evidence of churches owning property and erecting special buildings for worship before the third century. In earlier years, the “house-church” seems to have been the norm, since government persecution made anything larger impractical. The following “house-churches” are named in scripture:

- a. House of Philemon (Philemon 2)
- b. House of Mary (Acts 12:12)
- c. House of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:19)
- d. House of Nympha (Col. 4:15)
- e. (?) House of Gaius (Rom. 16:23)
- f. (?) House of Lydia (Acts 16:15, 40)

V. 16 And When This Letter Has Been Read Among You, Have It Read Also In The Church Of The Laodiceans; And See That You Read Also The Letter From Laodicea – This letter “out of Laodicea” has been an intriguing puzzle as far back as the second century. The following theories have been suggested concerning this “missing” letter:

- a. It was accidentally lost at an early date. (But this is hardly consistent with the working of God’s providence, which safely guarded the rest of scriptures through the centuries.)
- b. It was judged non-canonical and discarded. (But it was apostolic, and it was suitable for public reading in the churches. These were two of the most important tests of canonicity.)
- c. It became known as the epistle to Philemon. (But there is little evidence to favor this view. Philemon was rather clearly located in Colossae, not Laodicea. Consider Colossians 4:9, 17 and Philemon 2.)
- d. It became known as the epistle to the Ephesians. While this cannot be proved, certain facts are in its favor. Ephesians seems have been a general epistle addressed to more than a single church. It has no personal greetings and addresses no local problems. If such an epistle were intended to circulate throughout all of Asia minor, it would have been sent first to Ephesus and then would have followed the trade route to Laodicea. Then it would have been sent on up the Lycus River (southward) to Colossae. Notice that the letter is not called a letter “to” the Laodiceans, but a letter “out of” Laodicea.

The probability of this connection is enhanced by the similarity of contents between Colossians and Ephesians, by the fact that the words “in Ephesus” (1:3) are lacking in the

earliest manuscripts, and by the fact that Marcion (second century) considered Ephesians to be this epistle.

V. 17 And Say To Archippus – Archippus was apparently a member of Philemon’s household, possibly his son. (See notes on Philemon 2.) He had a certain responsibility in the Colossian church, but no details are known.

“See That You Fulfil The Ministry Which You Have Received In The Lord.” – This public reminder to do his duty might well have been embarrassing to Archippus, but it certainly should have provided the necessary impetus for him to fulfil his task.

V. 18 I, Paul, Write This Greeting With My Own Hand – Paul normally used an amanuensis, or trained scribe, to pen his words. We know, for instance, that the man who wrote down the epistle to the Romans was named Tertius (Rom. 16:22). At the close of each epistle, Paul would then write a few words with his own hand as a mark of genuineness (II Thes. 3:17). In contrast to the neat, professional lettering of a trained scribe, Paul’s penmanship would appear awkwardly large (Gal. 6:11).

Remember My Fetters – Only now did Paul allow himself a personal request. He called attention to his chains (see Phil. 1:13) and implied that they should pray for him in this regard. In the parallel passage in Eph. 6:20, Paul called himself “an ambassador in chains.”

Grace Be With You – As always, Paul concluded his letter with a mention of grace. Grace was God’s unmerited favor which made their salvation possible. Grace was privilege of service which had ultimately led to Paul’s imprisonment (Eph. 3:7-9). Most of all, grace was God’s sufficiency in spite of Paul’s weakness (II Cor. 12:9).

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What kind of prayer does Paul call for?
2. What was Paul’s personal request in his own behalf?
3. How can a Christian influence outsiders favorably for the gospel?
4. What is known about Tychicus?

SIX LESSONS ON COLOSSIANS

5. Who was Onesimus? Why was he accompanying Tychicus?

6. What is known about Aristarchus? How is it that the scriptures do not tell us more about this important associate of Paul?

7. What can we learn from Mark? How had Paul's attitude toward him changed over the years?

8. What was Epaphras' prayer for his fellow Colossians?

9. Why did the church meet in the house of Nympha? Was the "house-church" part of a divine blueprint for the church? What would be the advantages or disadvantages of meeting in "house-churches" today?

10. What do we know about the "letter from Laodicea"?

11. Why was "grace" always mentioned at the opening and the closing of Paul's letters?

12. What have you learned from this study of Colossians? How do you expect your life to be changed as a result?