

[c] Duncan Heaster

[dh@heaster.org](mailto:dh@heaster.org) [] [www.heaster.org](http://www.heaster.org)

## CHAPTER 1

1:1 *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God-* Paul often begins his letters by saying this. But "the will of God" should not be understood by us as it is by Islam, where the will of God is understood as fulfilling anyway in a deterministic sense. The word carries the idea of the intention, the wish or pleasure of God. Paul could have turned down the call to be an apostle. He was not forced into obedience by an omnipotent Divine manipulator. All things were created for God's "pleasure" or will [s.w. Rev. 4:11], but clearly enough "all things" do not all perform God's wish. We pray for the Kingdom age when God's will shall be done on earth- for it is now generally not done. We are best therefore to understand the idea of God's wish, His desire, which of course He labours to see fulfilled. But He does not force or impose; He too deeply respects the freewill of His creatures. The art of Christian life is to willingly align ourselves with His will.

*And Timothy our brother-* The "our" connects Paul with the Colossians. The rather unusual grammar suggests Paul is identifying himself with his audience. This identity is a vital part of all preaching and pastoral work.

1:2 *To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ that are at Colosse-* This doesn't refer to two tiers of believers in Colosse but rather reminds them that every believer is a saint. In both Judaism and paganism there was a tendency to consider some believers to be in a 'super' category. Paul carefully debunks that concept.

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ-* This is no mere standard literary introduction. God's grace and subsequent peace was willed and prayed for by Paul to come upon his audience, and prayer for third parties indeed makes a difference.

1:3 *We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you-* Paul tells so many that he is "always" praying for them. His life was a life of prayer for others.

1:4 *Having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus-* Perhaps Paul had never visited them nor knew them personally. 2:1 suggests they had never seen his face. But his warmth towards them is remarkable. We must ask what emotions and feelings are called forth in us by news of believers we have never met. The same connection between faith in Christ and love for the others in Christ is made in 1 Jn. 3:23. We cannot therefore profess faith in Christ personally and remain in splendid isolation from others in Him. For we are baptized into the body of Christ, which is the church. There are many parallels between the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, and the parallel here is in Eph. 1:15, where Paul says again that he has heard of both their faith in Christ and their love to the other believers.

*And of the love which you have toward all the saints-* Loving other believers is part and parcel of accepting the faith in Christ; this love is the intended outcome of it, the fruit of the Gospel (:6), which can be powerful enough to convert the world by its display.

1:5 *We thank God because of the hope-* Paul has spoken of faith and love in :4. The Greek suggests that the love of :4 was elicited by their hope. Faith, hope and love are so often spoken of by Paul together. If we really believe in the Gospel of salvation then we have a sure hope, and the certainty of that hope results in love for others.

*Which is laid up for you in the heavens-* A specific reward is prepared for each of us, s.w. 2 Tim. 4:8 a crown of righteousness is laid up for Paul. The nature of each of our battles is unique, and therefore our crowns or rewards / signs of victory are going to differ. In the parable, we will each have different towns we rule over. It's an upward spiral. We have "love toward all the saints, because of the hope which *is laid up for you*" (Col. 1:5 RV). If we doubt the hope, thinking we don't know if we will be accepted or not... there isn't much inspiration to love our brethren with the similar senseless grace which *we* have experienced. Note that the hope was 'laid up' in Heaven in the sense of being stored safely there- rather than the hope consisting of being one day in Heaven. For the Kingdom of God shall come on earth. Although Paul had never met these brethren, he strongly assumed they would be saved; this is an assumption which we must make about all believers in Christ. For it is not for us to condemn.

*Of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel-* The parallel Eph. 1:13 says that the word of truth is the good news of salvation. The ultimate truth is that we shall be saved. This is the good news of the Gospel- no reference is in view to some set of theological propositions which are logically true. The truth is that we shall be saved, not that we have figured out a true set of interconnecting theological explanations which ring 'true' to our own minds- at this point in our lives. We should be able to positively answer the question 'Will I at this point in my life be saved if I die?'. This is the final, ultimate and only truth. We may at some future point change our interpretations of some Bible passages and themes, but the ultimate truth is that we shall be saved. And if we lose that confidence, and only then, we will have 'left the truth'. Departure from some particular interpretation is not necessarily the same as 'leaving the truth', neither should 'the truth' be used as a kind of code word summarizing our association with a particular church or denomination.

1:6 *That Gospel is come to you, even as it has also come to all the world-* This is not to be read as a statement that the Gospel had been spread into all the world let alone the entire *kosmos*- for it had not been. The idea may be that there is something universal about the Gospel, in contrast with the various false religions and gospels of paganism, which tended to have mere local appeal. They offered good news for the local people of a certain city or area, whereas the true Gospel of Christ has universal appeal and relevance and is addressed to all people equally. Colossians appears directed against a particular false 'gospel' which was circulating in Colosse and surrounds.

*Bearing fruit and increasing, as it does in you also, since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth-* Paul enthuses that the Colossians were in the good ground category of the sower parable: the Gospel "*bringeth forth fruit... in you, since the day ye heard*" (AV). The important doctrines of the basic Gospel bring forth the fruit of spirituality in the converts (Col. 1:6). The *euangelion* is pictured in Colossians 1 as a mighty, personal force working

powerfully in the lives of men and women. It produced fruit, i.e. concrete actions (Philemon 11). The Gospel gives "understanding *that* ye might walk worthy" (Col. 1:9,10). We bear fruit and increase in this "by the [increasing] knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10 RVmg.). Thus we are to be renewed in knowledge, finding full assurance of our salvation in *understanding* (Col. 2:2; 3:10). The Hebrew word for "understanding" is also that for "certainty"- e.g. Josh. 23:13 "Know for a *certainty*..." [s.w. "understanding"]. To understand is to be sure, in God's language. Understanding, "being filled with the knowledge of his will", *does* have a place in determining our daily walk in Christ. What and how we understand, and thereby what we believe, *does* therefore matter.

1:7 *Even as you learned it of Epaphras our beloved fellow-servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf-* The same as Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25; 4:18; Philemon 23, which mentions he was a prisoner in Rome at some stage). He was a local Colossian, "one of you" (Col. 4:12).

1:8 *Who also declared to us your love in the Spirit-* Perhaps the Spirit inspired Epaphras to give Paul an inspired account of how they were doing. Or maybe the idea is that their love had been brought forth as a result of the function of the Spirit in their hearts; for love is a fruit brought forth by the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). This would be the "love of the Spirit", the love brought forth as a fruit of the Spirit, which Rom. 15:30 refers to. God's love is poured out in our hearts through the function of the Spirit within us (Rom. 5:5).

1:9 *For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray and make requests for you, that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding-* Paul wishes that the Colossians would be "filled with the knowledge of his will", just as at his conversion he had been chosen so "that thou shouldest know his will" (Acts 22:14). He wanted them to share the radical nature of conversion which he had gone through; the sense of life turned around; of new direction... See on Acts 13:11. He clearly believed, as we should, that our prayers can affect the internal spiritual condition of others; and that the Lord is willing to fill believing minds. The parallel in Eph. 1:22,23 is that the church, the individuals within the body of Christ, is filled with the fullness of Him who fills all in all. This filling can be complete- insofar as we allow it and are open to it. There's nothing more wonderful to behold than the life and heartbeat of a secular man or woman being taken over by the things of the Spirit.

1:10- see on Col. 2:1.

*To walk worthily in the Lord fully pleasing him, bearing fruit in every good work; increasing in the knowledge of God-* This is wonderful encouragement when we as sinners wonder how we could ever please the Lord Jesus. We can, according to these words, *fully* please Him. This doubtless is a function of His way of imputing righteousness to us, and the way love has of being thrilled at the slightest move of the beloved towards the lover. This is why Paul goes on to say that we are "suitable" for immortality (:12), and are spotless before Him (see on :22). We are "filled" (:9) so that we might "fully" please Him. The fruit which pleases Him is empowered by the Spirit He grants which brings forth that fruit if we allow it. In this sense we are "strengthened" by Him (:11). "Fully" translates *pas*, "all", and we find the word again in :11 speaking of the "all" power which strengthens us to be fruitful. We too easily assume that it is circumstance or environment which enables our pleasing of Him; and too many have

sold their souls to create wealth, believing that this will enable them to somehow purchase a situation in which they can more fully please their Lord. But here we are told that it is His will that we please Him, and He gives us "all" that is necessary in terms of internal strengthening and attitude. If we are honest, we all know that it is those internal attitudes which are most important, and they are a gift which cannot be bought with wealth or situation.

1:11 *Strengthened with all power*- See on :10 *Fully pleasing him*. A play on words, 'made able with all ability'. It's the same word as found in Mt. 25:15, where we read that talents are given to each one "according to his personal *ability*"; but *kata* ("according to") needn't be translated like this at all, and could mean that the talents given *are* [what results in] the personal abilities. This connects with a major theme of Paul's- that we are *made* able, rather than having existing abilities which God asks us to use. The parallel Eph. 3:16-20 speaks of "the power that works in us" as being far above all we ask or think; and it is exercised within our minds ("strengthened with might by His spirit in the inner man", Eph. 3:16). We are given psychological power, strength within, to do what would have been impossible otherwise. Constantly we're faced with mental situations we feel we can't endure- the need for continued patience with a difficult person, to keep on keeping on forgiving and showing grace... The strengthening which Paul has in mind is exactly what we need. It is internal, "in the inner man". And this is the same context in which Paul speaks here in Col. 1; for the mighty strengthening we receive enables the mental, internal attributes of patience and joyful endurance (:11). We who were once alienated "in your mind" (:21) are now changed; the Christ formed "in you", the mind of Christ within, is the basis for our "hope of glory" (:27). 2:2 continues this theme when Paul speaks of his urgent concern for the state of the believers' *hearts*. Indeed the whole hymn of praise to Christ in :15-18 is in this context; Paul is emphasizing the utter supremacy of Christ because this should lead to Him dominating our thinking. Appreciating the height of His exaltation will lead to Christ mindedness. "He is the head of the body" in the sense that He is the mind of it, the thinking of it. Members of Christ's body are shown to be in the same body by the fact that they are Christ-minded, they have Him as their "head". Christ-mindedness is therefore the basis upon which we feel that someone is also in the body of Christ rather than membership of the same denomination, fellowship, church etc. But note that the idea of the Greek word translated "strengthened" is essentially ability, and therefore potential. Nobody is forced against their will. We are given the potential ability, and must use it.

*According to the might of his glory, to all patience and endurance, with joy*- This appears to be a reference to the immense and total power which the Lord Jesus now enjoys, as King of the cosmos and prince of the kings of the earth. The idea is that the internal strengthening of the believer is performed by He whose power is unbounded throughout the cosmos. This is encouragement indeed, when we wonder how ever we might be able to change, or rather, be changed.

1:12 *Giving thanks to the Father*- This is a function of the work of the Spirit in us, which Paul has introduced in :9.

*Who made us suitable-* See on :22. The Greek is clear that the idea is not that we are in process of being made qualified, as if 'making us suitable'. We have been made suitable, in that we attained this new status at baptism into Christ. This is indeed the breathtaking good news of the Gospel.

*To be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light-* Paul may well have Angels in mind- we shall become like the Angels (Lk. 20:35,36), who are "Angel[s] of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). But he has defined the "saints" in :2 as the believers. We walk now "in light"; insofar as we do, we are experiencing the essence of the future inheritance. The parallel idea in Ephesians is that "You were once darkness, but now are you light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). Our future and present hope is expressed in terms of partaking in something collective, the inheritance of all the saints; no man can therefore be an island in this life.

1:13 *Who delivered us out of the power of darkness-* "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness (cp. Egypt, 1 Pet. 2:9,10), and hath translated us into the Kingdom of His dear son; in whom we have (now) redemption through His blood... for by Him were all things created (the new, spiritual creation of believers is finished in prospect) ... you... now hath he reconciled... if ye continue in the faith... whereunto I also labour, striving..." (Col. 1:13,14,16,21,23,29). This shows how our comprising the Kingdom in prospect is dependent upon our continued personal effort. The contention is sometimes made in discussion with those who wrongly believe that the Kingdom in its full sense is the church of today that "into" in Col.1:13 can mean 'for'. However, the Greek preposition *eis* means 'in the interior, into, indicating the point reached or entered' (Strong). Thus Phillip and the Eunuch "went down both into (Gk: *eis*) the water" (Acts 8:38)- from which we correctly argue that baptism is by full immersion into water. However, it is true that at times 'eis' is translated with the idea of 'towards', although this is not its primary meaning. The rest of the quotation from Col. 1 made above would suggest that we should understand 'eis' here in its normal meaning.

*And translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love-* Used of the removing of people from one nation to another, as in the exile of the Jews to Babylon and thence back to Judah. The language of Judah's restoration is so often applied to what has happened to the believers. But the idea presented in :12 is of us receiving the lot or inheritance of the saints- suggesting the allusion is at least equally to the bringing of Israel out of Egypt through baptism, to receive an inheritance in Canaan.

1:14 *In whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins-* The Greek for "redemption" definitely refers to a ransom payment. In Christ- through baptism into that "in Christ" status- we were bought out of slavery. This metaphor [with all the limitations of any metaphor] was used of Israel's redemption from slavery in Egypt, and on :13 *Translated us* I have noted that this image is in view in this chapter. The ransom payment is in that we have been forgiven our sins- which continues the slavery metaphor with the suggestion that we were in slavery because we were hopeless debtors. The Lord Himself used that idea in framing the parable of the unmerciful debtor. It's highly likely that the language and metaphors chosen by Paul here were aimed at deconstructing the heresies about 'redemption' and ransom which were common amongst the incipient Gnosticism of that time and area. But that notwithstanding, the truths he elicits are for all time.

1:15 *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation-* This interprets the creation of a man in God's image as a reference to the resurrection and glorification of the

Lord Jesus. *This* was what the Angels had worked for millennia for, in order to fulfil the original fiat concerning the creation of man in God's image. Even now, we see not yet all things subdued under Him (Heb. 2:8); the intention that the man should have dominion over all creation as uttered *and apparently fulfilled* on the sixth day has yet to materially come to pass. The Angels are still working- with us. For 1 Cor. 15:49 teaches that *we* do not now fully have God's image, but we will receive it at the resurrection. Therefore we are driven to the conclusion that the outworking of the creation directives regarding man in God's image was not only in the 24 hours after it was given, but is still working itself out now. The new creation is therefore a continuation of and an essential part of the natural creation; not just a mirror of the natural in spiritual terms. See on 2 Cor. 4:6.

The idea of a new creation is well explained in Gal. 6:15: "For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything. What counts is being a new creation". This seems to parallel Gal. 5:6 "For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love". Paul's argument so far has been: Faith rather than works results in an identification with the Lord Jesus as the seed of Abraham; for to him were the promises of salvation made, and not through the Law. That faith and identification with Christ is confirmed by the Spirit being sent forth into our hearts (Gal. 4:5), which results in love as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). In that way, faith works through love. The parallel to that is that "what counts is being a new creation"; in other words, being created as Christ, being created as a Son of God as Jesus was, with His spirit whereby we also cry out "Abba, Father" just as He did. So the new creation in view is that we are created to be as Christ. Hence if any man is *in Christ* he is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). The language of "new creation" need not call up ideas of planets and a new cosmos. The new person created is Christ. Hence "the rule" of the new creation (Gal. 6:16) is another way of saying "the law of Christ". The Lord Jesus is "the image of every [new] creation" (Col. 1:15); we are made / created like Him, by the agency of the Spirit. He is thus "the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14). Hence the Gospel was preached to "every creation" (Col. 1:23), i.e. every convert. No "creation" is not open to the scrutiny of God's Word in Christ (Heb. 4:13). Clearly, "creation" was a title for believers in the early church, so common was this idea.

The creation record in Genesis 2 is not about a different creation from that in Genesis 1; it is a more detailed account of how the Angels went about fulfilling the command they were given on the sixth day. The process of bringing all the animals to Adam, him naming them, becoming disappointed with them, wishing for a true partner need not therefore be compressed into 24 hours. It could have taken a period of time. Yet the command to make man, male and female, was given on the sixth day. However, this may have taken far longer than 24 hours to complete. Indeed, the real intention of God to create man in His image was not finished even then; for as Paul shows here, the creation of man in God's image ultimately was fulfilled in the resurrection of God's Son.

Col. 1:15-20 is another poetic fragment which is misunderstood by those seeking to justify the false idea of a personal pre-existence of the Lord; it has been identified as a Jewish hymn which Paul modified (see on Phil. 2:6). We must remember that Paul was inspired by God to answer the claims of false teachers; and he was doing so by using and re-interpreting the terms which they used. This is typical of those passages which can give the impression that Jesus actually created the earth.

If this were true, then so many other passages are contradicted which teach that Jesus did not exist before his birth. The record in Genesis clearly teaches that God was the creator. Either

Jesus or God were the creator; if we say that Jesus was the creator while Genesis says that God was, we are saying that Jesus was directly equal to God. In this case it is impossible to explain the many verses which show the differences between God and Jesus (see *Bible Basics* Study 8.2 for examples of these).

The Lord Jesus was the “firstborn”, which implies a beginning. There is no proof that Jesus was God’s “firstborn” before the creation of the literal earth. Passages like 2 Sam. 7:14 and Ps. 89:27 predicted that a literal descendant of David would become God’s firstborn. He was clearly not in existence at the time those passages were written, and therefore not at the time of the Genesis creation either. Jesus became “the Son of God with power” by his resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:4). God “has raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, You are My Son, this day have I begotten you” (Acts 13:32,33). Thus Jesus became God’s firstborn by his resurrection. Note too that a son standing at his father’s right hand is associated with being the firstborn (Gen. 48:13-16), and Christ was exalted to God’s right hand after his resurrection (Acts 2:32 R.V.mg.; Heb. 1:3).

It is in this sense that the Lord Jesus is described as the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18), a phrase which is parallel to “the firstborn of every creature” or creation (Col. 1:15 R.V.). He therefore speaks of himself as “the first begotten of the dead... the beginning of the creation of God” (Rev. 1:5; 3:14). Jesus was the first of a new creation of immortal men and women, whose resurrection and full birth as the immortal sons of God has been made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus (Eph. 2:10; 4:23,24; 2 Cor. 5:17). “In Christ shall all (true believers) be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming” (1 Cor. 15:22,23). This is just the same idea as in Col. 1. Jesus was the first person to rise from the dead and be given immortality, he was the first of the new creation, and the true believers will follow his pattern at his return.

The creation spoken about in Col. 1 therefore refers to the new creation, rather than that of Genesis. Through the work of Jesus “were all things created...thrones...dominions” etc. Paul does not say that Jesus created all things and then give examples of rivers, mountains, birds etc. The elements of this new creation refer to those rewards which we will have in God’s Kingdom. “Thrones... dominions” etc. refer to how the raised believers will be “kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10). These things were made possible by the work of Jesus. “In him were all things created in the heavens” (Col. 1:16 R.V.). In Eph. 2:6 we read of the believers who are in Christ as sitting in “heavenly places”. If any man is in Christ by baptism, he is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). By being in Christ we are saved by His death (Col. 1:22). The literal planet could not be created by being in Christ. Thus these verses are teaching that the exalted spiritual position which we can now have, as well as that which we will experience in the future, has all been made possible by Christ. The “heavens and earth” contain “all things that needed reconciliation by the blood of (Christ’s) cross” (Col. 1:16,20), showing that the “all things...in heaven” refer to the believers who now sit in “heavenly places...in Christ Jesus”, rather than to all physical things around us.

If Jesus were the creator of the universe, it is strange how He should say: “...from the beginning of the creation God made them...” (Mk. 10:6). This surely sounds as if He understood God to be the creator, not He Himself. And if He literally created everything in Heaven, this would include God.

That "by him" is a poor translation is readily testified by reliable scholars. Take J.H.

Moulton: "for *because of him* [Jesus]..." (1); or the *Expositor's Greek Commentary*: "*en auto*: This does not mean "by Him"" (2).

Many of Paul's more difficult passages are understandable once it is appreciated that he is alluding to existing Jewish and Gentile literature which was familiar to his readers. He does this in order to deconstruct it and give the Lord Jesus His rightful place of exaltation. There are a number of connections between Col. 1:15-20 and Jewish Wisdom theology concerning Adam and the mystical "heavenly man". The terms "image of God" and "firstborn" refer to Adam; it's as if Paul is showing that Jesus should be afforded the place of all exaltation, and not the mystical "Adam" or "Heavenly Adam" which Judaism then believed in (3). Another possibility, not necessarily mutually exclusive, is that Paul is alluding to and even quoting a "pre-Christian Gnostic redeemer hymn" (4)- and seeking to demonstrate that Jesus is the true redeemer. We may apply the words of a well known song or character to someone we know, in order to show the similarities and bring out the contrasts; but the correspondence isn't 100%. And so with the manner in which Paul quotes Gentile or Jewish literature and terminology about Jesus- not every word must be literalistically pressed into relevance to Him. It's like the idea of types- Joseph was a type of Christ, but not *everything* about Joseph was true of Christ. We need to be aware that Paul didn't sit down to right theology sitting in an ivory tower university, or because he just felt like delving into these matters for the pure intellectual buzz of it. His letters are all missionary documents, born out of real life situations in his work of preaching and then pastorally caring for his immature converts. He was dealing with attacks upon his tender babes in Christ by Jewish and Gentile false teachers; there was no written New Testament, and the Christian message was in competition with the 'scriptures' of the surrounding religions. So it's hardly surprising that Paul so often alludes to their terminology and literature in order to deconstruct it.

It should be noted, as a general point, that God the Father *alone, exclusively*, is described as the creator in many passages (e.g. Is. 44:24; Is. 45:12; Is. 48:13; Is. 66:2). These passages simply leave no room for the Son to have also created the literal planet.

It could also be argued that the hymn to Jesus here in Colossians 1 is speaking of how God views Jesus. "He is "firstborn of all creation"- not in time, but in the Father's mind" (5). To God, Jesus was the beginning, in everything He was *en pasin autos proteuon*- in all things He held first place (Col. 1:18). But where and how? In the Father's mind. It was God who created the world. But for God, in the context of creation, Jesus His Son was pre-eminent. James Dunn comments on Col. 1:20: "Christ is being identified here not with a pre-existent being but with the creative power and action of God... There is no indication that Jesus thought or spoke of himself as having pre-existed with God prior to his birth" (6).

## Notes

(1) J.H. Moulton, *Grammar Of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) Vol. 3 p. 253.

(2) W.R. Nicoll, ed., *Expositor's Greek Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) p. 504.

(3) This case is made at length in H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) pp. 78-86.

(4) See E. Käsemann, "A Primitive Christian Baptismal Liturgy" *in* *Essays On New Testament Themes* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1964) pp. 149-168.

(5) Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1993) p. 138.

(6) James Dunn, *Christology In The Making* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) p. 254.

1:16 *For in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible-* See on :15. The theme of the believers being "in Christ" is so major in Colossians and Paul generally that we should have no problem in seeing here a reference to the new creation. But all this has meaning in practice- we who are in Christ are to have Him [and not mere abstract ideas] as the whole basis of our existence.

*Whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things have been created on account of him and for him-* "Thrones... powers" is a Jewish rabbinic term which expressed their idea of "the various gradations of angelic spirits". But it's doubtful he believed in this himself. Paul at times quotes from or alludes to popular Jewish ideas with which he may not have necessarily agreed. The lack of quotation marks in New Testament Greek means that it's hard for us at this distance to discern when he does this – but it seems to me that it's going on a lot in his writings. Thus he uses the phrase "your whole spirit, soul and body" (1 Thess. 5:23), a popular Jewish expression for 'the whole person' – but it's clear from the rest of Paul's writings that he didn't see the body and soul as so separate.

1:17 *And he is superior to all things, and in him all things consist-* See on :15. The "all things" are those reconciled to God in Christ (:20), and therefore refer to persons rather than the physical creation, which is not morally alienated nor in need of reconciliation with God.

1:18 *And he is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead-* See on :11,15. A phrase which is parallel to "the firstborn of every creature" or creation (Col. 1:15 R.V.). He therefore speaks of himself as "the first begotten of the dead... the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 1:5; 3:14). Jesus was the first of a new creation of immortal men and women, whose resurrection and full birth as the immortal sons of God has been made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus (Eph. 2:10; 4:23,24; 2 Cor. 5:17). "In Christ shall all (true believers) be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1 Cor. 15:22,23). This is just the same idea as in Col. 1. Jesus was the first person to rise from the dead and be given immortality, he was the first of the new creation, and the true believers will follow his pattern at his return.

*So that in all things he might have the pre-eminence-* The concept of being "in" Christ is so frequent here in Colossians 1 that we must surely interpret the "all things" as a reference to the believers; because of His work, we are to give Him the pre-eminence in our thinking and hearts. And a real person, the Lord Jesus, can more meaningfully have such pre-eminence far more than abstract ideas or even theology as theology.

1:19 *For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all the fullness dwell-* All the fullness of God dwelt in Christ (Col. 1:19; 2:9); "and of his fullness have *all* we received" (Jn. 1:16). God's fullness, the full extent of His character, dwelt in Christ, and through His Name which speaks fully of that character, that fullness of Christ is reckoned to us. And so, in line with all this, Eph. 3:19 makes the amazing statement. And it is amazing. We can *now* "be filled with *all* the fullness of God". Let's underline that, really underline it, in our hearts. We can be *filled* with *all* the fullness of God. Filled with all the fullness of God's character. See on Eph. 1:23. We are counted righteous, counted as if we have the Lord's moral

perfection; but as Romans 8 explains, the Spirit is given in order to help us become in reality what we are counted as being by status. The language of 'filling' is used about being filled with the Spirit in our inner person (Acts 13:52; Rom. 15:13; Eph. 4:10; 5:18). It is the filling by the Spirit which reveals to us the fullness of God.

1:20 *And through him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross- yes, to reconcile all things through him, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens-* God has reconciled all of us into Himself through the work of Jesus; reconciliation with God is therefore related, inextricably, to reconciliation with each other. The fact that believers in Christ remain so bitterly unreconciled is a sober, sober issue. For it would appear that without reconciliation to each other, we are not reconciled to God. All we can do is to ensure that any unreconciled issues between us and our brethren are not ultimately our fault.

1:21 *And you, being in time past alienated and enemies in your mind in your evil works-* Note how the “works” were done “in your mind”; a similar parallel is in Tit. 1:15,16. Paul had fully absorbed the Lord’s teaching that the thought is the action. We live in a virtual world, lived looking at screens. At no other time in history has this perspective been more vital; that sin is in the mind, the thoughts are the works. The parallel Eph. 4:18 speaks of being alienated “from the life of God”. His Spirit, His living, His life and personality, can be given into our minds through the receipt of the Holy Spirit. Refusing that is to be alienated from God. The work of reconciling us with God is therefore fundamentally performed in the mind; for that is where the essential alienation is located. Our thought processes and worldviews are alien from Him; and the work of reconciling that alienation in our minds, in our evil spirit, is performed by the *holy* spirit of God.

1:22 *Yet now has he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish-* Yet by our preaching we “may present every man perfect in Christ” (Col. 1:22,28). The connection is clear: because we are being presented perfect in Christ through belief and baptism, we preach the opportunity of this experience to others. Likewise the Law often stressed that on account of Israel’s experience of being redeemed from Egypt, they were to witness a similar grace to their neighbours and to their brethren. See on Jude 24.

*And unreprouvable before Him-* AV “in His sight”. In His view, the way He looks upon us, we will be without sin, faultless before the presence of His glory at the last day (Jude 24); we will be “made meet” or appropriate to receive the inheritance of the saints (:12). We will be “made” like this. It will be the result of imputed righteousness. Thus the Lord will praise the faithful for all the good deeds they did, which they will be ignorant of (Mt. 25:37). But there is also a mechanism through which the Lord works to achieve this; for we will be “*made*” like this (:12). Thus :28 speaks in very similar terms of how at that last day, Paul hoped to “present every man perfect in Christ”. How Christ counts us in status- as complete because we are “in Him”- He also tries to work out in reality by actually changing our minds and hearts through His work. And one of the ways he chooses to do that is through people like Paul. Our efforts for others’ spiritual development will have His every blessing and enablement. Hence Paul moves forward to describe in :24,25 how he suffers with Christ in order to build up the body of believers into the body and person of Christ in actuality.

1:23- see on Lk. 6:48; Acts 2:9.

*If indeed you continue in the faith-* We are to continue in the doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16), continue in grace (Acts 13:43), rather than continuing in sin (Rom. 6:1). The idea is not simply that we shall doggedly hold to a set of theology we accepted at baptism; but more essentially, that we shall continue in faith in the wonderful grace those teachings reflect, that little me, I myself... shall really and truly live for ever in God's Kingdom. For the immediate context here is about being presented faultless in His eyes at the last day (:22); and we are to continue believing that wonderful truth.

*Grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to all creation under heaven. Of which I Paul was made a servant-* Paul says that the certain hope of salvation is what must ground us in life. "Hope" means a certain assurance. The fact it had been preached to all creation doesn't mean that it is no more to be preached. And "all creation" in the context of this chapter refers to every member of the new creation; for not all of the natural creation had heard the Gospel. And "all creation" is a strange way to refer to "all people". The idea is that all the current believers at the time of writing, those in whom the work of the new creation had happened, were in that status because of having heard the very same gospel which Paul was preaching. The Colossians had also heard it- they too needed to allow the work of the new creation through that gospel to work in them.

*1:24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh-* It has been perceptively commented: "The work of Christ in one sense is complete, but in another sense it is not complete until all men have known it and been reconciled to God by it. He is dependent on men and women to take it out and to make it known. He who accepts this task of bringing the message of the work of Christ to men may well be said to complete the sufferings of Christ". Every leaflet we distribute, every conversation we start, every banknote we put to the Lord's work... through all this we are extending the victory of the Lord in ways which would otherwise never occur. Thus Paul can say that in his work of preaching and upbuilding, he was filling up the sufferings of Christ (Col. 1:24). By the cross, all things were reconciled, but this is only made operative in practice *if* men "continue in the faith", which Paul suffered in order to enable (Col. 1:20-23). This is the context in which Paul speaks of fulfilling the cross. Thus Paul speaks of filling up "the afflictions of Christ" in his life (Col. 1:24), but uses the very same word to describe the "afflictions" [s.w.] which he suffered for his brethren (Eph. 3:13). The sufferings of the Lord become powerful and continue to bring forth fruit in human lives- through our response to them.

We too are asked to fill up the Lord's sufferings in our lives. The idea is that by the end of our lives, we have fellowshiped His sufferings, and finally our death becomes His death, so that His resurrection shall become ours. This perhaps is why old age for believers often entails particular physical or mental affliction which enables us to fellowship aspects of His sufferings which previously we had not fellowshiped. This imparts meaning to the final part of our lives, whereas in secular terms we would be viewed as having daily experiences which have little significance attached to them.

*For His body's sake, which is the church-* The way in practice we fellowship the Lord's personal sufferings is through our engagement with the sufferings of others in the church. Paul saw himself as filling up what was lacking in his share in the sufferings of Christ's body. He uses the idea of Christ's body in a double sense- the sufferings of Christ's body on the cross are being replicated in him in the course of his ministry to the body of Christ in the

sense of the church. It could also be that Paul has the idea that Christ is suffering now, the cross is in a sense ongoing, and he is suffering with Christ right now for our redemption. All we suffer for the sake of the believers and the preaching of the Gospel in order to develop the body of Christ is in fact a sharing in the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus. The “afflictions” of Christ are inevitable. We were “appointed” to such afflictions (1 Thess. 3:3). The parable of the sower suggests that tribulation [s.w. “afflictions”] come inevitably to the believer in Christ (Mt. 13:21). We *must* pass through much affliction or tribulation [s.w.] to enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). We can therefore glory in such tribulation (Rom. 5:3). We experience “affliction” as Paul did in concern for our brethren (2 Cor. 2:4), in ostracism (Heb. 10:33) as well as physical deprivation in the generosity of spirit required in the preaching of the Gospel and care for the body of Christ, in which context Paul uses the word many times. There’s a logic to all this, as the same word is used about the “afflictions” to be suffered by the rejected at the judgment seat (Rom. 2:9; Rev. 2:22). 2 Thess. 1:4,6 speaks of *our* afflictions now and then uses the same word to describe the afflictions of the rejected in that day. We must suffer one way or another. Paul consciously sought to experience what Christ did on the cross. He was warned by the Holy Spirit that “afflictions” awaited him if he went up to Jerusalem (Acts 20:23), but he chose to go up there, he made a determined decision within his own spirit to do so (Acts 19). High challenge as this is, we too should seek to consciously experience the sufferings of Jesus.

*1:25 Of which I was made a servant, according to the plan of God which was given me concerning you, to fulfil the word of God-* Knowing the Gospel somehow compels us to testify of it. “The word (*logos*) of God”, a phrase which the NT mainly uses with reference to the Gospel rather than the whole Bible, is sometimes used as parallel to the idea of preaching the Gospel (Rev. 1:9; 6:9; 20:4 and especially here in Col. 1:25).

*1:26 The mystery of which has been hid for ages and generations; but now has it been manifested to His saints-* Paul is answering the incipient Gnostic claims to hold 'mysteries'. The idea that 'I know something you don't' is very attractive, and is surely one of the reasons why the likes of JWs and other small time Protestant sects with unusual interpretations are at least initially attractive to many simple folks. They claim, as did the Gnostics, that the true mysteries are only to be found within their private meetings. Paul is saying that the mystery is now openly revealed and being shouted from the housetops- quite simply, any who believe in Christ shall be saved.

*1:27 To whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles- which is Christ in you, the hope of glory-* At baptism, the “new man” was created within us; the man Christ Jesus was formed in us, a new birth occurred, the real, essential Duncan or Dave or Deirdre or Danuta became [potentially at least] ‘Jesus Christ’, “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). This is how important this matter is. Perceiving the Christ-man within yourself is related to your “hope of glory”; this is the assurance of our future salvation, through which we can have all joy and peace through believing.

*1:28 We proclaim him, encouraging every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ-* As Christ will "present (us) holy and unblameable" (Col. 1:22), as a spotless bride (Eph. 5:27). The relationship between Christ and the ecclesia is to be mirrored within the ecclesia. See on Eph. 5:31.

1:29- see on Lk. 13:24.

*For this purpose I labour, striving according to his power, which works in me mightily-* As explained on :11, this power is boundless. And it works through us if we seek to save others and bring them within God's saving purpose. Never therefore need we fear lack of power, resources etc. in performing His mission. Paul can say that he has not yet become complete (Phil. 3:10-14) and yet he seeks to present each of his converts "complete in Christ" (Col. 1:28). He recognized that he too hadn't got to where he was seeking to take his converts.

## CHAPTER 2

2:1- see on Rom. 9:3.

*For I would have you know how greatly I strive for you and for those at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh-* This striving for others is in the power of the Lord's spirit, as explained in the preceding verse (1:29). His mental effort for those he had never met was and is inspirational. Paul's conflict or struggle was in prayer; for true prayer is a struggle, not a mental muttering of a few thoughts as we drift off to sleep at night, just as Jacob's struggle with the Angel is interpreted as a wrestling with God in prayer (Hos. 12:4). Paul's attitude in prayer spread to Epaphras, who did the same (Col. 4:12)- attitudes to prayer are catching, just as the disciples asked to be taught to pray after observing the Lord Jesus in prayer. But the idea of striving in prayer is continuing the figure of Col. 1:29, where Paul says he strives "according to His working which works in me mightily". This explains why at times we feel moved to pray for situations; we can of course refuse to allow God's work to work in us, but if we are in touch with Him, walking in step with the Spirit, then we will be open to His promptings to pray for situations.

Appreciating that prayer is so much "in the spirit", we can better grasp why prayer is portrayed as a struggle. Moab would pray in the time of his judgment; "but he shall not prevail" (Is. 16:12), as if the prayer process was a struggle. Jacob, by contrast, struggled with the Angel in prayer and prevailed (Hos. 12:2-4). The Romans were to strive together with Paul in prayer (Rom. 15:30); the Lord's prayers in Gethsemane were a resisting / struggling unto the point of sweating blood (Heb. 12:2). "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have [RV 'how greatly I strive / struggle'] for you... that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding" is parallel to "We do not cease to pray for you... that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 2:1 cp. 1:9,10). Paul's conflict / struggle for them was his prayer for them. Epaphras likewise was "always striving for you in his prayers" (Col. 4:12 RV).

2:2 *That their hearts may be comforted-* The Comforter, the Holy Spirit, can operate in human hearts- but we must allow this to happen. Hence throughout Ephesians and Colossians, Paul prays that the potential activity of the Spirit will be realized in his readership.

*They being knit together in love-* He who fears the Lord, "him shall he teach in the way that he [God] shall choose" (Ps. 25:12). The Father opens up new ways of understanding for us each, of His choosing and according to our individual needs, in response to our living a God-fearing life. If our hearts are knit together in brotherly love, the more we will understand- for true understanding is, in the end, to fathom the depths of God's love (Col. 2:2).

*And to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, that they may know the mystery of God as it is in Christ-* It is true that the deeper we understand, the easier some things are to cope with. But the understanding in view here is of the "mystery", which we saw in chapter 1 refers to the simple fact that those who truly believe in Christ's death and resurrection shall indeed be saved. This is what gives assurance; whereas correct theology of itself gives no assurance when faced with the inevitable demise and death which all men face.

2:3- see on Mt. 13:46.

*In him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge-* "The wisdom of God was in the midst of him" (1 Kings 3:28 AVmg.) is alluded to here in Col. 2:3- clearly seeing Solomon as a type of Christ.

The idea of being hidden is an allusion to the Colossian heresy of incipient Gnosticism, the idea that truth is hidden in secret writings, known only to the chosen few. The true wisdom is indeed hidden, but hidden in Christ.

2:4 *This I say, so that no one deludes you with persuasive speech-* AV "beguile", s.w. LXX Josh. 9:22 of the Gibeonites deceiving Joshua with their words. The implication may be that even false teachers and infiltrators of the flock still have the possibility of salvation, for by all accounts the Gibeonites appear to have repented and to have become fully assimilated into God's people, serving Him with distinction above many Israelites. Clearly the community Paul wrote to were threatened by false teachers whose ideas were attractive- it was "enticing" (AV).

2:5 *For though I am absent in the flesh, I am still with you in the spirit, rejoicing and seeing your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ-* Perhaps Paul had some Spirit gift of knowledge which enabled him to know their spiritual position. A similar passage in 1 Cor. 5:4,5 seems to also imply a supernatural ability to be present with an ecclesia: "I truly, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him that has done this thing, I command you that in the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are gathered together (and my spirit is present with you when you do), with the power of our Lord Jesus...". But the ideas of flesh as opposed to spirit would more suggest that he was mentally, spiritually 'with' them.

2:6 *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord- walk in him-* Gk. *The Christ... the Lord-* all the emphasis upon Christ's greatness is in the context of warning us to let nothing whatsoever distract us from our focus upon Him as a person. In our generation those distractions may not be arguments of Gnostics and Judaizers- although there are those who fall to such- but rather the host of selfish, laziness-enabling, egocentric distractions of modern culture.

As we received Christ Jesus as Lord at baptism, so we *live* daily in Him; our baptism experience is lived out throughout daily life (Col. 2:6). Thus Paul spoke of how he died daily so that he might share in the Lord's resurrection life (1 Cor. 15:31). We always bear about in our body the spirit of the Lord Jesus in His time of dying, so that His life might be made manifest in our mortal flesh even now (the use of "mortal flesh" indicates that this is not a reference to the future resurrection). In this way the process of dying to the flesh works life in us (2 Cor. 4:10-12). See on Gal. 3:27; 1 Pet. 1:23.

2:7- see on Lk. 6:48.

*Rooted and up built in him and established in your faith, even as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving-* Rooting, as of a tree, and being built up, as a building, are two metaphors

which occur together in Eph. 3:17, where we are taught that we are to be rooted and grounded "in love", whereas here we are to be rooted and grounded in Christ personally. A Christ-focused life leads to love. The source of a loving life isn't therefore to be found in psychological gymnastics within our minds, but rather by a focus upon Him personally. And we all, surely, want the answer to the question: 'How can I be more loving?'

2:8 - see on Mt. 24:4.

*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit-* The Greek for "spoil" means literally to lead away as booty. There were clearly false teachers eager to lead off the Christian converts through deceitful philosophy; and their origin was clearly Jewish.

*After the tradition of men, after the elements of the world, and not after Christ-* "The tradition" is perhaps a reference to the Jewish Kabbala, 'the received tradition'; "the world" is the Jewish world.

2:9 *For in him, in a bodily form, dwells all the fullness of all that God stands for-* Colossians and Ephesians emphasize the reconciling of both Christians and Angels through the death of Christ, perhaps due to the cross taking away the Angel-coordinated Mosaic system which separated man from God and the Angels. "Having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things (a phrase which elsewhere includes Angels- e. g. Heb. 2:8) unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in Heaven" (Col. 1:20). What are the things in earth and Heaven if they are not Christians and Angels? In Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9)- the fulness of Gentiles, Jews and Angels. "And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power (i.e. Angels- Col. 2:15)"- 2:10. As Christ is the head of the Angels, so if we are in the body of Christ, He is our head too, and we are therefore with the Angels in the same body. There is thus no need to worship them, nor the Mosaic ordinances they instituted. This seems to be a major theme in Col. 2 "Let no man beguile you of your reward in... worshipping of Angels... and not holding the Head (Christ), from which all the body (both Christians and Angels, whose head is Christ, v. 10,15) by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together (Angels and Christians!) increaseth (both of us growing in knowledge of God) with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the elements of the (Mosaic/ Angelic) world, are ye subject to (Mosaic/ Angelic) ordinances... ?" (v. 18-20). The evident similarities between Colossians and Ephesians invite us to interpret Ephesians 1 in the same way: "In the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth (Angels and Christians, Jews and Gentiles)... in whom we also (as well as Angels- it is hard to understand why Paul, being a Jew, should speak like this about Gentiles also, as well as Jews, obtaining an inheritance) have obtained an inheritance... (God) raised (Christ) from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the Heavenly places, far above all principality and power (i.e. Angels- Col. 2:15), and might, and dominion (Angels- Jude 8,9), and every name that is named (Christ "hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name" than Angels- Heb. 1:4), not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things (literally all things- including Angels) under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:10,11,20-23). The reference in Eph. 3:15 to "the whole family in Heaven and earth" probably refers to the Angelic and human parts of the family of God in Heaven and earth respectively being united

by the sacrifice of Christ. Christ's parables of the lost coin and lost sheep lend support to this. The woman and the shepherd on one level represent Jesus searching for the lost saint, calling together the friends to rejoice on finding him (Lk. 15:9,29). These friends represent Angels, we are told (v. 10). However, those in the ecclesia are also members of God's household; Christ laid down His life for us His friends; "Ye are My friends... I have called you friends" (Jn. 15:13-15). The parables of Luke 15 were initially directed at the Pharisees, implying that they as the shepherds of the ecclesia should be mixing with the weak of the flock to win them back (Lk. 15:2-4; n. b. "which man of you..."). Thus Jesus also expected the woman, shepherd and friends to refer to members of the ecclesia on earth. Yet He also specifically says that they have reference to the Angelic household in Heaven. Thus both Angels and earthly believers are part of the same "family in Heaven and earth" of Eph. 3:15. See on Jude 6; Heb. 9:23.

Col. 2:8,9 reasons that because in Christ dwells all the fullness of God, so far is He exalted, that we therefore should not follow *men*. A man or woman who is truly awed by the height of the Lord's exaltation simply will not allow themselves to get caught up in personality cults based around individuals, even if they are within the brotherhood.

Many of the 'difficult passages' in the New Testament are only difficult because they are alluding to, and even quoting phrases from, popular contemporary ideas and writings and seeking to deconstruct them. This technique is found throughout the Bible, especially with respect to false yet popular ideas about evil. To take an example: Valentinus taught in the second century that there was a *pleroma*, a "fullness of the Godhead", comprised of 30 aeons of time. Like most thinkers, he was drawing on ideas that had circulated a century before him, and so it's reasonable to think that the philosophical idea of a "fullness of the Godhead" was around in the first century. And Paul uses just this phrase when explaining how the entire fullness of the Godhead was to be found in the person of Jesus Christ (Col. 2:9). No need for philosophy and wild guesses at the structure of God. The fullness of the Godhead was and is in the personality of Jesus. However, this isn't Paul's only allusion to this idea. The lowest of the 30 aeons, Sophia, "yielded to an ungovernable desire to apprehend [God's] nature". And Paul alludes to this in Phil. 2:6,7, saying that Jesus by contrast didn't even consider apprehending God's nature, but instead made Himself a servant of all. As more and more is known of the literature and ideas which were extant in the first century, it becomes the more evident that Paul's writings are full of allusions to it- allusions which seek to deconstruct these ideas, replacing them with the true; and by doing so, presenting the Truth of the Gospel in the terms and language of the day, just as we seek to.

The fullness of God dwells in the body of Christ- and Paul often uses this idea with reference to the body of baptized believers. Within us and amongst us, over time and space, there will have dwelt (by the time of Christ's return) all the fullness of God's moral perfection and characteristics; one may have His love and grace, another His judgment, etc. This is confirmed by 2:10.

2:10 *And in him you are made complete. He is the head of all principality and power-* "Complete" is Gk. 'made full'. As God dwelt fully in Christ, so He fully dwells in us, the entire body of Christ. However the principalities and powers were perceived, be their hierarchies of Angels or not, the Lord Jesus was the head.

2:11 *In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ-* Through baptism, we enter

the "in Christ" status, and our flesh is as it were cut off, by status we are in Him and not in the flesh. This is repeated in Paul's argument in Romans 1-8, although there he stresses that our flesh still remains; but from God's perspective, it is cut off. It takes faith to believe this- faith in God's operation, that the circumcision operation was really performed by Him (2:12). Baptism is the means by which we become "in Christ" and in spiritual terms cease to be uncircumcised (2:13).

*2:12 Having been buried with him in baptism, by which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead-* AV "the operation of God". See on 2:11. Baptism is effective because we are to believe that God will now work in us to allow the life of the risen Lord to break forth in our mortal flesh. The faith required before baptism is therefore not merely an understanding of past events, but more importantly a belief that God's *energeia*, His energy, will operate in the transforming of our hearts and lives. The act of baptism alone doesn't save; it saves through our faith in God's operation to save us. Tit. 3:5 speaks of baptism as "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit"; but we have to believe in that "working of God" as Paul here puts it in Colossians. Baptism is paralleled with circumcision, which was a cutting off of the flesh. Our flesh, the mind of the flesh, will be cut off by God, as an ongoing process, once we make the connection with Christ in baptism. The parallel in Ephesians is Eph. 1:19,20, which speak of how the same unbounded power which raised the dead body of Jesus from the dead will likewise work in the hearts of us who believe.

*2:13 And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses-* This change from the second to the first person, or, *vice versa*, is common in Paul's writings. He like a truly good teacher admits his own need for forgiveness, and wishes to share his personal experience with us his readers.

Baptism is to be associated with the ancient rite of circumcision. The Lord Jesus Himself as it were circumcises men at their baptism, cutting off the flesh of their past lives, and thereby inviting them to live in a manner appropriate to what He has done for them (Col. 2:11-13).

*2:14* In the context of baptism and warning believers not to return to the Law, Paul argues "If ye be dead with Christ (in baptism) from the rudiments of the (Jewish) world, why, as though living in the (Jewish) world, (i.e. under the Law) are ye subject to (Mosaic) ordinances...?" (:20). The Law was "against us... contrary to us" (Col. 2:14) – hence it being called an adversary/Satan. The natural Jews under the Mosaic Law, as opposed to the Abrahamic covenant regarding Christ, are called "the children of the flesh" (Rom. 9:8). Similarly those under the Law are paralleled with the son of the bondwoman "born after the flesh" (Gal. 4:23). Paul reasons: "Are you now made perfect by the flesh?... received you the Spirit by the works of the Law?" (Gal. 3:2,3) – as if "by the flesh" is equivalent to "by the law". Now we can understand why Heb. 7:16–18 speaks of "The Law of a carnal commandment... The weakness and unprofitableness thereof". Not only is the word "carnal" used with distinctly fleshly overtones elsewhere, but the law being described as "weak" invites connection with phrases like "the flesh is weak" (Mt. 26:41). Rom. 8:3 therefore describes the Law as "weak through the flesh". See on Rom. 8:3.

*Having blotted out the bond written in ordinances-* Gk. 'to wash out', an allusion to baptism. The same word is used about the blotting out of our sins (Acts 3:19), of our tears (our lament for our sins, Rev. 7:17; 21:4). Our sins are blotted out in that the law itself has been blotted

out. We are saved through being "in Christ", counted as Him- and not on the basis of any legal obedience to any law. This is Paul's argument in Romans; not simply the Law of Moses, but any legal code which is against us has now been taken away. 'Law' in the sense of 'legality', and not only the law of Moses, has been replaced by salvation by faith in grace. But the reality of salvation by such pure grace is not lawlessness and indulgence in sin, but rather being utterly bound by the principle or law of being "in Christ". Our response to such grace will make us in fact more self controlled and consciously obedient to Divine principles than any system of binding laws, resulting in our being judged according to our obedience or disobedience.

*That was against us, which was contrary to us, Christ did away with it by nailing it to the cross-* Legal terms, reminiscent of the argument in Romans, that the Law stands in court accusing and condemning us by our failure to obey it; but in Christ we are declared in the right. Paul says here that this Law has been taken away, or as he says in Romans, where is now our accuser? He has fled the court room, there is none to accuse us if we are in Christ. Hence "took it out of the way" means literally in Greek to take away from the midst, away from the foreground- from the middle of the courtroom.

2:15- see on Lk. 11:22.

*Having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it-* S.w. Heb. 6:6 about the "open shame" of the crucified Christ. One reason for the cross was to publicly declare that all the laws which we break, our sins, are once and for all publicly declared in all their shame- and rendered powerless, lead away in Christ's triumph (2 Cor. 2:14). Disarmed [NIV]- an allusion to 1 Sam. 17:51.

The binding of the strong man in the parable was done by the death of Christ. One of the spoils we have taken from his house is the fact we don't need to keep the Mosaic Law (Mt. 12:29 = Col. 2:15).

2:16 *Let no one therefore judge you in food, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a Sabbath day-* But people do judge us. We can only not allow them to judge us by not letting their judgments affect us. This is a valuable principle; for the judgment of others seriously impacts upon our emotional and spiritual state. We are not to allow the judgments of others to do this, because we believe that there is only one final judge. Believing that God and His Son are our only judges is therefore of immense practical import. A similar situation is to be found in 1 Tim. 4:12 (cp. 1 Cor. 16:11), where Timothy is told to let nobody despise him. People did despise him- but he is told to disallow them from doing so by not taking it to heart, holding on to his value before God. And Paul tells Titus the same (Tit. 2:15). Likewise in 1 Jn. 3:7 we are told to let no man deceive us- although they will try, for as John notes, there are many deceivers in the world. Here in Col. 2:18, the same is taught- the Colossians were not to let anyone deceive them.

2:17 *They were a shadow of the things to come, but the real object is Christ-* Bible students have long recognized a 'prophetic perfect' tense in Hebrew, whereby the future is spoken of as having already happened. This not only reflects the utter certainty of God's words coming true, it also reflects God's way of looking at issues without time, in the sense that God is beyond time. Thus when He told Abraham that He *had made him* (not 'will make you') a great nation, this reflected the way that God already saw Abraham as a father of many.

Things which don't yet exist for us do *actually* exist for God (Rom. 4:17). The Law was a *shadow* of Christ (Col. 2:17) even when Christ didn't physically exist. Yet a shadow implies the real existence of the object. The Law reflected God's knowledge of the Lord Jesus; to Him, the Lord did in that sense pre-exist, although we know that literally He didn't. Likewise Levi was seen by God as paying tithes whilst he was still as it were within Abraham's body (Heb. 7:9,10), and the dead believers are likened to spectators in a stadium, cheering us on as we race the race of this life (Heb. 12:1).

Paul's statement that God has made public display for ridicule (*edeigmatisen en parrêsia*) of the "rulers and authorities" is alluding to a phrase which occurs in the Jewish writings about the supposed Satanic rulers of this present world. But Paul says that God displays them for what they are and thereby holds them up to ridicule (Col. 2:17), rather like Elijah mocking the non-existence of Baal. In Col 2:8,20 and Gal 4:3, 8–10, Paul says that believers are no longer subject to the "elements of the cosmos" (*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*) – again, a term the Jews used to describe supposed sinful Angels ruling the cosmos. He's deconstructing these ideas rather than supporting them.

2:18 *Let no one rob you of your prize by a false humility and worshiping of the angels, keeping on about all the things which he has supposedly seen in visions, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind-* If we let ourselves act against our conscience, we are *now* condemned (Rom. 14:23). If we judge another, "thou condemnest [present tense] thyself" (Rom. 2:1). We must not let false teachers "judge against you" (Col. 2:18 AVmg.) in the sense that by following them we can let them as it were pass the verdict of condemnation upon us, here and now.

Seeking to cut off the flesh by steel willed obedience to laws is in fact fleshly. Likewise in 2:23 Paul argues that obedience to laws isn't any benefit in cutting off the flesh; this is done by God in Christ through our baptism into Him and being counted as Him.

2:19 *And not holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increases with the increase of God-* The Lord Jesus, as the Head, *ministers* nourishment to the body (Col. 2:19). But how? The same word is used in the parallel Eph. 4:16: every joint of the body *supplies* (s.w.) the rest of the body with nourishment. The Lord's work of ministering to us is articulated through us His servants. This is why faith can die in individuals and ecclesias, simply because brethren and sisters are not ministering strength to others. We should seriously consider our words, spoken and written, our motivation, whether or not we challenge a brother or sister over something, the direction of our conversations... for we can obstruct the grace and nourishment of Christ by our raising of that which pulls down rather than builds up. Likewise Col. 2:19 says that God gives increase to the body; but Eph. 4:16 uses the same Greek in saying how the body makes increase of itself in love. It occurs again in Eph. 2:21: "all the building fitly framed together *groweth* unto an holy temple". This is all so weighty in its implication. Our duty is not merely to retain a correct understanding of certain propositional truths, and ourselves live a reasonable life. The welfare of all others in the body has been delegated to us. Their salvation and perhaps their eternal rejection lays in our hands, to some extent. See on Eph. 4:16.

2:20 *If you died with Christ from the elements of the world, why, as though living in the*

*world, do you subject yourselves to ordinances?*- The aorist tense of “you died” refers to a one time event, surely our baptisms into Christ's death. Likewise 3:1 refers to our one time rising with Christ in baptism. They were ‘subjecting themselves’ to the Jewish ordinances, the legalities of Judaism, “as though” they were living in the [Jewish] world. Submission to Judaism was inappropriate for those who had died with Christ in baptism. The salvation by faith through grace experienced in Him meant that they had died not only to sin, but to the law which brought about sin.

*2:21 Handle not, nor taste, nor touch*- These legal concerns were about external contamination. But the focus of Colossians has been that the gift of the Spirit affects the human spirit, the mind, the heart. This is the focus of true Christianity. Contamination of the heart cannot occur through eating or touching ritually unclean things. “Touch” in Greek can mean simply ‘association’, having ‘to do with’ someone. In this case, Paul is categorically condemning the whole concept of ‘guilt by association’ which has been the root cause of so much division between believers. Not handling [touching] nor tasting is alluding to Eve’s perception that she was not to touch nor taste the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:3). Eve had put a fence around the command not to eat of the fruit; she had added ‘neither shall you touch it’. And it had not saved her from sin; indeed, her primitive legalism was not mixed with faith in God’s grace, and it led her to spiritual catastrophe. The Judaist legalism and fences around the law were leading them in just the same way.

*2:22 (All things that perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men?*- The idea may simply be that all external things perish, food is touched, eaten and then perishes; whereas the work of the Spirit is in the heart and is permanent. The food laws concerned things which perished permanently; avoiding them was just a temporary way of avoiding legal infringements, whereas the work of the Spirit had permanent effect upon the heart. And it is the Spirit which will be experienced eternally in God’s Kingdom. And in any case, the ordinances of Judaism in view here were “of men”, and not therefore the law of God. This is a pointed attack on the Jewish idea that the teachings of the Rabbis effectively became Divine law.

*2:23 Which things have indeed a false appearance of wisdom in worship and humility and severity to the body, but are not of any real value against stopping the indulgence of the flesh*- Paul sees the “real value” of any teaching in spiritual terms. The legalism associated with worrying about food legislation was of no value against stopping us indulge the flesh. What is required is the Spirit, working internally; rather than regulations about external defilement. The “worship” in view is that of Angels (:18). Fasting was not demanded by the Mosaic law, apart from at the day of atonement; but fasting was a major part of Judaism. But all this would not stop the flesh but rather encourage it; what was required was the ministry of God’s spirit within the human spirit.

## CHAPTER 3

3:1 *If then you were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above-* Chapter 2 has spoken of baptism as death and resurrection with Christ. If this has happened, then we follow where He went after resurrection, which was to Heaven. Not literally, for heaven going after death is not taught in the Bible; but in our thoughts being with Him there in the Heavens. The structure of Paul's letters shows very clearly the link between doctrine and practice.

Colossians 1 and 2 are pure theology, the precise, analytical Paul at his most flowing, intellectually devastating and persuasive; but "then..." (3:1) we are lead on to another two chapters of the practical implications of this. This theology / doctrinal treatise and the pivotal, crucial then... therefore... is likewise the turning point of Romans (12:1), Galatians (6:1-10), Ephesians (4:1) and Philippians (4:1). His theology, his doctrine, always ends in an ethical demand (see too 1 Thess. 5 and 2 Thess. 3). To use pompous words, our orthodoxy (right doctrine) must lead to orthopraxy (right behaviour).

*Where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God-* Hence the significance of Stephen seeing the Lord *standing* at the right hand of God in urgent mediation and emotion for him in his sufferings.

3:2 *Set your mind on the things that are above-* The same word is used in bidding us to "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ" (Phil. 2:5); indeed, Paul uses the word seven times in Philippians. It is Christ who is "above" in that He has ascended to Heaven (:1); so the "things" in view are those of Christ, rather than spiritual, heavenly things generally.

*Not on the things that are upon the earth-* Paul is repeating the great theme of Philippians, to set our mind on Christ rather than be of those who "mind earthly things" (Phil. 3:19). The appeals in Philippians to be of "one mind" refer to the need to all be focused upon the same mind- Christ. That is the basis of unity, rather than being uniform in all matters of doctrinal interpretation or living.

3:3 *For you died-* Continuing the baptism allusions. When we were baptized, we died to the natural life, and therefore the only life we have is the life which we are given by reason of our association with the resurrected Lord Jesus. And therefore our spiritual life must be the central thing in our existence- not a hobby. As I dried myself off after my baptism, I opened my Bible at 'random', and came with marvellous appropriacy to Prov. 23:26: "My son, give me thine heart". And Paul taught the same: "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). "The love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that (Christ) has died for all (believers); therefore all have died. And He died for all (of us), that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised... therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old (life) has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:14-17 RSV). "I was co-crucified with Christ (Gk.): nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me" (Gal. 2:20). And "The love of Christ constrains us", it shuts us up with no other real way to move, as the Greek implies.

*And your life is hid with Christ-* The idea is of treasure in a totally secure place; for Christ is

in "the bosom of the Father" (Jn. 1:18). Our most valuable treasure is our life, who we are, our personality, which is what shall eternally endure. The "life" in view is surely our eternal life. In this we see the supreme, eternal importance of the development of spiritual personality; for it is that which shall last eternally.

3:4- see on 1 Cor. 15:20.

*When Christ, our life, shall be manifested, then with him you shall also be manifested in glory-* 1 Jn. 3:2 uses the same word in saying that "what we shall be" has not yet been "manifested". The manifesting of the Lord Jesus at the second coming is therefore our manifestation, because Christ is our life. But we are also individuals; *our* life and eternal being is involved. So our unique eternal personality is in fact an aspect of Him. The fullness of His personality has been shared out amongst all those in Him; one wired more towards His grace, another more towards His justice, e.g. In another figure, we are each unique parts of the body which is Christ.

If we believe we really will be there, then we will look more earnestly for the day to come. We can never be truly enthusiastic about the Lord's return if we are unsure about our ultimate acceptance at His hand. Because we are sure that "When Christ... shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication..." etc. (Col. 3:4,5). We don't control ourselves because we think this will make us good enough to be accepted, but rather because we believe that we have already been accepted. By grace alone.

*3:5 Therefore, put to death what is earthly in you: Fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire and covetousness-* Gk. 'make a corpse of'. We are alive and yet we are dead, as walking corpses. Putting to death is paralleled with "also put away..." in :8; the idea there is of undressing, of casting away clothes. We are naked corpses, that is the picture being developed. Our real life and being is centered around Heavenly things. The same word is only used elsewhere of Abraham whose body was dead, i.e. sexually impotent (Rom. 4:19; Heb. 11:12). The examples now given in the rest of this verse are all sexual. We are invited to see ourselves as Abraham, whose focus was upon the stars above, the promises of Heavenly things. Paul clearly saw that there was a real temptation for his readers to fall into sexual lust; and at the end of chapter 2 he has warned that claiming to abide by Jewish legal regulations was actually a temptation towards lust. The reasoning seems to be that legal obedience tempts a person to think that other areas of sin are therefore quite acceptable. And this would explain the link between Christian legalism and sexual immorality which has so often become apparent.

Paul saw Mt. 5:29, 30 in a sexual context (= Col. 3:5); which fits the context of Mt. 5:28. The Colossians still had to "put to death" things like fornication, even though they had put them to death in baptism (Col. 3:5 = Rom. 6:6). Yet they are described as having formerly lived in those things, as if now, they don't do them (Col. 3:7). Yet clearly they did still do those things. Again, Paul is saying that they don't do those things by status, in God's eyes, therefore they shouldn't do them in practice.

*Which is idolatry-* Paul is writing to those attracted by Judaism, for whom avoiding idolatry was an obsession. But he is warning that the real idolatry is not falling down before statues, but the life of the flesh and the hidden lust of the mind.

*3:6 For which things' sake comes the anger of God upon the children of disobedience-* The idea of disobedience suggests that the class in view are those who know God's requirements, those responsible to judgment. The similar language of Rom. 1:18 refers to this category of persons. And we can assume there were some in Colosse, as in other New Testament churches, who were justifying serious sexual immorality as perfectly allowable for believers in Christ.

*3:7 Things in which you also once walked, when you lived in these things-* The parallel Eph. 2:2 says that "in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, according to the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience". That 'spirit' is here defined as that of sexual abandon and lack of internal mental control. This arises from within the flesh; and not as a result of some cosmic being controlling us.

*3:8 But now you are to also put away-* See on 3:5 *Put to death*. The commandment to "put away" these behaviours suggests that they were all ongoing amongst the Colossian converts. The same word is used of how Christian converts elsewhere needed to "put off" such carnal behaviour and immorality (Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22; 1 Pet. 2:1). Clearly the early churches were full of quite serious immorality, bad language, blasphemy and even violence. The historical accounts of how some very self-sacrificial behaviour attracted the positive notice of outsiders doesn't take away from this; and this sad scenario is all witnessed by the New Testament itself. We need to give this internal evidence its due weight. It's clear that Paul preached and then baptized whoever said 'yes' without unduly analysing their motives or morality. Inevitably with so many quick baptisms, the communities which developed would have been characterized by the same spiritual immaturities which were in their native societies.

The "also" connects with the list of five forms of sexual sins in :5. Paul now gives another list of five sins which are more internal than external. He may be continuing the theme developed at the end of chapter 2, of needing to focus on the internal and spiritual more than the external.

*Anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth-* The idea is that the five gross sexual sins of :5 are no worse than the five more common failures now listed.

*3:9 Lie not one to another-* The parallel Eph. 4:24,25 explains the significance of "to each other": "Put on the new man... Therefore, putting away falsehood, each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour. For we are members one of another". The function of the one body will be hindered by lying to each other within it.

*Seeing you have put off the old man with his doings-* This is the language of Rom. 6:6 about baptism. It could fairly be said that Colossians is explaining to baptized believers the

implications of their baptisms.

3:10 *And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator-* Because in status we have 'put on the new man', "put on, therefore... mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind", i.e. bring forth in yourself the characteristics of Jesus, seeing you have 'put Him on' in baptism (Col. 3:10,12). Clothe your personality with Him, submerge yourself within Him, seeing you 'put on' Christ in baptism. We are to live out in practice how the Lord sees us by status.

The Lord Jesus is set up in so many ways as the example for us to follow- in a way that some cosmic being descending from outer space never could have been. In the same way as Jesus was the image of the invisible God in His character (Col. 1:15; 2 Cor. 4:4), so we are bidden put on the image of God (Col. 3:10), being transformed into His image progressively over time (2 Cor. 3:18), through "the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2), being conformed to the image of Jesus our Saviour (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49). Thus the process of our redemption, through the perfect character of Jesus, becomes in turn a personal pattern for each of us who have been saved by that process. And it was only through the successful completion of that work of redemption that Jesus was "made" Lord of all (Rom. 1:4; Acts 2:36). This is a different picture to the Gnostic-Trinitarian idea of a pre-existent Lord of all descending to earth which was apparently troubling the Colossians. Further, their theory gets somewhat confused when they claim that the Angelic appearances on earth in Old Testament times [e.g. the Angel with Israel in the wilderness] were actually appearances of Jesus on earth. If this is so, then when did Jesus come to earth to save men? Did He make several visits...? Why couldn't each of these visits have been enough for human salvation? The idea that the Lord Jesus was an Old Testament Angel is simply unsustainable in Scripture and needs to be rejected, along with all Gnostic-influenced views of Him. We know from Acts 14:11 that there was a strong tendency in the first century to believe that the gods could come to earth in the likeness of men; and Trinitarianism simply reflects the fact that weak Christians in the early centuries sought to accommodate Christianity to their existing beliefs.

3:11 *Where there cannot be Gentile and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman- but Christ is all and in all-* In the "new man" whom we have "put on", i.e. Christ, "there cannot be Greek and Jew" etc (Col. 3:11 RV). But we have to do something in order to bring this about- mere baptism isn't enough. Paul continues: "Put on therefore... a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience" (Col. 3:12). If we are "in Christ", there "cannot be" division in that body- if there is, from our perspective, then surely we are proclaiming ourselves to be not of that body. But in order to actualize being "in Christ", we have to therefore show kindness, humility, patience etc. in order that there will not be division. We have to live out in practice the status which we have been given at baptism, of being "in" the undivided, indivisible Christ. "Christ is [created in] all [who believe] and in all [places of the world]" (Col. 3:11 Bullinger). It is the common experience of this new creation which binds us together as one body and spiritual nation world-wide.

3:12 *Therefore, as God's elect-* The language of Old Testament Israel, and also of the Messiah. The new Israel are characterized and identified by their spiritual attributes, as the children of Abraham by the spirit, rather than fleshly identity. We again note that the false

teaching plaguing Colosse and its surrounds was connected with a return to Judaism. But the main reference is I believe to us being as Christ, the elect.

*And beloved-* A title of Christ, whose titles and personality is now counted to all of us in Him (Mt. 12:18; and the clear parallel in Eph. 1:6 is that He "has made us accepted [by being] in the beloved").

*Put on-* We cannot just sit down and acquire the listed characteristics. But insofar as we are in Christ, we have clothed ourselves with Him, and these characteristics of His personality are counted to us by grace. We have "put on [s.w.] the new man", Christ (:10), who according to Isaiah's servant songs was "the elect". The faith that that is indeed so leads us to naturally be the persons we are counted to be by status.

*Sensitivity, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering-* These five characteristics are the antidote for the lists of five sins in :5 and :8.

3:13 *Forbearing one another and forgiving each other, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as the Lord forgave you, so also forgive-* He forgives us on account of our status in Christ, forgiving therefore without demanding specific repentance for every sin. And we are to operate a similar policy with others in Christ. This is the force of the little word "As...". Forgiveness without requiring repentance frees us from so much legalism and bearing of records of wrongs against others. Every "complaint" needs to be gone into, and a judgment reached as to whether the event really happened, or happened as the aggrieved party says it did; and whether there has been real repentance. And there is no ultimate ombudsman or judge on earth who can reach the ultimate truth of the situations. Every judge and jury, within or outside the church, formal or informal, will decide differently. In many cases, mitigating or unconsidered factors will keep on coming out of the woodwork. All this is a recipe for interpersonal strife and division. To forgive without demanding repentance, including forgiving perceived issues, is the way to peace and harmony, both within ourselves and within the believing community.

3:14- see on 1 Cor. 13:11.

*And above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection-* Moses' spiritual pinnacle was characterized by arriving at a profound depth of love. Love is likewise seen by Paul as "the bond of perfection" (Col. 3:14), the sign of ultimate maturity. He has already begun in Colossians 1 by saying that true faith and hope for eternity will bring forth love. The Greek for "bond" is a medical term, referring to the ligaments of the human body. Paul has just used it concerning the anatomy of the body of Christ, the church, in 2:19. The completeness of the body is brought about by love, and the context of that "love" is in the command in the preceding verse :13 to forgive as we have been forgiven, i.e. without demanding repentance. But this is the state of "perfection" or spiritual maturity. Those who insist upon repentance before forgiveness are not therefore mature, and the body of Christ will only be completely functional if this policy of forgiveness without repentance is universally accepted and applied.

3:15 *And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts- to this you were also called in one body;*

*and be thankful-* We are called to the hope of the Kingdom "in one body" (Col. 3:15); all who receive the call of the true Gospel are in the same one body. There is one body, based around sharing the one faith, one hope, understanding of the one Father and Son, having participated in the one baptism (Eph. 4:4-6). So whoever believes the doctrines of the basic Gospel and has been baptized and walks in Christ, we have a duty (and should have a desire) to fellowship. The need for unity amongst us is so very often stressed (e.g. 1 Cor. 1:10; Rom. 15:5,6; Phil. 2:2; Eph. 4:31,32; Col. 3:12-15).

3:16- see on 1 Pet. 2:5.

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. In all wisdom teach and encourage one another-* This may well be an allusion to the tradition of learning the Gospel of Mark. How can it richly dwell in us if we do not daily meditate upon those inspired records?

*With Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs- singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord-* There are connections between praise and forgiveness of sin. Col. 3:16 speaks of communal hymn singing as a means of "admonishing" each other- and the Greek translated "admonish" here means just that (cp. Tit. 3:10). The connection between praise and confession / forgiveness makes this appropriate. It may be that Paul is writing with his eye on Dt. 32; the Song of Moses spoke of Israel's weakness and proneness to apostasy. Yet they were bidden sing this to each other, in order to inculcate the culture of forgiveness without repentance- see on :13 and :14. Would anything like that get into a Christian hymn book today?

3:17 *And whatever you do, in word or in action, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him-* The doing and acting in view is in the policy of forgiving without repentance, on account of a believer's status in Christ; see on :13 and :14. We do this because we are in Christ, we are acting in His Name, and do so giving thanks to God for our blanket forgiveness which we experience in Him, whereby all our sins are blotted out because of our status in Christ (2:13).

3:18 *Wives, be in subjection to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord-* As all in Christ are to be subject to each other (Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:5). These commands about family life are added in the context of the preceding argument about love and unconditional forgiveness. The Christian family and home is to be the living and supreme example and microcosm of the principles governing church life. This is why church leaders are to be judged more than anything else by the state and function of their own families.

3:19 *Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them-* I have argued that these commands about family life are exemplifications of the preceding comments about unconditional forgiveness and treating each other as Christ has treated us. The parallel in Eph. 4:31,32 supports that: "Let all bitterness and wrath... be put away from you... be kind to each other, sensitive, forgiving each other, even as God in Christ also forgave you". Bitterness arises from unforgiveness. Likewise the command in :21 about not provoking others to wrath (AV) must be read in this same context; wrath, according to Eph. 4:31,32, arises from unforgiveness.

3:20 *Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is pleasing to the Lord-* Implying there were baptized young people in the ecclesias. The early critics of Christianity mocked it as a religion of children and women. Those not counted as persons in ancient society found their meaning and acceptance in Christ.

3:21 *Fathers, do not provoke your children, in order that they are not discouraged-* See on :19 *Be not bitter*. These commandments are regarding believing families. The discouragement in view was presumably in the context of the children growing up encouraged by their fathers to believe and be baptized. But endless provocation of children in domestic life will only discourage them from that path.

3:22 *Servants, obey in all things those that are your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord-* The Greek *kurios* is used here for “masters” rather than the more natural *despotes* because the idea is being developed that service to human masters can be accepted as service towards the Master- the Lord Jesus.

3:23 *Whatever you do, work heartily, as if to the Lord and not to men-* This is in the context of commands to slaves (:22). It would have been so liberating for those in dead end daily situations, similar to those trapped in minimum wage employment today, to realize that their service can be done "to the Lord". He realizes the limitations of human situations in employment, and is willing to accept the toil of the daily grind as done to Him- if we are willing to give it to Him.

3:24 *Knowing that from the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ-* The comfort is to first century slaves, and those in the slavery of minimum wage dead end employment in our age, to not look so much to the pittance of salary or reward at the end of each day or month- but to realize that the reward of working as unto the Lord is in fact the inheritance of the Kingdom.

3:25 *But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality-* The context is about slaves and masters, and the reference may well be to believing masters who abused their slaves.

## CHAPTER 4

4:1 *Masters, give to your servants what is just and equal. Knowing you also have a master in heaven-* Our relationships with others should be governed by our sense of relationship with the Lord Jesus. If we are but His slaves, then we will deport ourselves appropriately in any secular position of authority which may be our lot. The even handed attitude of the Lord Jesus to us, without favouritism, was to be reflected by masters not having favourites amongst their slave; and certainly not giving them unjust compensation for their services. For the Lord's attitude to us is ultimately "just and equal". Indeed, Paul's thought is repeatedly that we are the unjust, but are justified by faith in His grace. Our Master died for us, "the just for unjust" (1 Pet. 3:18). And even if we have to deal with unjust servants, we are to remember that God sends His rain on both the just and the unjust (Mt. 5:45). This command follows on from the comment in the previous verse that there is "no respect of persons" with the Lord Jesus, and that believing masters who abused their slaves would be judged for this (3:25).

4:2 *Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving-* This is the very language of the earliest church, who are repeatedly set up as our example (Acts 1:14; 2:42,46). The difficulty of prayer is to persevere in it, not making requests as a passing shot, but continuing in prayer. And any requests are to be framed within constant thanksgiving for what the Lord has given us already, not least in His Son. The same word is used about continuing in prayer in Acts 6:4 and Rom. 12:12. "Vigilant" means 'keeping awake', and is used of the disciples in Gethsemane failing to do this as asked (Mt. 26:38,40,41). We can read it quite literally- do not drift asleep whilst praying. For who of us is not concerned about our tendency to do that. The appeal is for mental focus, not allowing prayer to slip into mere ritual, a repetition of the same themes and phrases. And "thanksgiving", deep gratitude for what we have been given already, which will help us in this alertness.

4:3 *Meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for preaching the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for the sake of which I am also in chains-* This prayer was indeed answered, because Phil. 1:13; 4:22 [see notes there] report that Paul's witness in chains led to the conversion of people right within Caesar's household. Opening doors is the language of release from prison (Acts 5:23; 16:26). So although in prison, Paul felt that his chains would as it were be loosed, he would no longer feel so limited, if he could spread the Gospel. I pray each day to meet the right people, or as Paul put it, for a door to be opened for preaching. Paul had earlier written of how a great door had been opened to him to preach the Gospel (1 Cor. 16:9). He may well have prayed for this, for the allusion is to how prayer is a knocking which opens doors (Mt. 7:7). If we want such open doors, they will be given to us. For to pray for that is surely to pray according to God's will. But all the same, Paul asks others to pray for him in this matter; and his success in prison is a parade example of how this prayer will be answered.

4:4- see on Mt. 26:35.

*Pray that I may speak boldly, as I should-* As noted on Eph. 6:20, Paul himself admits a tendency not to preach, to hold back from giving his all to fulfil that commission he had received to testify of the Gospel of God's grace (1 Cor. 9:16). He asks his brethren to pray that he would be able to "make it manifest" more than he did (Col. 4:4 cp. Eph. 6:20). As

noted on :3, this prayer was powerfully answered in the conversion of slaves and others within Caesar's household. "Speak boldly" is literally 'to manifest'. Paul earlier told the Romans that the Gospel is now made manifest [s.w.] to all nations (Rom. 16:26, also 2 Cor. 2:14; Tit. 1:3). But this is dependent upon our efforts to make it manifest, and even Paul felt that he was failing in this and needed prayer to achieve what was potentially possible. The Gospel has been made manifest to us (Col. 1:26 s.w.) and we therefore are to manifest it to others.

*4:5 Walk in wisdom toward those that are without, redeeming the time-* In a preaching context, Paul tells us to "redeem the time", or "be buying up the opportunity" (Col. 4:5 RVmg.); we are to urgently snap up every opportunity to preach. And walking wisely towards those "without" is a way of witnessing to them. Closer analysis of "redeeming the time" reveals that this is in fact a quotation from the LXX of Dan. 2:8, where Nebuchadnezzar tells the wise men that they want to 'redeem the time, because you know that [the decree for their execution] is gone from me'. There are other allusions in Col. 4 to Daniel: captivity, earnest prayer, thanksgiving, making manifest wisdom to the world as we ought to, walking in wisdom in the eyes of the world. Daniel and his friends urgently devoted every moment of their lives to prayer in order to redeem time, so that they would be delivered; and Paul took as it were a snapshot of their frantic urgency, and applies it to each of us, also living in Babylon. "The days are evil", the world around us is insidious- and therefore we must redeem the time from it (Eph. 5:16). Or it could be that 'the evil days' refers to the great and special day of evil, at the second coming (Eph. 6:13, in context; Ps. 37:29). In view of the coming of that day and the judgment it will bring, we ought to have a deep sense of the future we might miss, and the urgency of our present position; and devote ourselves therefore to redeeming the time. The sure coming of that day is an exhortation to the believer, "that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles... [for we] shall give account to him that is ready to judge" (1 Pet. 4:2-5). Peter's message is that there's no need to spend time living as the world does, tickling the desires of our nature- for we already spent enough of our time doing that. We are men and women living under judgment, and therefore should devote our lives to the service of God's will.

*4:6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one-* "Always" demands consistency; it is easy to talk nicely at times, but to live and speak like this as the atmosphere of our language demands much more. Our experience of grace should empower this consistency, our word choice and intonation will reflect the grace we have received. Living in this atmosphere or spirit of thinking will mean that we somehow naturally find the right words to speak, rather than struggling to respond rightly every time we encounter a provocative conversation. "Each one" presumably refers to "those without" of :5. But it equally applies to our words to our brethren. The command to have salt and therefore peace with each other (Mk. 9:50) is fulfilled, Paul saw, by watching our words (= Col. 4:6). Salt was a symbol of covenant relationship with God (Lev. 2:13); yet in the NT this salt stands for love, peace and kind speaking the one to the other (Mk. 9:50; Col. 4:6). This is the result of true membership in covenant relationship; a true and abiding love for all others in covenant.

4:7 *All my affairs shall Tychicus make known to you, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord-* In an age where communication was very limited, "the messengers of the churches" travelled around the known world taking messages and news (2 Cor. 8:23). We should be making the same effort to be bound together with others within the Lord's body, and surely the age of easy communication has arisen in order to allow us to do just that. Let us not abuse it but use it for the purpose the Lord intended.

4:8 *Whom I have sent to you for this very purpose, that you may know our state and that he may comfort your hearts-* The sole reason Tychicus was sent all the way from Rome to Colosse was to carry news of how Paul was faring in prison; see on :7. Paul assumed that the Colossians were desperately worried about his state in prison, and "for this very purpose" sent Tychicus to comfort them.

4:9 *Together with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you, they shall make known to you all things that are done here-* As the Lord sent out the disciples in pairs, so it would seem that Tychicus and Onesimus were sent together. Onesimus was "one of you", originally from Colosse and known to them. "All things that are done here" presumably refers to the kind of regime Paul was experiencing in prison, as well as the real state of things under Nero's terror against the Christians. Paul has to emphasize that Onesimus is faithful, because he would have been known only as the runaway slave. He is again called "the beloved brother" in Philemon 16. Paul would therefore have been writing the letter to Philemon at the same time as he was writing to the Colossians. As noted on Phil. 1:1, a fair case can be made that the prison epistles were all written quite close to each other, when Paul was no longer dwelling in his own hired house in Rome but was suffering the results of Nero's persecution of the Christians. In this case we note all the more his focus upon the spiritual wellbeing of others, when he was himself in such a time of crisis.

4:10 *Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)-* Aristarchus is called Paul's fellow worker when he writes about this time in Philemon 24. The prisoners saw themselves as actively working for the Lord despite their apparently reduced freedoms. It's all a great encouragement to us, that no matter that the ties that bind, we can actively labour for the Lord. "Mark" is likely the "Marcus" of Philemon 24; another hint that the letters of Philemon and Colossians were written about the same time and may well have been carried together to Colosse by Onesimus. If Mark was the relative of Barnabas, we can better understand why Barnabas found a patience with him which Paul apparently didn't. Paul was aware that he had fallen out with Barnabas over Mark, who had 'departed from' Paul and returned to the Jerusalem church- all language which suggests a spiritual division between them, perhaps because Mark couldn't cope with the mass appeal to the Gentiles which Paul was making. But now towards the end of his life, Paul urges them to forget all that and accept him amongst them. For Mark now is with Paul, apparently also his fellow prisoner. All tensions between brethren over interpretation and acceptance of third parties are all somewhat irrelevant once both of them are sitting together in prison for Christ. We too need to focus as far as possible on what we have in common, which is so much, indeed, "all things".

4:11 *And Jesus who is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellow-*

*workers to the kingdom of God, men that have been a comfort to me-* Paul graciously speaks of some brethren "who are of the circumcision [party]" as his "fellow workers unto the Kingdom of God", noting that they are "men that have been a comfort unto me" (Col. 4:11 RV). The circumcision party understood things very differently to Paul- he is ever arguing against their position, showing that circumcision profits nothing. And yet these brethren whom he here refers to were still acceptable to him as fellow workers, and he even took "comfort" from their fellowship. I find that a beautiful example of how tolerance can be practiced; despite the fact Paul was right and they were wrong, the simply reality that they were mistaken on this point, he could still work with them and be encouraged by them. He didn't reason: 'If you don't agree with me on this point, well, we're not working together, that's it, goodbye, I can take nothing positive from you by way of fellowship or encouragement'. In fact we could read the AV translation as implying that although Paul had many fellow workers, out of them all, the ones who were a personal comfort to him were these brethren who were of the circumcision party: "Aristarchus... Justus, who are of the circumcision, these only are my fellow workers... which have been a comfort unto me". Justus was in common use among Jews and proselytes, as "denoting obedience to the law". Yet Paul the apostle of grace and the end of the Law found great comfort in him, and worked together with him "to the Kingdom". The Kingdom of God is not now literally established upon earth, but we as believers are under God's kingship. We are therefore His Kingdom. Paul and his brethren in prison were workers within and towards the Kingdom. There is nothing better than when man has an end in view for his labour; and that end for us is glorious, nothing less than men and women entering God's Kingdom at the last day.

4:12- see on Col. 2:1.

*Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always striving for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God-* Perhaps Paul had watched Epaphras on his knees in the same prison cell, 'wrestling' as Jacob did in prayer, for the perfecting and assurance of his home church back in Colosse; for he too "is one of you". Prayer is no bedtime lullaby; it is a real wrestling, not just on occasion, but "always". Faith is a certain hope that really, we shall be saved and live eternally in God's Kingdom. He prayed that they would 'get it', and be fully assured that this was indeed God's will for them. For our salvation is so often linked with the will of God. Epaphras was following Paul's example, who constantly prayed that they would be filled [s.w. "fully assured"] with the knowledge of God's will (1:9). If these brethren were sharing the same prison accommodation, we can understand how attitudes to prayer would be so contagious. Knowing God's will doesn't have to mean that we know the will of God for us in every situation. It is part of the journey of faith and trust that we do not. But His will is for our salvation in His Son; this we can know and experience.

4:13 *For I bear witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and for those in Hierapolis-* On :11 we noted that Paul considered these brethren, along with himself, to be 'working' for the Kingdom's cause whilst incarcerated. In :12 he observes how Epaphras was always striving in prayer "for you". I suggest therefore that the hard work [AV "great zeal"] in view refers to the work of prayer. And he also prayed not only for Colosse but for those he knew in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

4:14 *Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you-* Luke's loyalty to Paul had led him to accompany Paul on the journey to Rome, including the shipwreck; and perhaps he remained in Rome as Paul's personal physician. Luke was with Paul at the very end of his life (2 Tim. 4:11). We could therefore conclude that Colossians was written at around that same time. I have argued the same for Philippians (see on Phil. 1:1). In this case, Paul ended his days with desperate appealing to others to see the reality of the great hope he had; his focus was outward, not upon himself, but upon the spiritual welfare of others. However, 2 Tim. 4:10 contrasts the faithful Luke with the less faithful Demas, who left Paul, "having loved this present world". Colossians would therefore have been written slightly earlier than 2 Timothy. But the fact both Luke and Demas are mentioned together suggests the time gap was not that great.

4:15 *Greet the brothers that are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church that is in their house-* This could mean that the church in Laodicea met in the home of Nymphas. For Laodicea is the context both before and after this mention of Nymphas [some manuscripts offer Nympha, a female name, and read "her house"]. We tend to assume that the size of 'churches' today was the same in the first century; but there is no archaeological evidence for dedicated Christian meeting places in the first century, although there is ample for the existence of house churches. The perversions which the Lord later criticizes in the church at Laodicea would likely have all occurred in the lounge or side rooms of a large house. Nymphas may well have been "the angel of the church" to whom the Lord's letter to Laodicea was addressed (Rev. 3:14).

4:16 *And when this letter has been read among you, take steps to have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and you also read the letter from Laodicea-* The letter *from* rather than *to* Laodicea may refer to a circular letter which was being passed around the churches, and was to come from Laodicea to Colosse. The letter in view may well be Ephesians (see on Eph. 1:1). The wish for letters to one church to be read to another indicates that we are wrong to think these letters are merely Paul writing to one specific church, and that the principles have no relevance to us. They clearly do, for even originally the letters were to be read to other churches for their instruction.

4:17- see on Acts 12:25.

*And say to Archippus: Take heed to the service which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfil it-* Archippus was part of the house church of Philemon (Philemon 2; possibly the son or relative of Philemon). His ministry ["service"] was perhaps to minister there whilst Epaphras and others from there were away in Rome. This would suggest that the Colossian church met in the home of Philemon. if we are "in Christ", then we receive a ministry; receiving the ministry is predicated upon being in Christ, and therefore every baptized believe into Christ has a ministry, something to do; but we must "take heed" that we "fulfil it". To "receive" Christ (s.w. 2:6) is to also receive a unique role in His body, a ministry, a path of service.

4:18 *I Paul write this salutation with my own hand. Remember my bonds-* As he signed the letter, Paul would have been aware of this chain. There is here the stamp of circumstantial evidence that what we read in the Bible is authentic; for signing a letter would lead to reflection on the chain.

*Grace be with you-* The *charis* or gift of the Spirit was what Paul so wished to be experienced by all believers. And he often prays for this. We cannot therefore read this as a standard ending to a letter, which in any case would more likely have read "I wish you peace". Paul really felt that his prayerful wishes for them would have effect in practice.