

NOTES ON THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

* * * CHRIST AS THE PRE-EMINENT HEAD OF THE CHURCH * * *

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Soli Deo Gloria!
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"And [Christ] is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence."

(Colossians 1:18)

AUTHOR: The Apostle Paul (c. 60-61 AD)

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE. The opening verse of Colossians asserts Pauline authorship (Col1:1). Colossians is one of Paul's four so-called prison epistles (along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon), which means it was written during the two year period in which Paul was under house arrest in Rome (cf. Act28:30; c. **60-61 AD**). Since Paul anticipates his own death in Philippians 1:19-21, but no mention is made of it in Ephesians, Colossians, or Philemon, Philippians was presumably the last of the prison epistles to be written (after the outcome of Paul's trial was known) and may have been written during his so-called second imprisonment. Ephesians 6:21 and Colossians 4:7 suggest that Tychicus brought these epistles of Paul to their recipients, at which time he also brought Onesimus back to Philemon (Col4:9).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT. Colosse was a city in the Lycus Valley of Asia Minor (i.e., modern Turkey) about 10 miles from Laodicea; thus, it was closely associated with the seven churches "in Asia" of Revelation 1-3. Though not mentioned by name in the Book of Acts, the church in Colosse was likely established during Paul's third missionary journey in which he spent "two years" in Ephesus, teaching "daily in the school of one, Tyrannus", during which time "all they who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Act19:9-10). It seems that Paul had not personally visited the church at Colosse, which may have been founded by "Epaphras" (cf. Col1:4-8). The church at Colosse met in the home of Philemon (Cp., Col4:9,17; Philem1-2).

The occasion of Paul's writing to the Colossians appears to be a response to learning of conditions that prevailed in the assembly (probably from Epaphras; Col4:12), especially false teaching that involved: 1) spiritual deception (cf. Col2:4), 2) a philosophical appeal to a Gnostic understanding of the identity of Christ (cf. Col2:8), and 3) a morality based in legalism and/or asceticism (Col2:16-22).

THEME OF COLOSSIANS. The over-arching theme of Colossians is the supremacy (i.e., pre-eminence) and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. Also prominent is the Headship of Christ over the Church, which is His Body (cf. Col1:18,24; 2:17,19; 3:15). The epistle addresses numerous errors associated with this relationship. In Colossians, the Apostle Paul refutes philosophy, traditionalism, sacramentalism, ceremonialism, legalism, asceticism, and mysticism, which are varied forms of human/worldly wisdom. In many ways, Colossians is a polemic against Gnosticism. Although Gnosticism as a pagan

philosophy/religion would not be fully developed until the second century, it surely existed in nascent form in the mid- to late-first century; in any event, the Holy Spirit anticipated it and provided an adequate refutation of it in Paul's epistle to the Colossians¹. Much of the content of Colossians is similar to Ephesians, with numerous parallel passages found between the two epistles (see DISPENSATIONAL NOTES).

BACKGROUND ON Gnosticism. Gnosticism began during the apostolic era and continues to today. Elements of Gnosticism survive in secret societies (e.g., Freemasonry), pseudo-Christian cults (esp. Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses), the New Age movement, and some charismatic Christian sects. It was an early rival to Christianity, and many of the so-called Church Fathers wrote refutations against Gnosticism. "Gnosticism may be the most influential system of thought the average person has never heard of ..." (Darren Penland).

The basic tenets of Gnosticism include: **1)** a denial of the incarnation of God in Christ (and, thus, the Trinity) and an assertion that Jesus and the Christ were not one in the same (cf. 1Jn2:22; 4:2-3; 5:1). **2)** belief that the material world is evil; thus, it denies a bodily resurrection (cf. 1Cor15:12,16-17) and an afterlife that includes a future physical kingdom (cf. Matt8:11; 19:28; Luk22:16,30). **3)** belief that personal salvation is obtained through secret knowledge (which the enlightened have, but others do not; cf. Act20:27), especially the knowledge of one's own divinity (cf. Isa45:21-22; 1Tim2:5).

KEY WORDS IN COLOSSIANS. Key words in Colossians are "pre-eminence" and "fullness". The word "dispensation" occurs once (Col1:27), and the word "mystery" occurs 4 times (Col1:26,26: 2:2; 4:3). The word "philosophy" occurs only in Colossians (Col2:8).

OUTLINE OF COLOSSIANS. As is a common pattern in Paul's epistles, the former portion of the epistle is dedicated to a discussion of doctrine (e.g., the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ), whereas the latter portion is concerned with the application of those doctrines in the life of the believer.

I. SALUTATION AND INTRODUCTION	Colossians 1:1-14
II. SUPREMECY (PRE-EMINENCE) OF CHRIST	Colossians 1:15-2:3
A. Who is Christ?	Col1:15-19
B. What did Christ accomplish?	Col1:20-2:3
III. SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST	Colossians 2:4-3:4
A. Warning against false teaching	Col2:4-8
B. Completeness in Christ	Col2:9-15
C. Exhortations based on completeness in Christ	Col2:16-3:4
IV. APPLICATION OF THESE DOCTRINES IN THE BELIEVER'S LIFE	Colossians 3:5-4:6
V. PERSONAL GREETINGS AND BENEDICTION	Colossians 4:7-18

DISPENSATIONAL NOTES. Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles (Cp., Rom11:13; 15:16; Gal2:2;7-9; Eph3:1; 1Tim2:7), and his (13 signed) epistles (i.e., Romans-Philemon, which includes Colossians) contain the unique revelation/doctrine directly applicable to the Church during the Dispensation of Grace. Paul's two epistles that most comprehensively reveal the mystery of the relationship of Jesus Christ to the Church, which is His Body/Bride (cf. Eph5:32), are Ephesians and Colossians; whereas Ephesians focuses on the

¹ John's first epistle, written considerable later than Paul's epistle to the Colossians, is an even more explicit polemic against Gnosticism.

Church as the Body of Christ, Colossians focuses on Christ as Head of the Body.

The 1st century church at Colosse was in close proximity (~10 miles) to the church at Laodicea (to which the Lord Jesus Christ addressed one of His 7 letters²; Rev3:14-22). These two churches shared a close relationship, as "Laodicea" is mentioned 5 times in the epistle to the Colossians (and occurs nowhere else outside of Revelation 1-3). Since Christ's letter to the Laodiceans represents His evaluation of and exhortation to believers in the final (i.e., Laodicean) days of the Church age, this suggests that Paul's epistle to the Colossians may contain doctrine that is especially relevant for the Church present on earth in the time of apostasy that precedes the rapture of the Church which concludes the Church Age (cf. 1Tim4:1-5; 2Tim3:1-9).

² As Christ addressed letters to 7 churches in Revelation 2-3, so the Apostle Paul wrote epistles to 7 churches: 1) Rome, 2) Corinth, 3) Galatia, 4) Ephesus, 5) Philippi, 6) Colosse, and 7) Thessalonica. There are clear thematic correlations between the 7 letters of Christ and the 7 epistles of Paul.

CHAPTER 1

SALUTATION AND INTRODUCTION

- [1] The epistle was written by "Paul"; every Pauline epistle written to a local church or the leader of a local church opens with "Paul"³. Paul was "an apostle of Jesus Christ". Many in the early Church questioned the authenticity of Paul's apostleship (cf. Act1:21); here, Paul merely asserts it, but his second epistle to the Corinthians includes an exhaustive defense of his apostleship (Cp., 2Cor12:11-12). Paul certainly did not seek out the office of an apostle, but was made an apostle "by the will of God", which included a supernatural encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus (cf. Act9:1-20) followed by three years of individual instruction and "revelation" from "Jesus Christ" in "Arabia"⁴ (cf. Gal1:11-12,17-18). Paul's apostleship was distinct from that of the Twelve⁵ (Cp., 1Cor15:5), in that to Paul alone Christ entrusted the dispensation of the grace of God and the revelation of the mystery (cf. Eph3:1-3).

Also included in the authorship of the epistle is "Timothy". Whereas Paul often referred to Timothy as his "son" (Cp., 1Cor4:17; 1Tim1:2; 2Tim1:2), here he is referred to as "our brother". This seems to implicitly comport with the theme of the letter, in that within the Body of Christ there is no hierarchy under the Headship of Christ (i.e., Paul the Apostle, Timothy, and the "saints" and "brethren" at Colosse are all "brothers"; Cp., v2).

- [2] The believers at Colosse are addressed as "saints" and "faithful brethren"⁶ who are "in Christ". The prepositional phrase "in Christ" as used by the Apostle Paul⁷ is a technical term denoting believers during the present dispensation who have been baptized by the Spirit into the Body of Christ (1Cor12:13), equivalent to the universal or heavenly Church (Cp., Eph1:22-23; Col1:18), thereby supernaturally creating an entirely new category of humanity (cf. 1Cor10:32; 2Cor5:17).

Paul's standard greeting is "grace" and "peace" in which he combines the traditional Greek and Hebrew salutations. The order of his greeting is of theological import, as "grace" from God must precede "peace" with God (Cp., Isa53:5; Rom5:1). This grace and peace come "from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ". The Holy Spirit is not included, perhaps reflecting subordination within the Godhead, as the Spirit proceeds⁸ from the Father and the Son.

³ The Epistle to the Hebrews does not open with "Paul", which has caused many to doubt Pauline authorship of that epistle. Such a conclusion based solely on that feature, however, is far from warranted.

⁴ The place in which Paul spent "three years" (Gal1:18), during which time he received "the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal1:12), is said to have been in "Arabia" (Gal1:17), which may have been at "Mount Sinai" (cf. Gal4:25).

⁵ Paul was the 13th apostle, he authored 13 epistles, and his ministry began in Acts 13.

⁶ Per the Granville Sharp rule of Greek grammar, the "saints" and "faithful brethren" are not distinct categories of believers, but synonyms for all who are "in Christ".

⁷ In contrast, the prepositional phrase "in Christ" appears only three times in the General Epistles (cf. 1Pet3:16; 5:14; Jude1).

⁸ The Father sent the Son (Jn5:36-37; 1Jn4:10,14), whereas the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit (Jn15:26; 16:7). A dispute over the procession of the Holy Spirit is

- [3] Prayer was a large part of Paul's ministry. He repeatedly makes mention of his prayers for others (as here) and regularly beseeches his readers to pray for him (Cp., Rom15:30; 2Cor1:11; Eph6:18-19).
- [4] Although the church at Colosse was likely a result of Paul's two-year ministry in Asia (Act19:10), it seems that had not personally visited this church. Yet, he has "heard" of their "**faith**", which has as its object "Christ Jesus" (Cp., Matt17:20; Mk11:22-23); also their "**love** of ... all the saints", which is the distinguishing characteristic of Christians (Cp., Jn13:34-35);
- [5] and, finally, "**hope**"⁹. As used in the N.T., "hope" has the idea of *confident expectation that the promises of God will surely come to pass* (cf. Rom8:24-25). For the believer during the Church Age (in contrast to Israel under the Mosaic covenant), our "hope" is in "heaven" (Cp., Col3:2), as we have no promise of deliverance from suffering in this world (cf. Jn16:33; Philip1:29; 2Tim3:12). All our "blessings" are "spiritual" and are found "in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph1:3); during this present age, Christ is in heaven (Col3:1), as are those who are "in Christ"¹⁰ (Eph2:6). Our access to this "hope" is by means of "the word of the truth of the gospel" (cf. 1Cor15:1-4); the promises of God upon which the believer's "hope" rests can only be known from the Bible.
- [6] This "gospel" (v5) is both "come unto you" (i.e., the Colossians) and "in all the world"; the gospel of Christ, which is the access into "the grace of God", is available to "all men" (Cp., Tit2:11). Following conversion, the expectation is that believers will "bringeth forth fruit" (Jn15:8; Eph2:10), although such fruit-bearing is not guaranteed (cf. 1Cor3:11-15).
- [7] "Epaphras", who was presumably converted under the ministry of the Apostle Paul, may have been the founder of the church in Colosse; he was a "minister" in the church at this time (cf. Col4:12; Philem23).
- [8] Apparently Paul's knowledge of the Colossian believers has come to him by the testimony of Epaphras (v7). As believers, their "love" ("which ye have to all the saints"; v4) was the fruit of the "Spirit" (Gal5:22).

THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER

- [9] Paul prayed "without ceasing" (1Thess5:17) for the Colossian believers. From Paul's intercessory prayers, we learn that those things for which we should pray for others include: **1)** the "knowledge of [God's] will" (cf. 1Tim2:4), "wisdom" (Cp., 1Cor2:6-7), and "spiritual understanding" (Cp., 1Cor2:9-13), which requires personal study (2Tim2:15);

the doctrinal issue that led what came to be known as the Eastern Orthodox Church to separate from the Roman Catholic Church.

⁹ Note that in vv4-5, "faith", "love", and "hope" occur together (Cp., 1Cor13:13).

¹⁰ Theologically, our identification with Christ in heaven is often called *positional* truth. In Paul's epistles, the believer is spoken of as being present in heaven today *proleptically*; that is, this future state is so sure as to be spoken of as a present reality (Cp., Rom8:28-29).

- [10] 2) to "walk worthy of the Lord ... " (Cp., Eph4:1; i.e., grow in sanctification; 1Thess4:3); note that "increasing in the knowledge of God" is connected to a believer's sanctification;

Note on Calvinism. Paul's prayer for the sanctification of the Colossian believers implicitly refutes Calvinism's (and Lordship Salvation's) denial of the reality of a carnal Christian (Cp., 1Cor3:1-3,10-15).

- [11] and 3) that the fruit of the Spirit (e.g., "patience"¹¹, "long-suffering", "joyfulness"; Gal5:22-2) be manifest in their lives; thus, Paul's prayer is not for them to work harder, but to abide in Christ (Cp., Jn15:5; Gal3:2-3; Col2:6). If these things were included in Paul's prayer for the Colossian believers, it would also be his/God's desire for us.
- [12] Paul opened his prayer with petitions (vv9-11), but it also included "giving thanks unto the Father". That God "hath made us meet" for our future "inheritance" views our future glorification proleptically¹² (i.e., as an already accomplished fact because of His predestination; Cp., Rom8:29; Eph1:5-6); this presumes personal salvation.
- [13] Note the "light" versus "darkness" motif in vv12-13 that is so common in the Gospel of John (Cp., Act26:17-18). This is one of the very few verses in Scripture in which "kingdom" is used in a spiritual, rather than a physical, sense (Cp., Luk17:21; Rom14:17); here, "the kingdom of his dear Son" (Lit., "his beloved Son"; Cp., Matt3:17; 17:5; Mk1:11; 9:7; Luk3:22; 9:35) includes all those who have been rescued from "the power of darkness" by the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Before salvation, the position of a lost person is with Satan in Hell (Matt16:18); after salvation the position of a believer is with Christ in Heaven (Eph2:6). By use of the word "translated", Paul conveys that our salvation occurred in a moment of time in the past, even as our glorification will occur in a moment of time in the future (Cp., 1Cor15:51-52; 1Thess4:17; Heb11:5; Gen5:24).
- [14] Christ's work of "redemption", which includes "the forgiveness of sins" (a blessing made possible by the New covenant; cf. Jer31:33-34), was of necessity "through his blood"¹³. In Christ's work of redemption, His death was necessary, but not sufficient; also necessary was the application of His blood, poured out in death, to the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle in heaven (cf. Heb9:11-14,22-26). This necessity was prefigured in the earthly tabernacle on the Day of Atonement, in which the goat was sacrificed on the brazen altar, but atonement for the nation was only secured when the blood of the sacrifice was applied to the mercy seat (cf. Lev16:15; 17:11).

THE SUPREMACY (PRE-EMINENCE) OF CHRIST

¹¹ In the KJV, "patience" generally connotes *perseverance* (Cp., Rom5:3-4).

¹² This is sometimes called *positional* versus *practical* truth, or *standing* versus *state*.

¹³ The prepositional phrase "through his blood" is a textual variant omitted in some Greek manuscripts (and, thus, modern versions), but it appears in Romans 3:25, 5:9, and Ephesians 1:7, and it should be regarded as the authentic reading of Scripture in Colossians 1:14.

Having introduced the Person and work of Christ in his prayer for the Colossians (vv13-14), Paul now begins an extended excursus on the supremacy (i.e., "pre-eminence"; v18) of the Lord Jesus Christ, beginning with the most detailed presentation of His identity (vv15-19) in all of the N.T.

WHO IS CHRIST?

[15] Seven characteristics of Christ are enumerated in vv15-19, which establish His preeminence (v18); the opening pronoun "Who" refers to "Son" (v13).

1) He is "the image of the invisible God". God is "invisible" (Cp., 1Tim1:17; Heb11:27), which is why "no man hath seen God at any time" (Jn1:18; Cp., Jn6:46; 1Jn4:12). Whereas man was created "in the image of God" (Gen2:27), Christ is the image, such that "He that hath seen [Christ] hath seen the Father" (Jn14:9). Hebrews 1:3 says the "Son" is "the express image of [God's] person", or the image of God expressed as a person. Thus, Christ is the perfect visible representation of God. Note that at the rapture/resurrection (1Cor15:51-53), our bodies will be "conformed to the image of [Jesus Christ]" (Rom8:29).

2) He is "the firstborn of every creature". This characteristic has been often misunderstood by Christians and perverted by Arians of all stripes. Christ is God and man, possessing both divine and human natures. His divine nature has existed from all eternity (see v17, "he is before all things"; Cp., Mic5:2), but His human nature began at the incarnation (Luk1:35)—and that human nature is a "creature"/creation. The hypostatic union, formed at the incarnation, is a union of the Creator and the creature in one Person. Here, "firstborn" refers to His position of greatest honor among all creatures (cf. Ps89:27; Mk16:19; Heb1:3), which normally went to the son born first chronologically, but with notable exceptions (E.g., Isaac, Gen17:20-21; Jacob, Gen25:23; Joseph, 1Chron5:1).

[16] 3) He is the Creator of the universe. When God created, He did so by means of His Word (Cp., Gen1:3,6,9,14,20,24,26); thus, Christ was the agent of creation (Jn1:1-3). That creation included "all things ... that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible"; this includes angelic creatures as well as earthly creatures, which is made explicit by mention of the specific angelic categories¹⁴ of "thrones", "dominions", "principalities", and "powers" (Cp., Eph6:12). All things were not only created "by him", but "for him" (Cp., Rev4:11).

[17] 4) He is the sustainer of "all things". God did not merely create "the heaven and the earth" (Gen1:1) and then walk away from it (as Deists teach). He must actively sustain His creation moment-by-moment¹⁵, and He does so by means of Jesus Christ: "by him all things consist", and "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb1:3). At the end of the Millennial Kingdom, Christ will cease His sustaining activity, and

¹⁴ This list of angelic categories is illustrative, not exhaustive. There are nine such categories, or ranks, of heavenly/angelic creatures (see ANGELIC TAXONOMY).

¹⁵ Quantum physics, with its arbitrary assumptions, was developed in large measure to rationalize why the universe does not implode on itself, because based on classical physics it should (see CHART: QUANTUM PHYSICS)! Quantum physics was very controversial among leading scientists in the early 20th century, and even Albert Einstein doubted its veracity.

the present heavens and earth will pass away (2Pet3:10,12) in preparation for "a new heaven and a new earth" (2Pet3:13; Rev21:1).

- [18] 5) He is "the head of the body, the church". Here, "church" is the universal Church comprised of all believers from Pentecost to the rapture. The Church is the body of Christ (1Cor12:27; Eph4:12), since all who believe during this dispensation are baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body (1Cor12:12-13; Eph4:4), over which Christ is the "head". The Apostle Paul's ubiquitous references to believers as being "in Christ" (e.g., Rom8:1; 1Cor3:1; 2Cor5:17; Gal1:22; Eph2:6; Philip1:1; Col1:2; 1Thess4:16) is an implicit reference to this special relationship, which may be the most profound truth revealed in the Pauline epistles. Though Christ prophesied His future work of building the Church (Matt16:18), its identity and destiny were mysteries not revealed until the Apostle Paul (cf. Eph3:1-6).

6) He is "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead". This "beginning" relates to His headship of a new human race (Rom5:18; 2Cor5:17; Cp., "the beginning of the creation of God"; Rev3:14). Entrance into this new race is by regeneration (i.e., the new birth; Tit3:5) and glorification (which occurs either at the rapture or the first resurrection). Reference to Christ being "the firstborn from the dead" relates to His resurrection as a glorified Man (cf. Rom8:29); He is the very first member of a new creation¹⁶ race of glorified men (cf. 1Cor15:20-23).

- [19] 7) He is the "fulness"¹⁷ of the Godhead. In Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col2:9; Cp., Jn1:16). Though not fully comprehensible to us, this is one of the most powerful expressions of the full deity of Christ in all the Bible. Remarkably, the "fulness" of Christ is said to include us as His body (Eph1:23).

WHAT DID CHRIST ACCOMPLISH?

Having revealed the identity of Christ in the most comprehensive manner in all of the N.T. (vv15-19), the work of Christ and all that it accomplished is reviewed (vv1:20-2:3).

- [20] Christ's work on the "cross" accomplished "peace" and "reconciliation" by means of His "blood" (cf. v14). Though available to all, "peace" and "reconciliation" are actually realized only in believers. By personal faith, those who were once the enemies of God (v21; Rom5:10) are now at "peace" with Him (Rom5:1) because their sin issue has been resolved (cf. Rom3:23-26). Note that in "reconciliation", it is the believer who is brought back to God (Cp., 2Cor5:18-19), for he departed from Him (not vice-versa). Christ's work of reconciliation includes "all things", qualified as "things in earth" and "things in heaven", but not things under the earth (i.e., Hell; Cp., Philip2:10); thus, no support for so-

¹⁶ That Christ is the first member of the new creation race would seem to preclude the regeneration of O.T. saints, since regeneration produces a "new creature" (Tit3:5; 2Cor5:17). Christ was first at His resurrection, then the regeneration of believers began at Pentecost.

¹⁷ The Greek word for "fulness" (πληρωμα) was used for a central concept in Gnosticism. In Gnostic thought, completeness and perfection could only exist in the non-physical, spiritual realm. In contradistinction to Gnosticism, Paul asserts that completeness and perfection entered the physical universe in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

called universal reconciliation (a.k.a. universalism) is found here. Both heaven and earth have been defiled by sin (i.e., angelic sin and human sin), and as a consequence God will create "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev21:1).

- [21] The subject "you" is formally the "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ, who are in Colosse" (v2), but by extension includes all who are "in Christ". Our "alienat[ion]" caused by "wicked works" (i.e., sins) made us "enemies" of God. There is no neutral ground; Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me" (Matt12:30). Yet, believers have been "reconciled" to God by the work of Christ, and that reconciliation is not a future hope awaiting heaven, but has been realized "now".
- [22] Christ's redemption of men could only be accomplished "through death", since "the wages of sin is death" (Rom6:23); but this necessitated that God take on a "body" of "flesh" (1Tim3:16). This comports with the pattern of the kinsman redeemer (Deut25:5-10); in order to qualify as redeemer, one had to be a near kinsman of those to be redeemed. Thus, to redeem men, Christ had to be a Man (cf. 1Tim2:5; Heb2:14-17). For this reason, salvation is not available to fallen angels, since no redemption has been made for them. The believer who is in Christ is reckoned by God as Christ is; namely, "holy" and "unblameable" and "unreproveable" (Cp., 2Cor11:2). This is positional truth!
- [23] Here, "If you continue in the faith" is a first class condition¹⁸ in the Greek text; it is presumed that believers will "continue in the faith". When the article is used with "faith", it denotes the content of faith (i.e., doctrine); elsewhere, Paul exhorts believers to "[hold] fast the faithful word ... that [ye] may be able by **sound doctrine** both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Tit1:9). Holding to sound doctrine is the means by which believers are "grounded" and "settled" and "not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Cp., Eph4:13-14). Here, "hope" is used in the N.T. sense of *confident expectation* that what God has said will come to pass (Cp., Rom8:25); there is no uncertainty associated with the "hope" of a believer in the promises of God.

"Paul" was made a "minister"¹⁹ of N.T. doctrine, as are all believers (2Cor3:6), especially as relates to the revelation of the mystery (cf. v27; Rom16:25-26; 1Tim3:9). The assertion that the "gospel" had been "preached to every creature that is under heaven" (in fulfillment of Christ's command; Mk16:15) during the lifetime of Paul cannot be understood to mean that every person alive in the first century personally heard the "gospel". Rather, this should be understood in light of the dispensational change that occurred at Pentecost. No longer was the revelation of God confined to the Hebrew people in the Hebrew language, but it was now going into all the world in the language

¹⁸ In Koine Greek, a first class condition is created by the conjunction **εἰ** followed by a verb in the indicative mood; what follows is accepted as, or presumed to be, true. This construction is often translated "since" in English.

¹⁹ The Greek word translated "minister" (i.e., servant; vv23,25) is **διακονος**, of which the English word *deacon* is a transliteration. Here, Paul speaks of the function of a servant rather than the office of a deacon (Paul's office was that of apostle; cf. Col1:1). Such a use of **διακονος** is also found in Romans 16:1, where Paul calls Phoebe a "servant of the church" using the feminine form of **διακονος**. This is not warrant for the office of deaconess.

of the Gentiles (i.e., Greek) to be "made known to all nations" (Rom16:26).

- [24] Paul "rejoice[d]" in his "sufferings" for the believers at Colosse, and for all the "body" of "Christ" ("which is the Church"), knowing that such suffering will bring personal reward (Rom8:17; 2Tim2:12). Paul's suffering, and that of all believers, for the cause of Christ "**fill up** that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ"; that is, the sufferings of Christ are made complete by the suffering of His Body²⁰ (i.e., the Church; Cp., Act9:4; Philip1:29).
- [25] Having introduced the concept of the Body of Christ, "which is the church" (v24), Paul points out that he has been "made a minister ... to fulfill the word of God" concerning a new "dispensation", which is "the dispensation of the grace of God" (Eph3:3). Paul was uniquely given the revelation concerning this new dispensation (Rom16:25-26; Gal1:11-12; 2:2,6; Eph3:3-5). It was a mystery (vv26,27) not revealed to the O.T. prophets, but prophesied by the Lord Jesus Christ (which is the sense in which Paul's revelation of it "fulfill[ed] the word of God"; cf. Matt16:18).

Dispensations. A dispensation can be defined as "a stage in the progressive revelation of God constituting a distinctive stewardship or rule of life. Although the concept of a dispensation and an age in the Bible is not precisely the same, it is obvious that each age has its dispensation" (Lewis Sperry Chafer). God has planned to put mankind through a series of 7 dispensations; the present dispensation of grace is the 6th of the 7, with only the dispensation of the kingdom to follow (see DISPENSATIONS AND DISPENSATIONALISM).

- [26] Everything associated with the Church, the Body of Christ, and its accompanying age was a "mystery". The N.T. uses the Greek word **μυστηριον** to denote a doctrinal truth "which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men" (Eph3:5). This means revelation concerning the Church cannot be found in the O.T. The Church (i.e., its origin, purpose, completion, and destiny²¹), which is being built by the Lord Jesus Christ during the present age (Matt16:18), was always a part of God's plan (Eph1:11), but it was kept secret by Him in order to gain a strategic advantage over the fallen angels (1Cor2:6-8).
- [27] The "mystery" of the Church includes "riches" and "glory" for "the Gentiles". "Christ in you" is the permanent indwelling of God experienced by the members of the Church in the present dispensation (Rom8:10-11; 2Cor13:5; Eph1:13-14). Note that "you" is a plural pronoun, the antecedent of which is "the Gentiles", such that here the indwelling of Christ is viewed corporately rather than individually. Thus, whereas God in prior dispensations dwelt in a physical tabernacle/temple, during the present dispensation He dwells in the

²⁰ The sufferings of members of the Body of Christ are non-propitiatory (cf. 1Jn2:2; 4:1); rather, they relate to our intimate "fellowship" with Christ (Philip3:10; 2Tim3:12).

²¹ The Church's origin was on the day of Pentecost, its purpose is to build a Body/Bride for Christ (taken primarily from the Gentiles; Act15:14), its completion will be at the rapture, and its destiny is to rule over the world and the angels (1Cor6:2-3).

members of the Body of Christ, who (for that reason) are described as a "temple" (cf. 1Cor3:16; 6:19). It is the "hope of glory" in the sense that it has not yet been fully realized, but awaits our glorified bodies which will be received at the time of the rapture (Rom8:24-25,29-30).

Note the profound revelation concerning "the Gentiles". Whereas they were excluded from the covenant program, which focuses on the nation of Israel (cf. Eph2:11-12), they have become the centerpiece of His mystery program beginning in the Church Age (cf. Act15:14; Eph2:13).

- [28] The antecedent of the pronoun "Whom" is "Christ" (v27). Paul asserts that the subject of his preaching (to the Gentiles) is Christ (Cp. 1Cor2:1-4), which includes "warning" and "teaching". Paul's objective in preaching is to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Cp., 2Cor11:2). In Paul's epistles, "perfect" is used in the sense of complete or mature (cf. Eph4:12-13; 1Tim3:17). Such perfection for the believer is ultimately consummated in his glorification, at which time he is "conformed to the image of [God's] Son" (Rom8:29).
- [29] Although Paul personally "labor[ed]" and "striv[ed]" in his service for Christ, he acknowledges that it is Christ "which worketh in [him] mightily" (Cp., Phil4:13).

CHAPTER 2

CHRIST IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE

In stark contrast to the presuppositions of the Enlightenment and all forms of humanism, which make man (i.e., his reason and/or experience, which includes the so-called Scientific Method; Cp., 1Tim6:20) the measure of all things, Paul exalts Jesus Christ as the beginning (i.e., source) of all wisdom and knowledge.

- [1] Paul was greatly concerned for the believers at Colosse and "Laodicea" who were being deceived by Gnostic ideas, many of which will be noted in the subsequent verses. Note the implication that Paul had not personally visited either Colosse or Laodicea, such that the believers there "have not seen [his] face in the flesh".
- [2] Paul desired the "hearts" of the believers at Colosse and Laodicea, and by application those of all believers during the Church Age, be "comforted" and "knit together" (i.e., in agreement) by the "full assurance" of the "mystery" doctrine Paul revealed concerning "Christ".
- [3] The "mystery" (v2) doctrine is that in Christ (v2) "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". That is, Christ is the measure of all things, not man. God had long before revealed through Solomon that, "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov1:7), and "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov9:10), where "beginning" is used in the sense of *source* and *presuppositional foundation*. That is, apart from a knowledge of and submission to the LORD and His revelation, it is impossible to have a proper "understanding" of anything in any subject area. The "mystery" here revealed by the Apostle Paul is that "Christ" is "the LORD" (i.e., JEHOVAH). This is an implicit, but profound, assertion of the deity of Christ (Cp., Prov3:19-20).

God's revelation is foundational to understanding the creation (i.e., the universe), because the creation has both natural and supernatural components. A worldview or "philosophy" (v8) that limits itself to naturalistic explanations²² (i.e., reason, experience, and the so-called Scientific Method²³) is wholly incapable of ascertaining truth in either the natural or supernatural realms.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST

Christ is presented as not only pre-eminent, but as a necessary consequence He is sufficient. Thus, the living Word of God (Jn1:1,14; Rev19:13) is sufficient, even as the written word of God is sufficient (cf. 2Tim3:16-17). This assertion is significant in the context of Gnostic teaching to the contrary in the early Church.

- [4] Paul's concern is that the believers would be "beguile[d]" (i.e., deceived) by the "enticing words" of the Gnostics. The false teaching of the Gnostics was certainly "enticing" in that it appealed to natural desires of the flesh (i.e., a pride in exclusive access to secret knowledge and wisdom, including the knowledge of one's own divinity; Cp., 1Jn2:15).
- [5] Paul expresses personal "joy" in the "order" (Cp., 1Cor14:40) and "steadfastness of [the Colossian believers'] faith in Christ", even under the attempts of the (Gnostic) false teachers to beguile them.
- [6] To "[receive] Christ Jesus the Lord" is the basis for justification, whereas to "walk ye in him" is a matter of sanctification. Justification and sanctification are not the same thing²⁴. Yet, the believer accesses both by grace through faith in this dispensation (cf. Gal3:2-3; Eph2:8-9). A disobedient walk does not necessarily mean salvation (i.e., justification) was not genuine, since salvation is based solely on belief in the gospel, not personal performance (Cp., 1Cor3:1; the believers in Corinth were "carnal", yet "babes in Christ").
- [7] To be "rooted" and "built up" in Christ means that He is sufficient for both justification and sanctification (Cp., 1Cor3:10-11). To be

²² Consider the concession of a very prominent evolutionary biologist and Harvard professor, who wrote, "Our willingness to accept scientific claims that are against common sense is the key to an understanding of the real struggle between science and the supernatural. We take the side of science in spite of the patent absurdity of some of its constructs, in spite of its failure to fulfill many of its extravagant promises of health and life, in spite of the tolerance of the scientific community for unsubstantiated just-so stories, **because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism.** It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that we are forced by our *a priori* adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for **we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.**" Dr. Richard C. Lewontin, "Billions and Billions of Demons" in *The New York Review of Books*, January 9, 1997.

²³ As an illustration of the inability of the Scientific Method to ascertain truth with certainty, see THE INDUCTION FALLACY.

²⁴ The conflation of justification and sanctification leads to the error of so-called Lordship Salvation.

"stablished in the²⁵ faith" is an allusion to sound doctrine (cf. 2Tim4:3; Tit1:9; 2:1). The truth of the sufficiency of Christ should be the basis of the believer's "abounding with thanksgiving" (Cp., Philip4:13).

- [8] This is the only occurrence of "philosophy" in Scripture. Per the Granville Sharp rule of Greek grammar, "philosophy" is equivalent to "vain deceit"; "vain" means *useless* or *futile*, and "deceit" means the act of causing someone to accept as true or valid what is false or invalid. The problem with "philosophy" is that it is a discipline that presumes knowledge can be obtained using means (i.e., reason, experience, etc.) that exclude revelation from God; it presupposes materialism/naturalism and is mere human wisdom, which cannot lead to God (1Cor1:21). This is the basis for Paul's warning to "beware ... philosophy", lest it "spoil you".

The "tradition of men" likely refers to the pattern of the Jewish Pharisees, who added "tradition" to the "commandment of God" (cf. Matt15:1-3), effectively superseding it. Thus, both Greek and Jewish errors relative to God's revelation are encompassed in this verse.

Here, "rudiments" are *first principles*, or that which must be learned first in any subject area, which also encompasses *presuppositions* (i.e., those unproven beliefs accepted as true and brought to any subject area; a.k.a., axioms). The "world" and the "tradition of men" (i.e., human viewpoint/wisdom) always adopt naturalistic presuppositions that exclude God (Rom1:18), but "the fear of the LORD" is the beginning (i.e., rudiment) of all "knowledge" and "wisdom" (Prov1:7; 9:10; cf. Col2:2-3).

The point is that our *first principles* and *presuppositions* must come from God and His revelation, the greatest manifestation of which is Christ (Col2:2-3; Heb1:2). We can only properly have knowledge of anything if our knowledge is built upon the revelation of God concerning that subject (whatever it is). This fact applies to all subjects, not merely so-called religious subjects. Cornelius Van Til, "The Bible is authoritative on everything of which it speaks. Moreover, it speaks of everything". For this reason, a purely secular education is wholly inadequate. Noah Webster, "Education is useless without the Bible".

COMPLETENESS IN CHRIST

- [9] This verse is the most forceful assertion of the deity of Christ in the Bible (Cp., Jn1:1,14; 1Tim3:16). Although some have erroneously taken "Godhead" to be a trinitarian designation, it simply means *Godhood* or *divine nature*. But in Christ the "fullness" (Greek, *πληρωμα*) of Deity was resident in "bodily" form. Although the Gnostics allowed for 'the Christ' spirit to be divine in nature, they denied that spirit permanently resided in a human body. While much emphasis is rightly placed on the Deity of Christ, His humanity is equally important (cf. 1Jn4:2-3; 2Jn7,9).

²⁵ In the N.T., when "faith" is used in conjunction with the article (i.e., the faith) it communicates not merely the existence of belief, but the content of what is believed.

The union of the divine and human natures in the Person of Christ is the doctrine of the **hypostatic union**, which was extremely well formulated in the Chalcedonian Creed of 451 AD:

*Christ is undiminished Deity, united with true humanity,
without confusion, in one person, forever.*

God's desire from the beginning of His creation has been to "dwell" with His people (cf. Gen3:8; Lev26:11-12; 1Kgs8:27; Jn1:14; Rev21:3); the consummation of this desire is fulfilled in His becoming a Man to live among men.

- [10] The believer is "complete in Him" because he has the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to him (Rom1:16-17; 2Cor5:21), to which nothing need be added. This emphasizes the **sufficiency of Christ**²⁶.

While Christ is "head" of the body, the Church (Col1:18), He is also "head" over "all principality and power" (i.e., representative designations of spirit creatures who dwell in the heavenly realm; Cp., Eph6:12). In His humiliation (Philip2:6-8) Christ was made "a little lower than the angels" (Ps8:5; Heb2:7), but in His resurrection and glorification (as a Man) He has been exalted above all creatures (cf. Eph1:20-21; Philip2:9-11; Heb1:3).

- [11] Regeneration creates a new nature/creature in the believer (2Cor5:17; Tit3:5). The "circumcision made without hands" (i.e., spiritual circumcision, also called "the circumcision of Christ" and circumcision of the heart; Deut30:6) alludes to the fact that in regeneration there is a separation of the new nature from the old nature (i.e., the "flesh") in the person²⁷ of the believer (Cp., Rom7:15-25; 1Jn3:9). These two natures war within the believer until the redemption of the body at the rapture/resurrection (Rom8:23; Philip3:20-21).

- [12] This verse refers to spirit "baptism" (cf. 1Cor12:13), not water baptism; water baptism is merely a picture of spirit baptism in the believer during the Dispensation of Grace. In spirit "baptism" the believer is positionally identified with "Christ" in His death, burial, and resurrection (Cp., Rom6:4; 1Cor15:3-4); thus, when Christ died, "the body of the sins of the flesh" (v11) of the believer was put to death and "buried". The "operation of God" seems to refer to God's work of raising Christ from the dead (Cp., Eph1:19-20); note it is God's "faith" (i.e., faithfulness) in raising Christ from the dead that is the basis of the believer's justification (Cp., Rom3:22; 4:25; Gal2:16).

- [13] In regeneration, that spiritual part of the believer that was "dead" (cf. Gen2:17) is "quickened" (i.e., made alive). Since the believer's identification with Christ in His death satisfies "the wages of sin" (Rom6:23), God has "forgiven [the believer] all trespasses". Note, "having forgiven" is a past tense participle. Thus, the forgiveness of a believer's sins is a completed reality; it is not awaiting a future

²⁶ In that the Lord Jesus Christ is "the word of God" (Rev19:13), the sufficiency of Christ encompasses both the incarnate Word (Jn1:1,14) and the written word (i.e., Scripture; 2Tim3:16-17).

²⁷ This is analogous to the two natures (human and divine) that coexist in the Person of Christ without confusion (i.e., mixture). The new and old natures coexist in the believer without confusion until resurrection/glorification.

fulfillment²⁸. In addition, "all trespasses" have been forgiven. Under the Law of Moses, trespasses were categorized as either *sins of ignorance* or *willful sins*. Atonement could be made for sins of ignorance by means of animal sacrifices (cf. Lev4:2; 5:15), but there was no atonement available for willful sins (cf. Heb10:26-28). The Law of Moses could never be a means of salvation due to this inherent limitation. In contrast, the sacrifice of Christ propitiates "all trespasses" (cf. 1Jn2:2).

- [14] The "handwriting of ordinances" refers to the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant (Cp., Exod18:20). Although Gentile nations were never put under the Law of Moses per se (cf. Ps147:19-20), individual Gentiles who would worship the God of Israel were generally expected to join themselves to the nation and keep its laws (cf. Deut4:5-8; Ruth1:16-17). When the Law of Moses was operative, it held all individuals under it to perfect obedience (cf. Jas2:10), thus condemning all.

Christ came not to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it (Matt5:17). The propitiatory work of Christ "took [the Law] out of the way". When Christ died on the "cross" as an offering for sin (Isa53:10), He suffered "the curse of the Law" (Gal3:13) and satisfied the Law's demands upon the believing sinner (i.e., "nailing it to his cross" as a figurative illustration that the debt was fully satisfied).

- [15] Christ's propitiatory work on the cross "spoiled principalities and powers". To "spoil" is a military term meaning to defeat an enemy and take all that was theirs. Here, "principalities and powers" is used as a designation for that part of the host of heaven that is fallen and in rebellion against God (cf. Eph6:11-12). Thus, the results of Christ's crucifixion achieved a strategic advantage over Satan and his angels, with whom He is at war; indeed, Christ secured such an advantage that (in military terms) it ensured ultimate victory (cf. Eph1:20-21). For this reason, that part of God's plan, though conceived in eternity (Eph3:11), was kept secret²⁹ (1Cor2:6-8).

Christ "made a show of them (i.e., "principalities and powers) openly, triumphing over them" during the three days He spent in the heart of the earth (Cp., Matt12:40; 1Pet3:19-20). Though Christ was in "paradise" (Luk23:43), or "Abraham's bosom" (Luk16:22), Hell's place of torment could be seen from there (Luk16:23).

Textual Note. In Greek, the dative case in the singular has the same inflected form for both the masculine and neuter genders. Thus, at the end of this verse, "in it" can also be translated "in him" (αὐτῷ; i.e., Christ).

EXHORTATIONS BASED ON COMPLETENESS IN CHRIST

What follows are practical exhortations drawn from the theological conclusion that the believer is complete in Christ.

²⁸ When Christ died, all the sins of a Church age believer were yet future.

²⁹ That is, it was not revealed to the O.T. prophets (cf. Rom16:5; Eph3:5; Col1:26) nor recorded in the O.T. scriptures. Thus, Satan and his angels could not have known of it in advance.

- [16] Verses 16-17 are warnings against Mosaic **legalism**, such as practiced by the Judaizers (Cp., Act15:5). If the believer is complete in Christ, observance of the Law's dietary restrictions (Cp., 1Tim4:4) or festival schedule, including "sabbath days" (Cp., Rom14:5-6), can add nothing to his standing. The believer is not sanctified by keeping the Law of Moses during the present dispensation.
- [17] This verse indicates the Law of Moses, with all of its commandments, ceremonies, and festivals, is a grand type, of which "Christ" is the antitype. Typologically, the Law illustrates "things to come" (i.e., prophetic realities). Note that the verb (i.e., "are") is present tense (not past tense). Thus, the Law has not yet been fully fulfilled³⁰ in its typological sense; there are aspects of it that remain to be fulfilled (e.g., installing Christ as king at His return; cf. Deut17:15). These remaining fulfillments will not occur during the Dispensation of Grace, but during the coming Tribulation and Millennial Kingdom.
- [18] Verses 18-19 are warnings against **mysticism**³¹, which would have been promoted by the Gnostics. All forms of mysticism serve to "beguile" (i.e., deceive). Included under mysticism is the "worshiping of angels" (e.g., pagan polytheism; Cp., Deut32:16-17; 1Cor10:20), which this verse asserts "he hath not seen"³². Such a "voluntary humility" in submitting to "angels" is unbelief relative to Christ's triumph over them (v15).
- Mystical religious experiences always and only serve to "puff up" the "fleshly mind" of the one who allegedly receives them. This is part and parcel of Gnosticism, which always promotes an elite class of so-called initiates who have a superior spiritual knowledge relative to others. Paul characterizes the pursuit of such experiences as "vain", which implies it is both useless and engenders spiritual pride. The unbeliever who seeks such experiences will not be led to a knowledge of God (1Cor1:21); the believer who seeks such experiences stands to lose his "reward" at the Judgment Seat of Christ (cf. 1Cor3:11-15).
- [19] In contrast, Christ is "the Head" (of the body, which is the Church; Col1:18). It is from Him alone that the believer's "nourishment" is "ministered". All that the believer needs for growth (i.e., sanctification) comes from the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Jn16:7,12-15) and "the sincere milk of the word" (1Pet2:2; Cp., 1Cor2:12-13) which Christ has provided, not from experiences.
- [20] Verses 20-22 are warnings against **asceticism**³³, which is common in all forms of Gnosticism, especially Roman Catholicism. If the believer is indeed "dead with Christ", the "rudiments of the world" are of no spiritual benefit to him.

³⁰ Christ asserted that He came for the purpose of fulfilling the Law (Matt5:17), but that does not necessitate all of it was fulfilled at His first coming.

³¹ While much is included in mysticism, its central tenet is that spiritual truth can be obtained by means of personal, subjective experiences. In contrast, Christ asserted that "truth" is obtained solely by means of revelation from God (Jn17:17).

³² Note that many modern versions (e.g., NIV, ESV) remove "not", such that the sense is changed to having seen "angels". The KJV reading is authentic.

³³ Asceticism is the belief that a denial of physical comfort or pleasure, or even the infliction of pain/damage to the body, aids spiritual growth.

- [21] Ascetic "ordinances" (v20) include restrictions on what can be touched, tasted, or handled (i.e., a denial of physical experiences, especially those that bring comfort or pleasure). Rather, the believer is granted tremendous liberty in these areas (cf. 1Cor6:12; 10:23).
- [22] Such practices (v21) have little physical benefit (1Tim4:8) and no spiritual benefit (i.e., they "perish with the using"); they are "commandments and doctrines of men" found nowhere in Scripture. Note, the Lord condemned the Pharisees for adding "the commandments of men" as requirements for spirituality (cf. Mk7:7).
- [23] "Which things" (v21), which all amount to a "neglect of the body", are characterized as a "show" (i.e., façade) that appears to the natural man as "wisdom" and "humility", but in fact is an appeal to "the satisfying of the flesh". Whereas Gnosticism teaches that all that is material is inherently evil, and that only that which is purely spiritual can be good, the Bible asserts that God is the Creator of both the physical and the spiritual. Neither is inherently bad, although in Adam both are fallen. The physical body of the believer awaits its redemption, to occur at the rapture/resurrection, at which time he will be a glorified man with a perfect body, soul, and spirit. The coming kingdom will be physical, complete with eating and drinking (Matt26:29; Luk14:15).

CHAPTER 3

THE BELIEVER'S IDENTIFICATION AND UNION WITH CHRIST

- [1] "If ... ye be risen" is a first class condition in the Greek text, which means it is assumed to be true (Cp., Col3:12); thus, Paul is addressing believers. Positionally, as a member of the Body of Christ, the believer is "risen with Christ". During the Church Age, Christ is present in heaven, and "sittith on the right hand of God" (the place of greatest power, privilege, and pre-eminence in the universe; cf. Matt28:18; Mk16:19; Heb1:3; Rev3:21); thus, the believer's identification is with Christ in heaven (Cp., Eph2:2), where all his promised blessings are reserved³⁴ (Eph1:3). If that is true, the believer should identify with "those things which are above" (i.e., heaven; Cp., Philip3:20); and yet, he remains on earth as in a foreign land to which he is "an ambassador for Christ" (2Cor5:20).
- [2] The present world is temporary and will pass away (cf. Matt6:19; 1Cor7:31; 1Jn2:17; Rev21:1), such that setting one's "affection" on things associated with it is vain (Cp., Eccl1:2). It is those "things above" that are eternal and worthy of our "affection" (Cp., Matt6:20; 2Cor4:18).
- [3] Being in Christ, the believer died with Christ (Rom6:3-4), such that our sin debt has been paid (cf. Rom6:23). Such positional truth is also illustrated in the sin of all men in Adam (Cp., Rom5:12; 1Cor15:22) and in Levi's paying of tithes to Melchizedek in Abraham (Cp., Heb6:9). Being "hidden with Christ", the believer is now wholly identified with Him, not only in death, but in "life". Being "hidden with Christ" strongly implies eternal security (cf. Rom8:29-39).

³⁴ Whereas God's covenants with Israel promised them physical and material blessings on earth, God's promises to the Church are spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

- [4] What is positionally true for the believer in Christ on earth at present will become a practical reality for all eternity "when Christ ... shall appear" (i.e., at the rapture; Cp., 1Cor15:51-53; 1Thess4:16-17; 1Jn3:2), which is why His "glorious appearing" is referred to as the "blessed hope" of the believer during this dispensation (Tit2:13). All members of the Church, the Body/Bride of Christ, will share in His "glory".

APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINES OF THE SUPREMACY AND SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST
IN THE LIFE OF THE BELIEVER

As is the common pattern in the epistles of Paul, having devoted the former portion of the epistle to the revelation and exposition of mystery doctrines for the Church Age, he turns in the latter portion of the epistle to the application of those doctrines in the life of the believer and the church.

- [5] If the body of the believer is positionally "dead" with Christ (v3), he should "mortify, therefore" (i.e., put to death, or better, reckon as dead) sins of the flesh (i.e., the believer's old nature). Those sins Paul enumerates are illustrative, not exhaustive: "fornication" encompasses all sins involving sexual behavior, "uncleanness" results from the satisfaction of sinful lusts (both sexual and non-sexual), "inordinate affection" is unbridled or unconstrained desires (sexual or non-sexual), "evil concupiscence" is unlawful sexual desires, and "covetousness". Note that "covetousness" is equated to "idolatry" because it seeks satisfaction on earth rather than in heaven. Paul gives similar lists of sins of the flesh elsewhere (Cp., Rom1:29-31; 1Cor5:11; 6:9; Gal5:19-21; Eph5:3-5).
- [6] These are the very sins (v5) against which "the wrath of God" (i.e., His righteous judgment) will be exercised. The objects of God's judgment are called "the sons of disobedience", a Hebraism that means those who are chiefly characterized by "disobedience". The "sons of disobedience" are not believers, since those in Christ will never come under the condemnation of God (Rom8:1).
- [7] Note that "ye also" brings the believer back into view, which comports with the understanding that "the sons of disobedience" (v5) has unbelievers in view (i.e., not believers who practice those sins). Previously, the believer "walked" (i.e., past tense) in "disobedience" (v6) and was identified with his sins (v5). Before regeneration, the believer "lived" in disobedience, but now his "life" is in "Christ" (v4). Sanctification is realized as the believer identifies with his new life in Christ rather than his old life lived in the flesh.
- [8] "But now" further reinforces that Paul has the believer's new (regenerated) nature in view. Here, the verb "put off" is in the aorist (i.e., past) tense, imperative mood, and middle voice. It is a command to the believer to once and for all lay aside sins of the flesh. The middle voice indicates the believer is both the subject and the object of the verb. Once again, Paul's list of sins should be considered illustrative, not exhaustive.
- [9] The rationale for putting away these "deeds" (v8) is that they are all associated with "the old man" (i.e., unregenerated nature).

- [10] Sanctification is not merely about the "put[ting] off" (v8) of sins, but a "put[ting] on" of the "new man" (i.e., identify with one's new nature rather than the old nature). The believer's "new" nature is "after the image of him that created him"; that "image" is the image of Christ as our Creator (cf. Jn1:1-3), who is the "express image" of God (Heb1:2), and the image to which the believer will be perfectly conformed in his resurrection (Rom8:29).
- [11] This verse is an allusion to the mystery of the Church (cf. Eph3:1-9), in which believers are united together in the body of Christ without distinction. In the body of Christ, there is no spiritual advantage between "circumcision" and "uncircumcision" (i.e., Jew or Gentile), "barbarian" and "Scythian" (i.e., cultural or national identities), or "bond" and "free" (i.e., societal differences); in Galatians 3:28, Paul also included "male" and "female" as distinctions irrelevant to spiritual standing in the body of Christ. This is in contrast to the nation of Israel as the covenant people of God, for which all these distinctions affected a person's spiritual standing before God.
- [12] Believers in the body of Christ are called "the elect of God" (Cp., Eph1:3-6), which simply means *chosen* by God (see Note on Calvinism below), and are also "holy" and "beloved". All of these are said of Christ, and all are true of believers by virtue of being "in Christ".

In contrast to the sins of the flesh, which the believer is to "put off" (v8), the attributes of Christ which the believer is to "put on" include "bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering"; these are all attributes of Christ which ought to be manifested in the lives of believers. They are also fruit of the Spirit (Gal5:22-23); as such, they are manifest in the life of the believer as a result of abiding in Christ (Cp., Jn15:1-9). As with the former list of sins, this list of attributes is illustrative, not exhaustive.

Note on Calvinism. There is no denying the fact that Scripture teaches that God makes choices. The perennial debate concerning the election of God is: 1) who are its subjects of God's election, and 2) for what purpose are the elect of God chosen (Cp., Rom8:29; Eph1:5)? Calvinism asserts that (some) unbelievers are chosen for salvation from eternity past. An analysis of those verses of Scripture that use cognates of the word "predestinate" (e.g., Rom8:29,30; Eph1:5; Eph1:11) demonstrates that God's election applies to believers who, by virtue of being "in Christ", who is God's "elect" (Isa42:1), are predestined to be glorified with Him (Cp., Rom8:29; Col3:4). See the CHART: PREDESTINATION AND ELECTION.

- [13] The believer's motivation to "forbear" and "forgive" others is out of gratitude for Christ having "forgave" (past tense) him. This is life under grace rather than the Law. Under the Law, God's blessing was conditioned upon obedience. Under the Law, one's relationship to God was based on "if, then"; under grace, it is "done, therefore do".
- [14] By prefacing this command with "above all", Paul places it in the position of highest priority. Here, "charity" is the Greek *αγαπη*, which simply means love. All that God has done for the world was motivated by love (cf. Jn3:16), and He is the pattern and standard of "perfectness" in all things (cf. Matt5:48).

- [15] The "peace of God" can only come after justification (Rom5:1). There can be no peace between enemies (cf. Jas4:4). Reference to the "one body" is the body of Christ (cf. Eph4:4; 1Cor12:12-14), or the universal Church. Again (Cp., v13), "be ye thankful" is the motivation of grace.
- [16] There is something very significant to be learned in this verse by comparing Scripture with Scripture and recognizing Hebrew parallelism. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" is in parallel to "be filled with the Spirit" in Ephesians 5:18-19. Thus, to be "filled with the Spirit" is manifested by an understanding of Scripture (Cp., 1Cor2:12-13). This is also communicated in the synonymous parallelism evident in Proverbs 1:23, where "I will pour out my Spirit unto you" is equivalent to "I will make known my words unto you".
- Note that "psalms" were meant to be sung; although the "psalms" chiefly concern prophecy related to the nation of Israel, the Church is charged with singing them (Cp., Rom15:4; 1Cor10:11). A "hymn" (which is a transliteration of the Greek word ὕμνος) is a sacred song. Irrespective of the form, our singing should be saturated with "grace" and directed "to the Lord" (i.e., the audience of our singing is the Lord, such that it is an act of worship).
- [17] This verse expresses the doxological purpose of all of the creation. The entirety of a believer's life should be lived in gratitude to God and for the purpose of bringing Him glory (Cp., 1Cor6:20; 10:31; Rom12:1).
- [18] The parallel passage to Colossians 3:18-4:1 is Ephesians 5:21-6:9, which begins with the overarching command, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God"; what follows are illustrations of how such submission manifests itself in various human relationships, but each also subtly models profound doctrinal truths. Here, the submission of "wives" to their "own husbands" models the subordination of roles within the Godhead (cf. 1Cor11:3). Note that women are not commanded to submit to men in general, but specifically "wives" to "husbands" within the context of marriage.
- [19] The "love" of "husbands" for "wives" models Christ's love for the Church (cf. Eph5:25,31-32).
- [20] The obedience of "children" to their "parents" models the obedience of the believer to God. The training ground for future servants of God is not government schools, or even the local church, but the home (Cp., Deut6:5-9; 1Tim3:4-5,12).
- [21] "Fathers" model the character of God the Father to their "children".
- [22] The obedience of "servants" to their "masters" models the believer's submission to Christ (Cp., Eph6:5-7). In this, the motivation of the heart is as important as external compliance (cf. Ps66:3).
- [23] This reiterates v17, in that all that the believer does should be done from the motivation of bringing glory to "the Lord [Jesus Christ]" (Cp., 1Cor10:31).

- [24] Consciously or unconsciously, all of the believer's life on earth is lived in service to "the Lord", and it will be evaluated and "reward[ed]" at the Judgment Seat of Christ (cf. Rom14:10-12; 1Cor3:10-15; 2Cor5:10). Only believers appear at this judgment, and its purpose is "reward" only; the members of the Body of Christ will never come under condemnation (Rom8:1). Note that Paul classifies the believer's "inheritance" (i.e., in the future earthly kingdom; Cp., Matt25:31-34) as a "reward", which provides a critical context in understanding passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:20-21, and Ephesians 5:5 (Cp., Act26:18; Rom8:17; 2Tim2:12). Entrance into the coming millennial kingdom is based on the new birth alone (cf. Jn3:3-8), but positions within that kingdom will be assigned as a "reward".
- [25] There is a sense in which every "wrong" experienced in this life will ultimately be corrected by the Lord (cf. Deut32:35; Rom12:19).

CHAPTER 4

- [1] The "just[ice]" and "equal[ity]" that "masters" are to show to "servants" model those attributes of God as "Master" over all men. Whereas there will be some men (i.e., believers) who receive grace and mercy from God, there will be no one who experiences injustice from God (cf. Rom3:23-26). God is just (Isa45:21; Zeph3:5), and it is not possible for Him to be unjust.
- [2] Prayer was important to the Apostle Paul, and he often exhorts believers to "continue in prayer" (Cp., Rom12:12; Eph6:18; Philip4:6; 1Thess5:17). Prayer is a necessity in the believer's life, and it is often paired with "thanksgiving" (e.g., Eph1:16; Philip4:6; Col1:3; 1Tim2:1); this may suggest that a thankful heart for the grace a believer has received should receive priority over petitions in his prayers (cf. Philip4:11-12).
- [3] Paul is the only writer of Scripture who requested prayer for himself. Here, his request is for an "open ... door" for ministry, specifically "to speak the mystery of Christ". The "mystery" doctrines of the N.T. were given almost exclusively³⁵ to the Apostle Paul (cf. 2Cor12:7; Gal1:11-12), such that his burden was to make them known as widely as possible (Rom16:25-26). Note that Paul mentions that he is in "bonds", consistent with the recognition of Colossians as a prison epistle.
- [4] Verses 3-4 are parallel to Ephesians 6:19-20. There Paul includes the "mystery of the gospel", which elsewhere he refers to as "the gospel of the grace of God" (Act20:24) and "my gospel" (Rom2:16; 16:25; 2Tim2:8). To make "manifest" that the death (for sins), burial, and resurrection of Christ is the gospel that saves in this dispensation (Cp., 1Cor15:1-4) was Paul's overriding and urgent concern (Cp., 1Cor2:1-5).
- [5] Paul turns to the relationship of believers to unbelievers, and he exhorts believers to "walk in wisdom toward them that are without [Christ]". Part of that "wisdom" is "redeeming the time" (i.e., making the best use of the available time). A believer should think carefully

³⁵ The single exception is the "mystery" of "Babylon the Great" which was revealed to the Apostle John (Rev17:5).

concerning how much of his time is spent in trivial pursuits (Cp., Matt6:19-21; Eph5:16-17).

- [6] The "speech" considered here seems to be that directed toward unbelievers (v5). In particular, "how" to "answer every man" (1Pet3:15; Cp., Prov26:4-5). It should "always" exalt the "grace" that is available to all, which would include the gospel, and be "seasoned with salt". Salt has numerous attributes, but here the one in view is probably its tendency to make one thirsty; our "speech" with unbelievers should be such that they would hear the gospel of "grace" and desire it (cf. Jn6:35; Rev22:17).

PERSONAL GREETINGS AND CLOSING BENEDICTION

As is common in the Pauline epistles addressed to local churches, Paul closes the letter with brief personal comments and greetings directed to those whom he knows by name. This closing in Colossians is considerably longer than most, save Romans (which was another church Paul had not personally visited).

- [7] "Tychicus" was a "beloved brother", "faithful minister", and "fellow servant in the Lord"; that is quite a commendation from the Apostle Paul. Apparently he was charged with delivering Paul's letters to the Colossians and Philemon (Cp., v9); he was also sent by Paul to Ephesus (cf. Eph6:21; 2Tim4:12), which may have been part of this same journey.
- [8] Paul's purpose in sending Tychicus, in addition to delivering his letters, was to "know your estate"; thus, the intention was for Tychicus to return to Paul (in prison in Rom) with a report on the condition of the church in Colosse.
- [9] Tychicus was also accompanied to Colosse by "Onesimus", the runaway slave of Philemon (cf. Philem10-12). Paul says of Onesimus that he is a "faithful and beloved brother", calling attention to his conversion to Christ since having fled from Philemon.
- [10] "Aristarchus" was a companion of the Apostle Paul from Macedonia (cf. Act19:29) who traveled with him to Rome (Act27:2). He is seemingly in prison with Paul, whether actually held captive himself or simply lodging with Paul during this time (Cp., Act28:30) is not specified. "Mark" is also with Paul at this time.
- [11] "Jesus" (a.k.a., Justus) was "of the circumcision" (i.e., Jewish); "Jesus" was a common Jewish name (i.e., Joshua). Paul calls these three, Tychicus (v9), "Aristarchus" (v10), and "Justus" (v11) his "fellow workers in the kingdom of God, who have been a comfort unto me", suggesting that they have been present with Paul up to and during his time in prison. Later in his imprisonment, perhaps during his so-called second imprisonment, Paul will lament that "only Luke is with me" (2Tim4:11).
- [12] "Epaphras" was at the church at Colosse, and may have been its founder (Cp., Col1:7). He is noted as "laboring fervently [for the believers at Colosse] in prayer"; prayer was not an overlooked ministry for the Apostle Paul.

- [13] The prayer ministry of Epaphras (v12) included the churches in Colosse, "Laodicea", and "Hierapolis", which were all cities in the Lycus river valley within about 10 miles of each other.
- [14] "Luke" and "Demas" are apparently with Paul. Here we learn that Luke was a "physician" by trade and "beloved" by Paul. "Demas" will later forsake Paul under the pressures of persecution and return to Thessalonica (cf. 2Tim4:10).

Was Luke a Jew or a Gentile? Many, if not most, Bible teachers assert that Luke was a Gentile. Certainly, "Luke" is a Greek name, but many Jews in the first century had Greek names (e.g., Peter, Philip). Here, Luke appears in a list of persons, seemingly distinct from those specifically called "the circumcision" (i.e., Jews; v11), which may be the strongest evidence in favor of his being a Gentile. However, this must be weighed against the clear assertion that all writers of Scripture were Jews (cf. Rom3:1-2).

- [15] Paul specifically directs the believers in Colosse to "greet the brethren who are in Laodicea" on his behalf. Verses 15-16 create an intimate connection between the churches in Colosse and Laodicea. Though "the church of the Laodiceans" will receive only words of condemnation when Jesus addresses them in Revelation 3:14-22 (approximately three decades later), Paul calls its members "brethren". "Nymphas", mentioned only here, is apparently a wealthy Laodicean in whose "house" the "church" meets.
- [16] Here is specific direction that the inspired letters of Scripture were to be shared among local churches. Note that the Apostle Peter validated "all [Paul's] epistles" as "scripture" (2Pet3:15-16; Cp., 2Tim3:16).

Some have seen in this verse support for the notion that certain (inspired) books of the Bible have been lost. Such is certainly not the case. The "epistle from Laodicea" is not an epistle that had been written to the Laodiceans, no longer extant, but an epistle written from Laodicea, which is the epistle we know as 1 Timothy. Note the postscript which follows 1 Timothy 6:21 (which is omitted from most modern Bibles): *The first to Timothy was written **from Laodicea**, which is the chiefest city in Phrygia Pacatiana.* In contrast, many modern conservative commentators presume the "epistle from Laodicea" to be Ephesians, since the content of Ephesians and Colossians is very similar; however, Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, being a prison epistle, was undoubtedly written from Rome.

- [17] "Archippus" is apparently the pastor of the church at Colosse (Cp., Philem2). Paul charges the Colossian church to exhort their pastor to remain faithful in "fulfil[ling]" his "ministry" to them, for which he will be held accountable to a higher standard (cf. Heb13:17; Jas3:1).
- [18] Paul wrote the "salutation" ending each of his epistles by his own "hand" (whereas most of his letters were dictated by him and penned by an amanuensis, with the possible exception of the epistle to the Galatians; cf. Gal6:11); this was apparently the "token" used to validate their authenticity (Cp., 2Thess2:2; 3:17).

Paul calls on the believers at Colosse to "remember my bonds". In prison, Paul was in need of their support, both in prayer (v3) and in material provisions (i.e., food, clothing, etc.; Cp., 2Tim4:13).

Finally, Paul closes this epistle, as he did all his epistles, by commending his readers to the "grace" of God, having learned by direct revelation from Him that "My grace is sufficient ... " (2Cor12:9).

--- S.D.G. ---

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